

Duo builds guitars for people with disabilities

Virginia Barreda

Des Moines Register
USA TODAY NETWORK

Tristan Berg wants to make guitars accessible to anyone.

That's the concept behind NVision Guitars, LLC, a business Berg, 27, founded with his mother, Renee Rausch, to design and construct electric guitars for anyone, from beginner hobbyists to professionals. Based in Ankeny, Iowa, the business also customizes guitars for musicians who are disabled by incorporating ergonomic designs and adaptive controls tailored to each person.

The idea came to the mother-son duo on their hourslong commutes to Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, for Rausch's medical appointments.

A retired executive officer for the adjutant general in the Iowa National Guard, Rausch, 47, said a possible autoimmune health issue brought her post-military career as a personal trainer to a halt. The car rides with her son to the clinic ignited deep conversations about purpose and future, she said.

Berg told his mother his purpose was to make guitars.

Berg said the mission of NVision, which launched in June, is "to speak uniqueness without words." Berg, who describes himself as an introvert, said he expresses himself best through music. He wants to bring the same opportunity to others.

"We don't have a lot of time on this Earth," he said. "And the point of being on this Earth is to do good works for others, so that way you can just be a better person and make other people's lives better."

Working out of a garage at his apartment complex in Ankeny, Berg meticulously crafts each guitar by hand.

Ideas start with pen and paper, and a slab of "exotic" wood, often from trees grown in different parts of the world. Berg sketches designs, builds mock-ups, carves the wood and adds all of the electrical wiring. Berg said each guitar takes about a week or two to finish, and typically costs \$1,200 to \$2,000.

Each guitar can be adapted to a person's needs. People in wheelchairs, for example, might need shorter, lighter



Renee Rausch and Tristan Berg, a mother and son duo, are behind NVision Guitars, a company that creates bespoke guitars for those with visual or physical impairments.

CODY SCANLAN/THE REGISTER

models. For people who are blind, Berg can add markings he calls "convex curves" on the guitar's neck to help players find the fret markers. He can also put tactile markers on the body of the guitar to help people know which string they're playing.

The duo sells Berg's guitars online and frequently showcases them at vendor shows.

Rausch said about 10% of their sales go toward creating guitars that are custom-made for people with disabilities. Berg and Rausch are looking to work with organizations that can pair them with people who need adaptable guitars.

Rausch said the inspiration for the company also came from her father, who became paraplegic after a car wreck in the early '90s. He went to Camp Sunnyside in Des Moines, which offers support for adults with disabilities, where he learned wood- and leatherworking. Now, his grandson uses his old woodworking tools.

For Rausch, the business is about helping her son achieve his dreams and building a legacy that will last for generations.