

# NEWSMAKER Q&A: Cherry Chirpers

By **KELLI O'BRIEN**

kobrien@messengerpostmedia.com

The Cherry Chirpers at St. Ann's Community in Webster are a singing group made up of war veterans and veterans' wives, singing a variety of tunes from the 1940s and '50s.

Choir director Kathy Toole, 74, of Rochester said her favorite part about the Cherry Ridge Senior Living Center group is that it shows old age isn't a burden.

"It shows new people coming into that part of their life that aging is a wonderful process, and isn't as black as people make it out to be," she said.

Toole started the group in 2004, after she had originally organized a Christmas carol singing group. St. Ann's then asked her to hold regular practice sessions with residents.

The group, which includes a few married couples, will perform in a talent show at the senior living center on Thursday,



RIKKI VAN CAMP/MESSENGER POST

**Jay Cook, foreground, belts out a tune as he practices for an upcoming performance featuring The Cherry Chirpers singing group. Next to Cook are fellow Chirpers Jim Borso, left, and George Schum. The Cherry Chirpers are all residents of the Cherry Ridge Senior Living Center in Webster. For more from The Cherry Chirpers, go to [MPNnow.com](http://MPNnow.com) for a photo gallery.**

singing "My Favorite Things" by Oscar Hammerstein II and "Once in Love with Amy" by Frank Loesser.

Toole, a retired Rochester City School District music drama teacher, pushes the residents to be their best, often stopping them during practices to tell them how to make it better, or if she

can do something to help.

The Webster Post sat down with Toole last Friday to talk about the group.

## Q&A with Kathy Toole

**Q: How many residents are in the Cherry Chirpers?**

**A:** There were 26, but due to some unfortunate circum-

stances, we average about 16 to 19 currently.

**Q: What kinds of songs are performed?**

**A:** A lot of the residents singing represent the World War II era, and we do a lot of music from the '40s and '50s, because it is vibrant and easy to listen to. I wanted to tap into the rhythm and the sound that was the richness of their lives.

**Q: How long are practices?**

**A:** We usually have one a week that lasts an hour, and then two a week before a performance.

**Q: What is the best part about the group for you?**

**A:** That they are enjoying it ... and this helps them forget their problems, and celebrating community. For one full hour they are focused on something other than themselves.