

# Guitar maker brings his skills home

By Tom Ninestine  
*Staff reporter*  
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BLOOMSBURG - John Dillon grew tired of playing in a rock band in the 1970s. But he still loved music and wanted a career that would keep him close to his passion. Making guitars was a logical choice.

Dillon was living in New Mexico when he heard about a guitar-maker in Colorado. The man did not want an apprentice, but advised Dillon on how to improve each music piece. Each guitar took about a month to make and by the third guitar, Dillon felt comfortable with his new-found craft.

One of his earliest models was on consignment at a New Mexico music store and the merchandise moved out in an untraditional way. It was one of four or five instruments stolen. Dillon received \$600.00 in insurance money.

"If it hadn't been stolen, it probably would still be there," Dillon joked.

The business flourished, however, and Dillon and two assistants began making them. By 1980, 50 custom-made guitars had been made.

John Dillon touches up the abalone inlay around the sound hole of an acoustic guitar. Each guitar takes about a month to complete. Dillon has made guitars for some of the top names in country & western music

He said there is a delicate balance between having the guitar thin and light enough that music resonates properly and having it sturdy enough to last.

The neck of the guitar is a block of wood sanded and sawed to individual specifications.

The wood is sanded down and after a dozen coats of lacquer, the guitar has a flawless sheen. The guitars are numbered and signed, the six steel strings are attached and each piece is given a hard carrying case.

"I like what I do because I carry the process through from beginning to end," Dillon said. "It's not an assembly line."

Dillon said acoustic guitars are gaining in popularity

"We were barely getting by,"

Dillon re-called.

In 1981, Dillon moved back to Pennsylvania and went to work as a marketing executive in his family's 100-year-old wholesale floral business.

But Dillon soon realized his heart was more in guitars than flowers and re-established the business in the Bloomsburg area. He is considered a luthier, a maker of stringed instruments.

Dillon said it takes about a month to make each instrument. The sides of the guitar are thin pieces of wood that get soaked until pliable. He fits them onto a heated form and when they are dry, adds the front and back panels. Since Dillon makes one guitar at a time, he can customize the guitar to fit its owner. Indian rosewood and Koa wood from Hawaii are types of wood in demand by Dillon's customers.

Brazilian rosewood was being used for Dillon's most recent project -- Number 59 -- a guitar for a surgeon.

because of country and western music. He also credits MTV's "unplugged" series with highlighting the instrument.

Dillon's guitars sell for between \$2,000.00 and \$6,000.00, Dillon said. His client is like a Who's Who of the country and western scene. He's made guitars for Micheal Martin Murphey, Dave Gibson, Hank Williams Jr., and folksinger Tish Hinojosa. Music from his guitars can be heard on recordings by Asleep at the Wheel, Tanya Tucker, John Gorka, Chris LeDoux, Suzy Bogguss and Herb Pederson.

But he has customers who are not performers. "In the '70s there was a younger market that was not willing to spend the money on a quality instrument," he said. "Now the people who grew up in the '60s have settled down and want to buy a real nice guitar."

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