

## First Coast Wind Symphony Continues Work as Cultural Service Organization



The First Coast Wind Symphony and Jacksonville University Wind Ensemble perform together.

**BY WINDY TAYLOR**  
Resident Community News

The First Coast Wind Symphony is tuning up to begin its 33rd season of free concerts for Jacksonville and surrounding communities, with an emphasis on local composers and educational opportunities for students.

"Our last couple of seasons have been affected by Covid, just like everything in this world," said Ann Carey Holt, public relations manager for the Symphony. "We rehearsed and performed this past season, but I think there were some of us who were rusty. This is our first full year where we're all back together and in great shape."

The 55-member ensemble will play seven concerts between October and May. The highlights of the season are two collaborations

between guest conductor/composers and the symphony. In October, guest conductor and Villages resident Lewis Buckley will showcase his own compositions at the Terry Concert Hall on the campus of Jacksonville University. In 1975, at the age of just 27, Buckley became the conductor of the U.S. Coast Guard Band, a position he held for the next 29 years. This makes Buckley the longest-serving conductor of a senior military band in American history.

The group prides itself on working with Florida-based and Florida-connected composers. "We have a new work that was written for us by a local composer that we'll be performing this year," said Holt. More information about this collaboration will appear on the FCWS web site when the plans are finalized. Additionally, the group has commissioned a piece from American composer Julie Giroux, which they will debut under her direction next season.

The season will close with the twelfth annual Concerto Competition, which is open to high school and college musicians. The winners of the competition receive a \$1,500 prize and the opportunity to perform with the FCWS in May.

Holt, a French horn player, joined the FCWS in 1993. "I went to a concert in their second or third season," she recalled. "I was so impressed with the quality of their playing. I started as a sub for a concert, and then I thought, 'If I just keep showing up, maybe they won't turn me away.' And now I've been playing with them for 30 years." After retiring from her position as Chief Information Officer for Ascension St. Vincent's in 2018, Holt joined the FCWS board.

The FCWS bills itself as a "cultural service organization" by making beautiful music accessible to all. Artie Clifton, Professor Emeritus of Music at Jacksonville University, founded the ensemble in 1990. Seven musicians in the

group are charter members and have performed all 33 seasons.

In addition to its regular concert series, smaller ensembles within the FCWS perform at private events such as weddings or special church services. "We have a polka band!" Holt said. "We're regulars at the ArtWalk downtown. We play at churches at Christmas." The Covid-19 pandemic dried up most of the group's private engagements, although those bookings are picking back up.

Holt's enthusiasm for high-quality, free public music is evidenced by her favorite unofficial gig. "At Christmastime, Avondale does the Luminaria. I live near St. John's Avenue, so me and a few of my French horn buddies will put on a little horn concert in the front yard."

For more information on the First Coast Wind Symphony, including their schedule of events, please see their web site at [fcwinds.org](http://fcwinds.org).