



Mary Chamberlin and Bill Mickelson perform at Westwood Commons in North Chili on November 25. K. Gabalski photo.

Long-time local performers continue musical traditions

by Kristina Gabalski

As Mary Chamberlin sings, residents of Westwood Commons in North Chili smile while others join in the singing. "I don't know who has more fun," she says, "the audience or us."

Mary and long-time friend and musical partner Bill Mickelson entertained residents at the senior living community the day before Thanksgiving.

After more than 30 years, the two continue to perform frequently at Westwood Commons as well as other locations around the area including Unity Adult Day Services at Cornerstone, the Ogden Senior Center, Seabury Woods and Lakeside Beikirch Care Center.

Westwood Commons residents look forward to the performances, activity director Cathy Toney says. "They love the music, they can relate to it, it tells a story with each song. They love to listen to Mary," she says.

Toney describes Mary's clear, expressive voice as classy. "It reminds me of 1950's singers," she says.

Bill Mickelson of Spencerport accompanies Mary on his ukelele - a unique model called a "Fluke" made in Massachusetts by the Magic Fluke Company. He also performs some solo pieces and instrumentals. Bill does all the arranging of the songs and Mary says after decades of performing together the two rarely need to rehearse. "Sometimes we do when we add a new song," she explains.

Selections performed on November 25 included familiar, long-time favorites such as, "Won't You Come Home Bill Bailey," "Back in the Saddle Again," "Turkey in the Straw," "Autumn Leaves," and "Don't Fence Me In."

Bill shared personal stories with the residents and explained changes he has had to make in his playing due to arthritis. "I use a thumb pick instead of a flat pick," he told the residents, and has worked out arrangements enabling him to, "give my left hand a break."

The small ukelele also helps, he added. Despite the arthritis, Bill's fingers still glide over the fret board creating delightful sounds and memorable musical moments. "No one expects to hear anything serious played on a ukelele," Bill said, and to counter that belief, played some light classical music and a Viennese waltz.

Bill explained he will be visiting a hand specialist soon and will likely have surgery on his thumb, meaning there will be no Christmas concert this year. "So I'll play a Christmas song now," he said. He performed a selection featuring the story of a grandma called "Corn Cobblers" from 1935.

Fittingly, Bill and Mary concluded their performance with "Happy Trails." No doubt residents of Westwood Commons hope that after more than three decades of bringing musical joy to the area, Bill and Mary will be able to continue - as the song says - "until we meet again."



Residents of Westwood commons enjoy music by Bill Mickelson and Mary Chamberlin during a concert November 25. K. Gabalski photo.