THE CLAY PIPER

First Coast Highlanders Newsletter

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Member Spotlight: Nikki Herbst



Nikki Herbst has been a member of the First Coast Highlanders since 2021 and is currently the Pipe Sergeant as well as a member of the FCH Board. With her partner Ralph Canapa, she is responsible for the Band's website, Facebook page, and quarterly newsletter. She interviewed herself for this article.

What do you like best about being a member of the First Coast Highlanders?

The camaraderie is special and a lot of fun, and we make music together!

How did you come to join the FCH?

During the Covid lockdown, I decided I wanted to learn a new instrument. I picked the bagpipes because I'd long been a fan of pipe & drum bands. I ordered a chanter online and taught myself to play it. Eventually I felt brave enough to contact Art Tenney about the Highlanders, and he made me feel very welcome to come and learn more.

What advice do you have for anyone who wants to learn to play the Great Highland bagpipes?

Buy earplugs. Be disciplined about finding the time to practice every day. Be patient but persistent. Working out at a gym wouldn't hurt, either—it's a very physically demanding instrument!

Where were you born/where did you grow up?

Born in Milwaukee, WI; lived in WI until I went to Denmark as an American Field Service exchange student. I've lived in New Brunswick, Canada; Okinawa; and Colorado; I was a long-time California resident and then a long-time Iowa resident before moving to Florida, where I hope to live long enough to be a long-time resident.

What did you study in school?



I have associate, bachelor, and master degrees in English and music. I have a Master of Music in Flute Performance from Arizona State University and a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from the Iowa Writers' Workshop.

What has been your career path?

My "path" has been like the zigzag of a rabbit chased by a coyote. In the U.S. Air Force, I was a computer programmer at NORAD Headquarters, working inside Cheyenne Mountain in Colorado Springs and later for the Military Airlift Command in Okinawa. I then worked as a programmer and technical writer in Silicon Valley while gigging in the evenings & weekends as a musician to support going to Stanford University. I was part of the programming team that installed the first computerized medical information system at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, MD. I have taught music, creative writing, and computer programming at the community college and university levels in northern, central, and southern California as well as in Iowa. I wrote college entrance exams and was a content expert for American College Testing (ACT) in Iowa City, IA. I was a freelance editor of college textbooks and medical journal papers for almost 30 years. I have taught English folk dance for many years at weekends and weeklong events around the country and in Canada and England.

Are there any especially memorable life experiences you'd like to tell us about?

I adopted a 22-month-old child from Russia. I volunteered as a bird-of-prey rehabilitator for 25 years, which allowed me to get close and personal with owls, hawks, falcons, and eagles. I have made numerous solo trips into the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. Last year I published my first novel. I feel fortunate to have been able to pursue many passions throughout my life.

Future Piper: Jordan



We are ecstatic to announce that band member Derek Bammer and his wife Rachel welcomed Jordan Derek Bammer into the world on January 29th. Jordan weighed in at 5 lbs. 2 oz. and was 19 inches long. He is perfect in every way and will make a wonderful piper some day!



Upcoming Events 2026

Apr 20th	**Jaxfreebird Heroes Golf Tournament** (8:30 AM) 1600 Selva Marina Dr, Atlantic Beach
May 1st	**Clay County Fire Rescue Award Ceremony**, (4:30 PM) The Church of Eleven22 - Fleming Island Campus, 4459 US-17, Fleming Island
May 31st	**Memorial Day Church Service**, (9:30 AM) Turning Point At Calvary, 3500 FL-16 #1, St. Augustine
Sep 12th	**Combat Veterans Motorcycle Club**, (8:30 AM) Trout Creek Memorial Park and Marina, 6550 FL-13, St. Augustine
Oct 11th	**Kirkin of the Tartan at Geneva Presbyterian**, (9:30 AM)1755 State Rd 13 N, Jacksonville

First Coast Highlanders Elected Officers for 2026

President: Scott Young
Vice President: Scotland Boland
Secretary: Matthew McGahee
Treasurer: Evan Brown
Member at Large: Nikki Herbst
Member at Large: Marcia Winnard
Quartermaster: Jill Dean
Pipe Major: Arthur Tenney

In Memoriam: Brenda Cohn



We are sorry to share the news of the passing of Brenda Cohn, wife of First Coast Highlanders piper and snare drummer Steve Cohn. Present at band rehearsals and performances for many years before becoming ill, Brenda was a meaningful part of the band community, and we will miss her.

Brenda devoted her life to sharing music with others as a teacher of students from elementary age through high school, as a community theatre performer, board officer, and music director, and as the Music Director of St. Giles Presbyterian Church from its founding until her retirement in 2018. Her influence, born of her enthusiasm, energy, talent, and deep love of song as well as her skillful leadership, continues to affect the church's rich musical life and caring community to this day. Brenda's legacy will live on.

Brenda was a joyful presence in many people's lives, and the Highlanders feel fortunate to have known her. May she rest in peace, remembered fondly.

First Coast Highlanders Recent Appearances



Performing at the Northeast Florida Highland Games night stage



Performing for the Veterans kiosk at the St. Augustine Celtic Festival



Playing at the St. Cyprians Vespers service, St. Augustine



Quartermaster Jill Dean hard at work organizing the Band's storage locker, with help from Band member David McCranie



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Steve and Jill Dean • Jane Romeo in memory of Stephen Romeo
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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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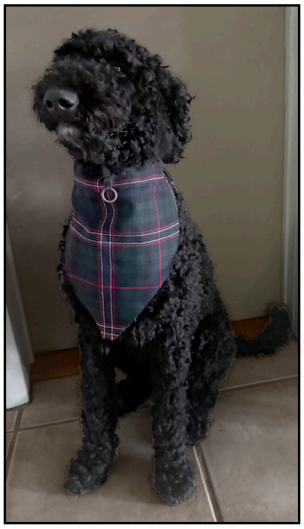
THANK YOU FOR YOUR DONATIONS!



New-to-us Band member Brian Nicolleti tries on a kilt



Band mascot Milo shows off his new Scottish National Tartan bandanna