

THE CLAY PIPER

First Coast Highlanders Newsletter

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February 2025

In Tribute to Steve Romeo

The First Coast Highlanders are saddened at the loss of long-time band member, mentor, friend, supporter, and all-around good person Stephen Romeo, who died on 4 December 2024 in Keystone Heights, Florida. He is survived by his wife, Jane, their two sons and a daughter, two grandchildren, and a great-granddaughter.

Steve was born on 3 November 1942 in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. He served in the U.S. Navy on an aircraft carrier in the Pacific from 1959 to 1965, during the Vietnam era. In an interview in 2021, Steve described his own career path as “long and diverse,” and we would need another half page to list his activities and accomplishments! His careers included being a Tampa police officer and the manager for a loading dock for a grocery chain. He also did human resource management work, owned and operated a mower repair shop, was a partner in a real estate office, and much more.

Jane Argo Romeo, Steve’s wife, shared the following:

“Steve loved Celtic music. He studied bagpipes in St. Petersburg (Florida, not Russia!) several years before I met him, but sadly his careers did not leave time to learn pipes.

“He joined Clay County Sheriff’s Office Pipes & Drums shortly after its founding, playing bass drum for several years and switching to a lighter tenor drum as years went by. (When he joined, there were already two Stephens, which is why they called him Romeo.)

“Steve went to Scotland with the band in 2014, played at Stirling Castle and at the 700th anniversary of the Battle of Bannockburn.

“Even with an Italian name like Romeo, he claimed heritage, via his mother, to four Scottish clans: Campbell, Fleming, Buchanan, and Pringle. During that band trip in 2014 we met several Pringle relatives and attended their first modern-day Clan Gathering.

“He was the love of my life and father to a daughter and two sons, grandfather to two granddaughters, and great grandpa to one adorable little girl. We would have celebrated 43 years of marriage on December 31.”

(continued on next page)



Jane and Steve at the NE Florida Highland Games, 2023



In Tribute to Steve Romeo

Steve played many roles in First Coast Highlanders, serving on the board as President, Vice President, and Quartermaster at different periods as well as playing with the band as part of the drum corps, first on bass drum and more recently on tenor drum. He and Jane gifted the band often with everything from logo-decorated aprons to caps, pens to notebooks, and other holiday surprises. Beyond those crucial contributions, he gave much more: Steve was the spark to many a conversation, the one to make us laugh, the voice of questioning when decisions were being made, the ever-steady supporter of the group's mission. His singing out of the first phrase of the band's frequently played tune "The Minstrel Boy" (sing it now: "I w-i-i-sh I had a Guinness right now!") helps us remember how the melody starts and, best of all, gives us a constant reminder that Steve continues to be there with us in the echo of our joined voices.

All First Coast Highlanders share their sadness at the loss of Steve. A few tributes are included here:

RIP my good friend. My heartfelt love goes out to Jane! – *James Roberts, tenor drummer*

No real words to describe how sad this news is. Romeo was/is the reason I joined FCH. I first met him in 2013 at the Clay County Fairgrounds. Reached out his hand to shake mine and said hey you want to play drums with us? The rest is history...I will miss you my Brother. – *Scott Young, FCH President, snare drummer*

Death ends a life but not a relationship. The new relationship continuously reshapes itself to bring comfort to the living. Let's celebrate, remember, and honor our dear friend and mentor, Romeo. – *Blanca Rios, student tenor drummer*

When I joined the band in 2012, Steve welcomed me and made me feel like I was at home! RIP Brother. – *Hamish Calder, piper*

Nothing can prepare you for the loss of a mentor and friend. – *Scotland Boland, piper, bass drummer*

Steve Romeo was a member of our pipe band from the beginning in 2009. He was my right hand and helped this band become what it is today. I will miss him greatly. – *Arthur Tenney, Pipe Major*

Tribute and photographs by Nikki Herbst

First Coast Highlanders Elected Officers for 2025

President: Scott Young

Vice President: Scotland Boland

Secretary: James Roberts

Treasurer: Evan Brown

Member at Large: Will Wheeler

Member at Large: Nikki Herbst

Quartermaster: Natasha Durrance

Business Manager: Arthur Tenney



Upcoming Events 2025

January 10th	Ron Parker Memorial (11:00 AM) Ron Parker Park, St. Augustine Beach
January 26th	Kirkin of the Tartan (8:30 & 10:30 AM) St. Simons Presbyterian Church, St. Simons Island, GA
February 16th	Kirkin of the Tartan (10:00 AM) St. Giles Presbyterian Church, Orange Park
February 22nd	NE Florida Scottish Games (9:00 AM) Clay County Fairgrounds
March 8th-9th	St. Augustine Celtic Festival (9:00 AM, All Day, Both Days) St. Francis Field, St. Augustine
March 16th	St. Patrick Mass & Joe Paddy Festival (11:00 AM) St. John Paul II Catholic Church, Ponte Vedra Beach
May 25th	Memorial Day Church Service (10:30 AM) Turning Point at Calvary Church, St. Augustine



At the St. Augustine Celtic Festival, 2023

The Story of Auld Lang Syne

Undoubtedly, millions of people throughout the world sang Auld Lang Syne to see in 2025. Few will know all the words, and fewer still what they mean. The words are attributed to Robert Burns, who was said to have picked up the tune and some of the text from an old man singing in the dialect of southwest Scotland. The possibility is that Burns only wrote two of the five verses. But, as he did with numerous other Scottish songs, he modified the words.

Auld Lang Syne has become the international song of departure, and it is sung by more people than any other. It seems likely that the song was first sung either in Poosie Nancy's Tavern in Mauchline, Scotland, or The Bachelors' Club in Tarbolton, located a few miles away. The song was initially centred on two young men who drifted apart after their early schooling, and who, after re-uniting, reminisced about their earlier times together, the happy experiences they had together, and the kindly folk they met.

Conviviality was, for Burns, one of the most important virtues. For him, Auld Lang Syne is a concrete expression of his love of humankind.

Adapted from https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1134884451972700&id=100063534671353



Dueling bass drums



Playing in the rain for the Veterans Day 5K run at Oakleaf Community Park



Kirkin o' the Tartan, Geneva Presbyterian Church



Posing for the annual band photo

Pipe Bands

These days, piping has become so popular that there are more pipe bands in the U.S. than there are in Scotland.



Thanksgiving potluck

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Northeast Florida Scottish Highland Games • Orange Park Presbyterian Church

Susanne Tenney • Cmdr. James Roberts in memory of Priscilla

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FOR \$25 YOU CAN BECOME A MEMBER OF OUR BOOSTER CLUB, and receive the newsletter by email.

For more information about hiring a piper or the band, or becoming a sponsor, call Art Tenney at (904) 368-8177.

FIRST COAST HIGHLANDERS

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