Virginia Brys’ love of music has brought her great joy over nine decades and now to the residents of Independence Hill Retirement Community.

She’s known around Independence Hill Retirement Community as “Songbird.” That’s because Virginia Brys, 90, has a passion for music that helped establish the Hill Topper’s Choral Group—almost 20 residents who practice weekly and sing for residents throughout the year.

Music, it seems, follows Brys—who serves as chorus director for the Hill Topper’s. She says that even the birds in the residence hall’s floor-to-ceiling cages start twittering outside the choral group’s practice room. “They’re loud,” she says, smiling.

No music program existed at Independence Hill five years ago. That’s when Brys learned some men were forming a quartet. She helped with harmonies and, soon, the bigger choral group formed. “I wish I could explain what their singing has brought back to them,” Brys says, noting that some haven’t sung since high school.

Originally from Pennsylvania, Brys’ sat with her dad at the family’s player piano when her feet couldn’t reach the pedals. She studied cello during school years and made music part of her life throughout two marriages and as she raised six children.

“I just love music, period. But not rock and roll,” Brys says, laughing as she admits adding “Jingle Bell Rock” to the Hill Topper’s holiday lineup.

She says music has helped her deal with difficult circumstances, such as recovering from surgery. “If you don’t have music in your life, you’re missing something,” she says.

She shares that love of music with the choral group’s dedicated pianist, Aurora Boliak. “I don’t know what we’d do without her,” Brys says, noting the pair hasn’t found backups for their roles. “We’re both locked in!”

A plaque honoring The Hill Topper’s Chorus thanks to Virginia for her “dedication...ultimately blessing all who have delighted in her gift as the choral director.”

“Nobody said I had to do it,” Brys says, adding she feels called to the role. “I really feel like God placed me here. I could have been a lot of places, but I feel like he has me here.”