

Happy Ukes bring music and God's ministry to North Augusta community with ukuleles

NORTH AUGUSTA — A ministry is bringing happiness one ukulele at a time with music and God's love in North Augusta.

Happy Ukes is a ukulele ministry at **Grace United Methodist Church** that meets once a week to play the **instrument**. With no prior experience required, the members play songs like "Take Me Home, Country Roads" by John Denver, songs by Christian music artist **Cece Winans** and the Beatles.



The ministry goes beyond music and serves as a space where members can love, support and pray for each other. The ministry also goes out into the community and plays songs.

Beverly Blevins, who serves as one of the organizers of the group, started it about eight years ago when a music director at the church showed her a video of a group playing ukuleles. The former director encouraged Blevins to give the ukulele a try.

"I am not an ukulele player, but I was a guitar player," she said. "I am a guitar player and I thought that it would be easy to do a ukulele."

Blevins said Happy Ukes started as small group who would play with prayer concerns and caring for each other, but it evolved to a weekly thing. She said as time went on, the group began to get invites to play at various places like senior living facilities or housing. Happy Ukes has practice every Monday at the church, but sometimes they will have a play date.

The most recent play date at **The Ledges Apartments** in North Augusta, in which many of the residents were singing songs and one member put on a hula skirt.

"We just love to spread the love of God's joy through music and the ukulele," Blevins said.

A new member of the group, Robyn Wittenberg Dudley, has been playing with them for over a month after she saw the group play at her residence at St. John Towers (Wesley Woods) in Augusta.

"Today was my first concert – yay!" she said. "I hope that they will keep me."

Wittenberg Dudley already knows how to play a ukulele after she took lessons at the **Jessye Norman School of the Arts** and knows the four chords of the tiny instrument because each summer the school has free ukulele classes for seniors.

Grace United Methodist Church member Suzanne Swygert saw her son Cory playing the ukulele and decided she wanted to play one, too.

"I joined it just for fun and I came home last night, saying that I am going to learn how to play the ukulele," she said.

Swygert said it also gives her an excuse to sing and play her favorite songs on the ukulele.

"I enjoy the camaraderie, I enjoy the fellowship," she said.

Wanting to get better at playing the instrument, she said she needs to put in more hours of practice.

"It's fun and they accept me with all my mistakes and all," she said.

Blevins said Happy Ukes is more than just a ministry because it brings happiness to others. Wittenberg Dudley said the ministry also brings many different people together to play and listen to music.

"I think it is kind of cool because I am a member of the Jewish community, but when it comes to this we are all together and we believe in the same higher power," she said. "I am really honored to be part of the group."

Bianca Moorman is a reporter for the Post and Courier North Augusta/The Star with a focus on community news, public safety and more.