

GBV

GUITAR BUILDERS FOR VETERANS

Guitar Builders for Veterans is a Facebook group that pools parts and builds guitars to gift to U.S. veterans. The group started when luthier Kris Colson of Colson Custom Guitars, located in Virginia, and Shredder Pinstripe, a neoclassical rock guitarist (*that plays everything from jazz to classical to progressive metal to rockabilly*) from the Ohio based band RATNIP, were finishing a charity build for a "Children with Cancer" benefit. They were chatting one day and Shredder said "I wish we could do something for the vets" and went on to share a story of how he had met a veteran at a show that used to play, but since he was out of the service simply hadn't had money to hardly survive, much less purchase a guitar. This struck a nerve in him and the story had an overwhelming effect on Kris. Kris said "done". The Guitar Builders for Veterans Group was started shortly thereafter.



"I've lost friends in Iraq...I need to get the word out to guys my age to start helping...we get to do what we do because they did what they did... No one my age gets that."

— Shredder Pinstripe

Shredder quickly found the group's first guitar recipient - an army vet in Florida named Mark. Mark dreamt of playing again, but supporting a family of four on a disabled vet's pension and having only a minimum wage job, he couldn't find the funds for a guitar purchase. Shredder hooked Mark up with Kris and the build was planned. This first build took a while to get parts donated as the group was very small at the time. Between the donated parts from group members and some donations from various guitar parts companies and suppliers like **Stew-Mac**, **Gator**, **Luthiers Mercantile International (LMI)**, and **Sperzel** to name a few, they were able to design and build Mark's dream guitar.

The next build was a custom upright electric bass for Pat, a disabled vet in a wheelchair living in Virginia. The bass was designed to be played upright or while sitting. It has custom scaling and string spacing that enables Pat to play with his limitations, in his style (*a classically trained cello player*).

A custom Les Paul was then built for Aaron in Ohio. This guitar had a custom paint job, set-up and a custom set of pickups and wiring. The guitar was presented to Aaron at a RAW Run veterans benefit concert in Ohio. Aaron even got to go on stage for the presentation during the Ratnip show.

The group has just started a custom telecaster build for Charles in Florida (a vet who has spent his post-service life helping other veterans through a non-profit organization). Parts for this build are coming together quicker than any of the previous builds.

GBV recently exceeded 100 members. As the group grows, more parts can be acquired resulting in more guitars being gifted. If you have parts that you would consider contributing to this effort, or if you want to have a hands-on part in a build, just look up Guitar Builders for Veterans on Facebook and join. As more luthiers join, more veterans can be served with a gift they simply cannot afford.

If you have ever wanted to give back to your vets then this is an awesome way to do it! The GBV group encourages you to get involved. This group welcomes people with diverse skill levels and of various degrees of involvement. If you have any questions, you can send Kris Colson a private message and he will happily chat with you. Not a Facebook user? You can contact Kris by phone at 540-553-6841.

Editor's Comment: *Guitar Show & Custom Luthier Magazine is pleased to help promote "Guitar Builders for Veterans". We all owe thanks to our veterans for our freedoms and this is one way for the guitar building community to give back. If you are a builder and want to give thanks to a veteran in need, then please join and they will find a way for you to help. If you represent a company, they will gladly accept donations for their projects. If you just want to help and aren't a builder, then please join and maybe you can help source parts etc. GBV is NOT a 501(c)3 charity and contributions are NOT tax deductible. Colson Custom Guitars is a small custom guitar shop that emphasizes quality & tone and can build the instrument of your dreams. We'd also like to thank the companies mentioned in this article:*

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Stewart-MacDonald <http://www.stewmac.com>
Gator Cases <http://www.gatorcases.com/>
Sperzel USA <http://www.sperzel.com/>

You can find Guitar Builders for Veterans on Facebook.com