

NEWSROOM

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AND COMMUNITYCHRISTOPHER NEWPORT IS FIRST VIRGINIA SITE FOR GLOBALLY RENOWNED SING FOR
HOPE PROGRAMby [Kelli Caplan](#) | February 15, 2024*Read time: about 3 min*

Inside a room in the [Mary M. Torggler Fine Arts Center](#), a collection of once forgotten pianos have been transformed into vibrant works of art by the skilled hands of local artists. The pianos have been repurposed - boldly painted and decorated - so that they may bring musical joy to the community.

The 10 pianos are part of a worldwide program called [Sing for Hope](#), an initiative that places artistically designed pianos in public places all over the globe for anyone and everyone to play.

To make Sing for Hope a reality, Christopher Newport, The Torggler, [Ferguson Center for the Arts](#), and the City of Newport News have partnered as hosts, working collaboratively to house the pianos, choose the artists, and provide the studio space where the masterpieces are painted.

Once complete, the reimagined pianos will be positioned in key locations throughout Newport News to ensure they receive the most attention and playtime from the community. The hope is that they will bring color, music, and happiness to the places they grace with their vivid presence.



Candyce Harrell '25

When people tickle the ivories of artist Terry Cox-Joseph's Sing for Hope piano, an ostrich and giraffe will be looking on with happy eyes and big toothy grins. Not real animals, but ones she painted on the front of the piano, which came from Japan.

"I love animals. The design evolved as I went," said Cox-Joseph, a longtime supporter of CNU. "I want to make people smile. This provides a sense of community. It brings people together around music."

Being at Christopher Newport checks two significant boxes for Sing for Hope: the first Virginia site for the program and the first small-market site in the world. The program provides both visibility to CNU, and an opportunity for community members to enjoy listening to the pianos being played, and to take a turn at the keyboards if they so desire.

"Sing for Hope is extremely visible and interactive. The program brings art out of classrooms, theaters, studios and museums, and into the community and gives everyone a chance to engage," said Bruce Bronstein, executive director of the Ferguson Center.

The painted pianos will be in the Diamonstein Lobby of the Ferguson Center on March 28 for a free Sing for Hope community kickoff at 7:30 p.m. featuring international award-winning pianist Drew Petersen. From there, they will be sent to indoor and outdoor venues throughout Newport News for all to see and play from April 1-18. Locations include Victory Landing Park, City Hall Plaza, Newport News Park, Midtown Community Center, Mariners' Museum, Riverview Farm Park, City Center Gazebo, CNU Fountain Plaza, Patrick Henry Mall, and Denbigh Community Center.

"We're in the process of planning some special pop-up concerts throughout the city, too," Bronstein said.

On April 20, they will return to the Ferguson Center lobby for a world premiere concert featuring Broadway star Erika Henningsen ("Mean Girls," "Hazbin Hotel," and "Girls5eva") with the Virginia Symphony Orchestra. After that, the dazzling pianos will be dispatched to their forever homes throughout the city.

The idea is to make music accessible to as many people as possible. The pianos will be housed in areas where people of all musical abilities can play them at any time. Sing for Hope is the country's largest annually recurring public arts project.

"I hope we make people smile. I hope we bring people together - friends, strangers, schoolmates, neighbors, young and old, musicians and artists. People who love to play the piano and people who have never played one before," Bronstein said. "I hope it inspires conversations and friendships. I hope to hear someone playing an original composition while I'm walking through the park and also watch two kids figuring out 'Heart and Soul' at a community center. I want to watch as neighbors learn for the first time that the guy that's always lived across the street is an amazing musician.

"Music and art are universal languages that transcend age, race and religion. This is such a beautiful agenda. We want to bring people together and inspire joy," he said.

For the past several weeks, artists have been at the Torggler diligently working to beautify the pianos, adding personality to them and making them sing, so to speak. Each artist created the design for his or her designated piano. Artists were selected after a request for submissions was sent out by the Torggler and the city's Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center.

Candyce Harrell, '25 [English](#) and [Studio Art](#), decided to bedeck her piano in an orange and blue swirl impressionist design inspired by Van Gogh. "This experience has been amazing. It's honestly just been cool to do something that feels 'professional,' since much of my art has been for me and me alone," she said. "With this project, I am able to do something for the community and get to say that my art was part of a public exhibition. As someone who is just starting out in the art world. I've really enjoyed getting to meet different community artists all drawn together by the same program."

For local artist Scott Turner, being part of Sing for Hope has been rewarding, both artistically and as a way to positively contribute to the community. He painted his piano to resemble a miniature world, with much of it appearing to be underwater. He also included a falling star, which he says relays optimism.



"I like the program a lot. The message is hope, healing and connection around the world," Turner said. "I hope that when people see it, they will want to play it. I want it to encourage hope."
