

Holladay builds a business through guitars

By
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IVN Contributing Writer

A luthier, from the French word luth, is someone who makes stringed musical instruments.

Master luthier Alazar Holladay, whose recently opened storefront on Lister Street in Cave Junction bears the name Running Fox Guitars, was a machinist for 30 years. But, ten years ago he had an epiphany.

“It just popped into my head all of a sudden, ‘Build guitars.’” he said. “I thought, thank goodness I wasn’t asked to build an ark.”

Holladay started out building electric guitars, but found that his unbranded electrics were difficult to sell.

“It’s a funny market,” he said. “Everyone wants to buy the guitar their idol was playing.”

So, six years ago, he switched to acoustics.

“I really enjoy building acoustics because there’s a real science to it,” he said. “I’ll be learning about that for the rest of my life.”

On display in the store is the first acoustic guitar Holladay ever built. Walking over to it, he points out the errors he made in that first attempt, but then plucks a couple strings, and the sound is beautiful.

“I had one fellow play it,” said Holladay. “And, after playing it, he said, ‘I want you to build me a guitar.’ In fact, I had a friend who had a really top of the line classical guitar, and he tried mine, and mine sounded better.”

Holladay does stock a selection of electric guitars. But, he says 95 percent of guitar players in the Illinois Valley play acoustics. He notes that ukuleles are popular too.

Holladay qualifies his price list as very affordable. For guitar repairs, he charges \$30 an hour and his acoustics start at \$4,000. He notes that some other luthiers in the area may not be happy with his low prices.

“But, my attitude is to provide a service to the community,” he said. “I’m not out to make a fortune.”

In addition to building guitars, Holladay also repairs them. But, he is looking for an apprentice to whom he can teach the repair end of the business.

His requirement?

“Anybody who has any aptitude at all,” he said. “It’s not rocket science.”

Holladay adds that, right now, there is not enough business to keep an apprentice constantly busy, but he expects the business to grow. For now, he is concentrating on serving the Illinois Valley where, he notes, there are “an incredible amount of guitar players.” He does, however, hope to eventually get a website and branch out.

“But guitars, until you’ve got a name, it’s a hands-on thing,” he said. “(Customers) want to play it and feel it. It’s very tactile. So they don’t like to buy that kind of thing sight unseen, unless it’s got a big reputation.”

For now, the Illinois Valley is Holladay’s oyster. He notes that one other, very experienced luthier, is planning to open a shop here, but he is not at all concerned, and says there is more than enough business to go around. In fact, he feels that the proximity of two related businesses will tend to attract more customers. He also welcomes the camaraderie.

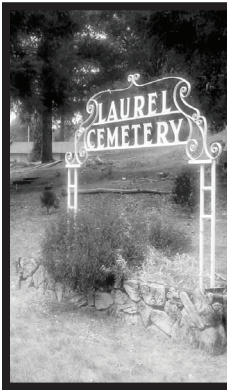
“Another thing I like about the luthier trade is that people really tend to share the new things that they’ve learned,” he said.

Oh, and does Holladay play the guitar himself? Nope. He tells of an interview he once saw with a highly renowned classical guitar maker from Spain.

“He said that when he first started, he was going to play classical guitar and make classical guitars,” said Holladay. “And his dad took him aside and said, ‘Look, can you drive two cars at the same time? Which are you going to do? Either you learn to play, or you build.’”

Master luthier Alazar Holladay, with his enchantingly-toned acoustic guitars, has learned to build.





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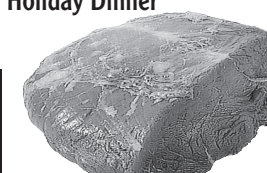
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