

A&E

by Brett Shaw

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TEAM SPIRIT

Guitar League's Asheville chapter reconvenes in January

Unless you're a transplant from upstate New York, it's unlikely you have heard of Guitar League. But the 13-year-old organization that began in Syracuse has recently begun to spread, opening six new chapters over the past two years, with Asheville as its newest location.

Guitar League's Asheville group had its first meeting in September and reconvenes Monday, Jan. 14, at the Days Inn Asheville/Mall. Paul Heumiller, owner of Dream Guitars in Weaverville, will be the featured presenter.

Jim Horsman, Guitar League's co-founder, calls himself "the longest-running rookie in the league history." Connor McCabe, the Asheville chapter leader, who honed his skills at open mics and weekly gigs in Florida, says he is a minor. After retirement and college, respectively, both relocated to Western North Carolina.

The second hour of every meeting consists of breakout sessions, where members split into three self-selected groups — rookies, minors and majors. In sports-speak, "rookies are beginners who are looking to learn chords, scales and basic strumming and picking methods," according to the league's website. "Minors should be at an intermediate skill level looking to learn varying chord patterns and moderately difficult rock and jazz leads. Majors are for the 'pros' who want to learn advanced picking styles and guitar leads."

"Members find the most useful level by feel within a meeting or two," says Horsman. Rookies and minors are led by more experienced guitarists during their breakout sessions, but, Horsman says, "Sessions are



STRINGS ATTACHED: Jim Horsman, right, co-founded Guitar League in Syracuse, N.Y., and Connor McCabe, left, leads the Asheville chapter. Paul Heumiller, owner of Dream Guitars in Weaverville, will be the featured presenter at the league's Jan. 14 meeting. Photo by Brett Shaw

often improvisational. If you have a skill you are interested in or struggling with, bring it to the group."

Breakout sessions were the genesis for the league. Horsman, who was retiring from gigging as a drummer, wanted to continue playing the music he loved. He realized a drum kit would not cut it as a solo instrument, so he turned to guitar — but starting a new instrument

in his 50s was frustrating. "YouTube was not really doing it. Trying to learn off of books was not really doing it, and I felt too old to take guitar lessons from someone my son's age," he says.

Horsman enlisted two friends, Dick Ward and Loren Barrigar, who were talented guitar players, as instructors. Initially, Horsman just wanted a few tutorials to get up and running, but he quickly realized the more he learned, the more there was to know. At that point, it seemed beneficial — as well as helpful to his friends — to create a space in which they, as well as he, could learn from and connect with a larger community of guitarists and musicians. Horsman, Ward and Barrigar devised a format, and Guitar League's flagship Syracuse chapter was born.

Meetings have a simple two-part structure: a featured presentation followed by the breakout sessions. The featured presenter offers a combination performance-lesson in the first hour focusing on a specific guitar skill. Heumiller will be demonstrating and discussing open tuning.

Horsman and McCabe see Heumiller's expansive knowledge as an additional benefit for those in attendance. "Hearing from someone with that knowledge about what to look and listen for in a guitar is a special insight to receive," says McCabe.

The wheels are well-greased: Local musicians Adi the Monk and Andrew Scotchie have already been announced as the next two presenters for February and March, respectively. "We are excited about meeting guitar lovers," Horsman says.

This aspect of connection and community was what brought McCabe to the league. "I first started learning to play guitar in high school. It was a group of us trying to figure out how to play our favorite metal songs during breaks," he says. This camaraderie is what he views as the driving force behind the league. "Many people have no desire to go to a jam or open mic. This space offers the ability for feedback without the fear of feeling less than other players."

When he heard Horsman was looking for someone to take over the day-to-day reins in Asheville and to focus on national growth and outreach, McCabe jumped at the chance. "One of the reasons I wanted to move here was the music scene," he says. "I think Guitar League is a great way to dip your toe into that community."

Several new chapters in Atlanta, Charleston and Tulsa are on the brink of opening. Horsman sees a network of chapters across the country as the league's future. For now, he is helping McCabe build inroads in Asheville, where he's found a similar level of musical potential and interest to Syracuse. "We have already started to toy with the idea of festival-conferences or multichapter events," he says. ❧



www.guitarleague.com

WHAT
Guitar League
Asheville chapter
guitarleague.com

WHERE
Days Inn Asheville/Mall
201 Tunnel Road

WHEN
Second Monday of every month,
6-8 p.m. \$75 annual membership,
first meetings are free