

# Happy Instrument Helps Spread Joy

By Patti Smith

**H**ow do you make Amazing Grace a snappy tune? Pastor Scooter Ward simply reset the lyrics to the music of Simon & Garfunkel's *Feelin' Groovy*. To add to the happy effect, he plays it on his ukulele.

Pastor Scooter shares his love of music and the ukulele with students in his adult and children's classes at Community Church in Santa Rosa Beach. He calls them the *Community Ukes & Ukesters*.

They play because it makes them happy, they enjoy the camaraderie and the sound of playing together, and they enjoy sharing their gift with others. Once a month, classmates are chauffeured to a local nursing home to play for elderly residents.

"Their minds aren't there, but as soon as we start playing music or quoting scripture, they come alive," Pastor Scooter said. "We touch them in a way that medicine doesn't. We touch their spirit."

The ukulele ministry started four years ago to bring people together in a fun environment. The classes are free and open to anyone. "I found that I developed some meaningful relationships with people in this group, and they feel the love of Christ through our interactions. As opportunities present themselves, I plant seeds of truth," he said. "Ultimately, I want them to feel like they belong, especially the children. The children today going through that adolescent transition, I know how rough that was as a kid."

His passion to see kids connecting who may not otherwise have a safe and productive place to do so is rewarding for Pastor Scooter. He enjoys facilitating that connection and helping them build confidence as they introduce themselves and play in front of various groups. Plus, they have a lot of fun.

event, the groups learned to play branch military songs.

Audiences are treated to a variety of music when the Ukes or Ukesters play. Spiritual songs, including hymns, along with modern tunes and secular favorites, like Bobby McFerrin's *Don't Worry, Be Happy*.



Pastor Scooter Ward, center, and members of the ukulele club play a socially distanced concert for retirement home residents who listened from their balconies and porches.

"I'm goofy and they like that," he said. More than 100 players have come through the classes, and at any time there will be 12 children and 12 to 30 adults actively involved. This includes snowbirds who come just for the winter, and college students who come home for the summer. The youth class is open to students in third grade through middle school. Both groups usually perform together during the summer months.

Last year the group played for the Wreaths Across America Ceremony, which recognizes veterans and teaches the younger generation about remembering their sacrifices. In preparation for the

"We'll keep this going as long as I see the ministry to the people in it," Pastor Scooter said. It's one of the ways he shows the love of Jesus. "I don't try to proselytize – I just try to live it out."

Classes have been suspended temporarily until August due to COVID-19. The group will serenade residents of Brookdale Senior Living community on July 11. Residents will enjoy the performance from indoors or outside on their porches and balconies. For information on how to join the Community Ukes or Ukesters, contact Community Church at 850-267-2599.