



Jan 13, 2020

Mr. Brian Gordon, Director
Three Rivers Education for Employment System
1215 Houbolt Road
Joliet, IL 60432

Dear Mr. Gordon,

I am writing to express my support from afar for the continuation and enhancement of the woodworking programs taught by Mark Smith at Reed-Custer HS in Braidwood, IL.

As someone who is always looking to improve his programs and engage more students, Mark got wind of the Southern California guitar-making programs sponsored by Taylor Guitars, and contacted us in 2012 in hopes of bringing such a program to his community. As a rule, Taylor sponsors programs in local high schools where we can directly support the teachers and students, so as to afford them the best chance of success. Our goal in sponsoring these programs is to promote wood shop classes by keeping them in the spotlight with a "cool" project that attracts students. Although there's not a direct pipeline from these shop classes to Taylor's recruiting department, there is the underlying idea that keeping wood shop classes alive is at least an indirect way of improving the quality of the applicants that we do get. Any hands-on, project-based program has huge value in developing the skills we need in our workforce.

At the time that Mark contacted me, I would not have seriously considered a request from so far away. I would have discounted it as being too distant for us to properly support. Our prime directive is not to launch a program without every opportunity for the students to succeed. But also, to partner with someone who has already demonstrated commitment and taken steps on their own, so we can meet them halfway. Looking more closely at Mark's portfolio, I was impressed with his commitment and competency, his evangelism if you will, on behalf of education in the woodworking trades. Mark is doing in his own way, in his own area, what Taylor is also trying to do.

I came to feel that Taylor's support was deserved and would be well-placed in Mark's programs. Mark came to San Diego at his own expense, on his own time over the summer, to learn how to build an acoustic guitar from a kit of Taylor-provided materials, then took that knowledge back to Illinois and launched his guitar-making class that fall. It has continued ever since, now having served around three hundred students (by my reckoning). Taylor Guitars continues to provide materials once a year, but other than that, Mark has proven himself to be highly self-sufficient, improving his luthier skills to handle the difficulties that inevitably come up, and even initiating improvements and taking the class to a higher level.

We at Taylor Guitars plan to continue our support of Mark's programs at Reed-Custer HS, because we recognize the value of his woodworking classes in providing skills and opportunities that can't be gotten elsewhere. I would like to add my voice to the many, I'm sure, who support and endorse the excellent work that Mark Smith is doing in preparing students for woodworking careers in the United States.

Sincerely,

Gerald Kowalski, Training Specialist, Taylor Guitars