



The Candy Cane dance is a perennial favorite and is inspired by *The Nutcracker*.

'PURE JOY'

STAFF CHORUS CREATES SPECIAL BOND AT KILLEARN LAKES ELEMENTARY

Story and photos by **Amanda Karioth Thompson** Council on Culture & Arts



Viki Rhodes provides accompaniment for the staff chorus during rehearsal.

Magic abounds during the holidays, especially for children.

At Killlearn Lakes Elementary School, the students are giddy with the spirit of the season and much of that is due to music teacher Vicki Rhodes. She puts on an annual winter program unlike any other school production.

Rhodes has taught music for 42 years in Leon County, 30 of them at Killlearn Lakes. When she arrived at the school in 1989, she took over the nascent staff chorus and a time-honored tradition took hold.

The winter program showcases a rotating catalog of holiday standards and is performed at the school for students and again at Chiles High School's auditorium for family and friends. The fifth grade chorus is always part of the production and, each year, a different grade level is also highlighted. Students sing, play instruments, dance and, as a culmination to the program, they perform with the staff chorus.

This year, the staff chorus is comprised of about 25 members of the faculty and school employees. Many of them join because they have a life-long love of music, others have been coaxed by their students.

"Kids were bribing their teachers this year," laughed Rhodes. "They were getting on their knees and giving them candy. One of the teachers came to me and said 'why did you put this kid up to that' and I said 'I didn't.' All I say to the students is if they have a favorite teacher, ask them to be in the staff chorus."

Jan Roberts is the school's speech language pathologist and she's been in the chorus for 25 years. In that time, she's seen how captivated her students are by the program.

"The kids, all year long, will ask you if you're

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