

Playing his part for vets

BRINGING YOUR GUITAR TO A GATHERING IS A GOOD WAY TO BREAK THE ICE AND START CONVERSATIONS. Mark Bristow, scale technician at BSI Scales in New Berlin, WI, brought his Martin® guitar with him when he came to Rice Lake to attend our “Fundamentals of Electronic Systems” training seminar. The conversation he started with us is well worth repeating.

Mark is a volunteer guitar instructor for [Guitars for Vets \(G4V\)](#), a national program that has given away over 800 guitars and more than 1,500 lessons. The students are service men and women who have come home from war feeling the debilitating effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He believes music is a universal language that can help veterans communicate emotions that are hard to talk about.

Guitars for Vets was strummed to life at the Milwaukee VA spinal rehab unit, where Dan Van Buskirk and Patrick Nettesheim performed for paralyzed veterans. They saw how therapeutic music is for those who are fighting a lifelong battle waged in wheelchairs and hospital beds. Dan, a Marine Corps reconnaissance scout during the Vietnam War, took up guitar in 2005 after years of PTSD had devastated his life. In 2008, he and his guitar instructor, Patrick, formed Guitars for Vets.

Watching Mark take his Martin out of the case, it was easy to see the close bond that exists between musician and instrument. When Mark heard about the program, he volunteered immediately.

Instructors must train through a strict VA program, and they're submitted to rigorous FBI background checks that require fingerprinting and official badges for admission to facilities. In addition to government protocol, G4V has three requirements for instructors:

- They must show gratitude toward veterans for what they have given.
- They must be empathetic and be sincerely able to feel these veterans' stories.
- They must be nonjudgmental and throw all political thoughts out the door.

Before receiving their free guitar at their sixth lesson, veterans enrolled in Guitars for Vets learn to play on donated practice guitars.

If you have an acoustic guitar gathering dust in your closet, send it in! Even if the instrument is no longer playable, artists associated with the program can turn it into an art piece that will then be sold to raise funds for Guitars for Vets. Guitars for Vets also needs instructors like Mark and coordinators to set up new chapters and help with existing groups.

Visit their website guitarsforvets.org or Guitars for Vets' Facebook page for more details on the program and ways you can play a part in bringing music into the lives of our country's heroes. ■

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