

Charlotte Chorale celebrating 30th anniversary

By **RUSTY PRAY**

LET'S GO CORRESPONDENT

Despite notions to the contrary, the Charlotte Chorale has nothing to do with the rodeo in Arcadia.

Darlene Gravatt, a local Realtor and a charter member of Charlotte County's vocal ensemble, recalls the day when she had to differentiate.

"I remember one time I was talking to someone about being a member of the Charlotte Chorale, and they honestly thought I had something to do with the rodeo in Arcadia," Gravatt laughed. "I had to explain to them what it was."

Gravatt, a Gulf Cove resident, needs no further explanation. The Chorale is a fixture in Charlotte County, and it's celebrating its 30th anniversary this season.

Its three-concert series begins with "A Season of Hope Christmas" performance on Dec. 9. "Bach to Bacharach" is schedule for March 2, and "Puttin' on the Glitz" for April 13.

IF YOU GO

WHAT: Charlotte Chorale's 2018-19 season:

Dec. 9: "A Season of Hope Christmas"

March 2: "Bach to Bacharach"

April 13: "Puttin' on the Glitz"

WHEN: 4 p.m.

WHERE: Charlotte Performing Arts Center, 701 Carmalita St. Punta Gorda

INFORMATION: Tickets \$25 adults, \$10 students; season ticket packages available. Visit www.charlottechorale.com

All three concerts are 4 p.m. at the Charlotte Performing Arts Center in Punta Gorda. Individual adult tickets are \$25.

A concert to benefit the chorale featuring Phil Dirt and the Dozers is scheduled for Jan. 20.

Gravatt was there before the Chorale had a name. She was part of the Charlotte County Adult and Community Chorus at the Cultural Center.

"In the fall of 1988, I saw at the Cultural Center they were registering singers to sing the



LET'S GO PHOTO BY RUSTY PRAY

"In the beginning, we were singing anywhere and everywhere to get out name out there," said Darlene Gravatt, a charter member of the Charlotte Chorale, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary.

'Messiah' for Christmas," she recalled.

The late R. Bruce MacGregor was the director, and he was thinking of forming a singing group not affiliated with the Cultural Center. MacGregor died in 2015 after retiring as the Chorale's only director. William Dederer succeeded MacGregor in 2013.

Gravatt called the early days a struggle. Those first 28 voices needed to be blended. The musical palette needed dedicated tinkering, and the name recognition just wasn't

there. Witness the unfortunate rodeo mix-up.

"It was mostly women, and that was a problem," Gravatt said of the early days. "A couple men came over, but the blend wasn't where it should be. Bruce took what he could get with the hope that as more people knew about us, they would come and join us."

What the Chorale did to work on those things was sing. A lot.

"In the beginning, we were singing anywhere and everywhere to get out name out there," Gravatt said. "Our first performance was at the Cultural Center. We sang at the mall after the mall opened up. That was really crazy because of the acoustics — everything is bouncing off the walls and the tile floors.

"We sang at a mobile home parks. We sang at nursing homes. We did benefits at the jail. We did the blessing of the fleet one year. We did the ball-park. We were involved in the schools."

The Chorale once opened for Phyllis Diller, who was an accomplished pianist as well as a comedian.

"That was kind of cool."

Over the years, the Chorale has developed


into a full, 80-voice concert choir. Dederer has broadened its repertoire to include contemporary music, including Broadway tunes. It is involved in the schools, offering an annual scholarship, and hiring students as accompanists. It is a Charlotte County staple for music entertainment.

When Dederer took over five years ago, his goals were "pretty simple. My desire was to improve the group's musical level, attract more singers, and put on quality concerts three times a year. I think that has happened."

Dederer sees having an orchestra accompany the Chorale a benchmark in the group's maturity. The Chorale began singing with an orchestra three years ago and will do so again this season with its Bach to Bacharach concert in March.


"Bill is very different from Bruce," Gravatt said. "But he has really brought the Chorale to a level that I think, if Bruce were alive today, he would be very proud of what Bill has done."

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