THE CLAY PIPER

First Coast Highlanders Newsletter

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Member Spotlight: David McCranie



Through diligence that the band appreciates, David McCranie has quickly become a strong voice in our bagpipe lineup. His understanding of the importance of hard work and maintaining a sense of humor have made him fit right in with the First Coast Highlanders. Here are David's answers to the Spotlight interview questions.

What do you like best about being a member of First Coast Highlanders?
I'm enjoying the challenge of learning a new musical instrument and the camaraderie of my bandmates.

How did you come to join the FCH?
About 10 years ago, I began exploring my Scottish roots. I learned that my father's side of the family had emigrated from Scotland sometime around 1730, settling in the Cape Fear, NC area. In the early 1800s, a group of them moved down to South Georgia, where I was born and where many of them remain today.
Three years ago, my wife saw an advertisement in the Clay Today newspaper soliciting new members for the band. She encouraged me to give it a try, and I agreed that it would be a great way of saluting those who came before me, while at the same time learning something new and fun.

What advice do you have for anyone who wants to learn to play the Great Highland bagpipes?
Be patient—not my strong suit to be sure. I've discovered that it takes a surprising amount of time to develop stamina and the muscle memory required for "feeling" where the holes are on the chanter, proper hand positioning, etc., all while keeping the bag sufficiently inflated—to say nothing of memorizing all the tunes.

Continued



David with the band on St. Simon's Island



Chatting with Greg at rehearsal

Member Spotlight: David McCranie



Where were you born/where did you grow up?
I was born and raised in Tifton, Georgia (about 180 miles south of Atlanta). Agriculture—peanuts, soybeans, tobacco, cotton, pecans—was and remains the foundation of the local economy.

What did you study in school?
After undergraduate school at Florida State in Tallahassee, I attended law school at the University of Georgia, graduating in 1982.

What has been your career path?
I began my legal career as a law clerk at the First District Court of Appeal, a state appellate court in Tallahassee. Two years later, I went to work for a law firm in Jacksonville, where I met my wife, an Orange Park girl and a court reporter. After we married, I worked for a law firm in Tallahassee for a couple of years before moving back to Jacksonville (Orange Park) in 1990, where we've remained ever since. I retired two years ago after 40+ years in practice.

Are there any especially memorable life experiences you'd like to tell us about?
I've had many memorable life experiences, none of which are especially fit to print! See me in person to discuss. 😊

Upcoming Events 2026

Nov 11th	**Veteran's Day Service**, (10:00 AM) Magnolia Cemetery
Nov 14th	**Veteran's Council 5K**, (7:00 AM)Orange Park Mall
Dec 11th	**Cocoa & Carols** (7:00 PM) Best Bet, 455 Park Ave., Orange Park

Upcoming Events 2027

Jan 31st	**Kirkin of the Tartan**, (7:30 & 10:30 AM) St. Simons Presbyterian Church, St. Simons Island, GA
Feb 27th	**Northeast Florida Scottish Games & Festival**, (All day) Clay County Fairgrounds

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

First Coast Highlanders and Amazing Grace



Amazing Grace at Geneva Presbyterian Churck Kirkin o' the Tartan

The First Coast Highlanders often play "Amazing Grace" at Kirkins, memorial services, and other gatherings. We frequently close our rehearsals with each piper playing the tune solo, followed by the band playing it together once through. Though it is a simple tune in tempo and notes, playing it beautifully is another matter, requiring concentration and control of an often unruly instrument.

Few tunes have traveled as far, or found their way into as many corners of human experience, as "Amazing Grace." For pipers and pipe bands, it is a tune for nearly every occasion that calls for music from the heart. It may accompany a funeral procession, honor a fallen comrade, mark a memorial service, or bring a congregation to its feet. It can be heard at weddings, civic ceremonies, Highland games, and gatherings where the pipes are played simply because the moment deserves something more than ordinary music.

There is something particularly moving about "Amazing Grace" played on the Great Highland bagpipe. The instrument's penetrating, unbroken sound carries the melody across open fields and through crowded streets, yet can seem intensely personal when heard at close range. The tune asks little of the listener in the way of musical knowledge. Its melody is simple, its message universal, and its emotional reach extraordinary. Whether played by a lone piper or a full band, it can express grief, gratitude, remembrance, hope, and celebration—sometimes all at once.

For pipers, "Amazing Grace" is more than a familiar tune in the repertoire. It is a musical language shared with audiences of every background, one that allows the pipes to speak when words are insufficient. Few tunes are asked to do so much, and fewer still answer the call so beautifully.

Saying Goodby to Greg McClelland





First Coast Highlanders had to say a fond farewell to piper Greg McClelland and his wife Dora, who moved to Charlotte, North Carolina, to be near their children. We wish them the very best and hope to see them again before too very long.

Summer Time



Scott, Vince, and Brian at rehearsal



Art and Nikki



Will working with Kevin



Steve enjoying time with the band

First Coast Highlanders Recent Appearances



Performing outside Geneva Presbyterian Church



Performing outside during a rare dry spell in hurricane season



Donations always appreciated



Florida Gateway College First Responders Graduation

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