

Guitar project amplifies students

STORY AND PHOTO BY KRISTEN WOHLERS

Have you noticed the influx of guitars hanging from walls around campus?

Clackamas Community College counselor Casey Sims is the man behind what he's calling "The Campus Guitar Project."

Sims has scattered at least 14 guitars, equipped with picks and tuners, around the college campuses, including in the Community Center, Niemeyer, Barlow, McLoughlin and more. He's also placed them at the Harmony and Wilsonville Campuses.

He is committed to providing a guitar for any building on the campuses, if it's wanted and it's not disruptive.

The idea behind the project is to make the instruments accessible for anyone who wants to pluck one from the wall and play a tune.

"It's just about helping to create a more positive sense of community and maybe a little playfulness on campus," said Sims.

He added, "The college campus is a lot of things, including a place where people spend extra time; and I value the little windows of time where people might strum a few chords. I think that might benefit not only them, but maybe the other people that they're with."

Ignacio Gonzalez, a counselor at the college, said that so far the project has been well received.

"The feedback has been generally really positive with most buildings reporting an increase in students just breaking into song, and grabbing a guitar, and attracting other students to come and join," said Gonzalez. "That has been a very positive thing."

It makes Sims "so happy" when he catches a student strumming one of the guitars; and nearly every day, people tell him that they've seen someone playing.

Student Jadon Clifton recently picked up the guitar in the Fireside Lounge before class.

"I have an exam in 10 minutes, and I just need to calm myself down a little bit," said Clifton.

The project began with one guitar in Sims's office. Sims was inspired by former dean Bill Briare, who he played with in a band for staff meetings, and who kept a variety of instruments in his office. That's how Sims got the idea to keep an extra guitar in his office at the college.

After that, he put a guitar in the classroom where he teaches a First Year Experience class. Sometimes he would

play and sing for his students.

"It's nice to get silly a little bit once in a while," said Sims. "Students appreciate that the instructor isn't so rigid. I did write a song about college success for fun."

As the guitars began to spread, Sims was reminded of a piano project in Portland called "Piano. Push. Play." The organization restores pianos, paints them fun colors and puts them in public places during the summer.

"I think this piano project is really cool. I'm really inspired by it," Sims said. "And then it occurred to me, what if I could do something like that with guitars on campus?"

And so, The Campus Guitar Project was born.

Sims pays for the guitars out of his own pocket. He enjoys saying, "No taxpayer dollars were harmed in the creation of this project."

He had been saving up to buy a nice Breedlove guitar for himself, when he realized that it might not be worth the time and money since his kids would likely get a hold of it.

"Instead, I just spent the money that I'd saved up on all these used guitars on Craig's List," said Sims. "And it's brought me so much more joy than having one fancy one that no one else is supposed to play."

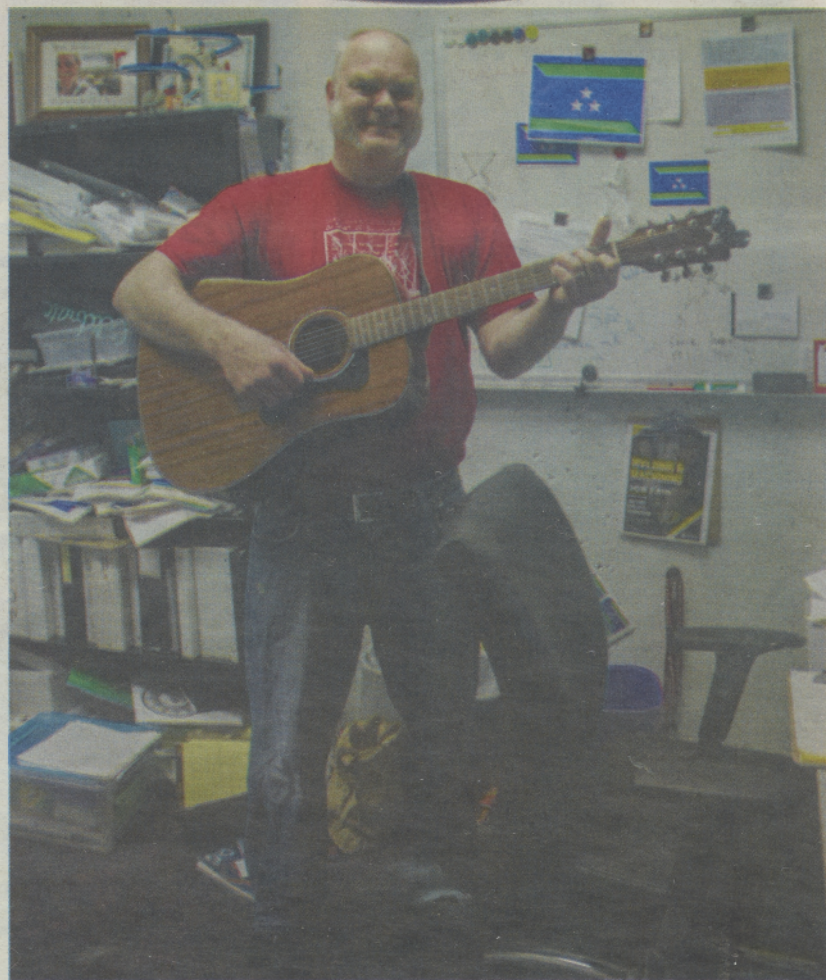
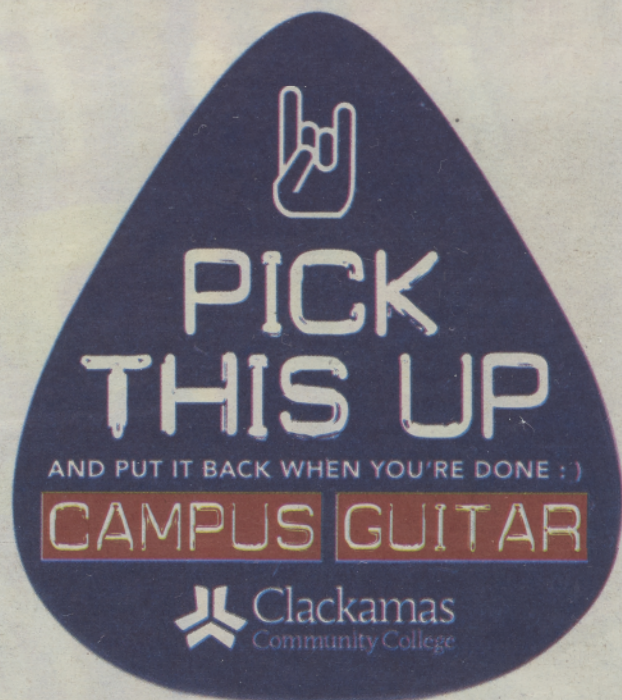
If anyone has a guitar that's collecting dust, Sims is happy to take it off his or her hands and put it to use for the project.

Sims searches for great deals on guitars that may have cosmetic or other flaws, and takes them to a local music store called Trade Up Music. The store has two Portland locations by that name as well as a Southwest location called Hum Strum Drum. The technicians (shout out to Dan and Miles) transform the guitars into something playable for the college community by putting on new strings, making adjustments and doing other minor repairs as needed.

The restored guitars are available not only for casual play, but also for students to borrow for guitar lessons or classes at the college. Sims wants to encourage people to learn to play.

"You can play like 100 songs with three chords," said Clifton.

So, pick up a campus guitar. Strum a few chords. A few is all you need.



College counselor Casey Sims strums one of his guitars. He's donated more than a dozen to campus in an effort to encourage relaxation and play.