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RETAIL

CLAWSON'S MUSIC | BY JOHN JANOWIAK

CLAWSON'S REACHES 50

Step into Clawson's Music in Corpus Christi, Texas, and amongst the abundant guitar displays, you're sure to meet at least one friendly, musical guy named Bob.

It could be the Bob Clawson who launched the business in 1963 with his wife, Barbara, and continues to work there at age 79. It could be their son, Bob Jr. (better known as Bubba), who started working there at age 10 and now manages the store. Or it could be Bubba's son, Bob III ("Bobby"), who started helping out at age 9 and is now, at 27, an integral member of the family business. (Someday, your greeter will likely be the fourth-generation Bob — Bobby's son, Bob IV ("Bo"), though at 2 years old he is not yet quite to shelf-stocking height.)

"It's Bob, Bubba, Bobby and Bo," said Robert Clawson Sr., known as Bob. "We've all got the same names. And then Barbara is the main one," Bob said of his wife with a laugh. "She keeps us all in line!"

Today the 7,000-square-foot freestanding operation is located along Texas State Highway 358 near the southernmost point of the state. But the roots of Clawson's Music go back to the early 1960s, when Barbara began



The five "B"s of Clawson's Music.

teaching her son to play guitar. Already a talented singer, songwriter and multi-instrumentalist about to embark on a successful country-and-western career, Barbara clearly had a knack for teaching, too. Bubba was only 5, but he took to the guitar immediately. Friends in the neighborhood wanted in on the fun, and soon Barbara had 15 students on her hands.

The teaching business picked up so fast that their house couldn't accommodate it all. So Bob rented a building to serve as a studio, and "in a short period of time,

we were selling guitar strings and guitars," he said. "It took off from there. And 50 years later, we have 1,200 guitars on the wall."

And plenty of drums, keyboards and accessories, too. "We have an extremely large inventory," Bob said. "I always learned that you can't sell out of an empty wagon."

As the teaching studio blossomed into a successful retail operation, Barbara's musical career hit its stride. She landed a recording contract in Nashville, Tenn., and recorded a number of popular songs, the biggest called

"One Bud Wiser." She toured constantly, with Bob as a member of her band. "We just utilized that money that was coming from there to put in the store, and the store just got larger and larger and larger," Bob said. "I had good help at that time, and while we were gone, they ran the store."

STORMY WEATHER

All was well until August 1970, when Hurricane Celia laid waste to Corpus Christi. When the family returned to the store the following morning, nothing was left but the slab



The store currently stocks some 1,200 guitars.



Bob on the phone in 1974.

foundation. "Everything was gone. When I say gone, I mean ... gone!" Bob said. The insurance came in and there wasn't anything there to see, so they just wrote us a check for what should have been there."

The operation moved to their current location on S.P.I.D. (South Padre Island Dr.) in 1974, and they've been there ever since, with a teaching studio across town. For a decade or so, Bubba followed in his mother's footsteps and enjoyed a touring career as a solo artist. When he decided to return from the road, Bob put him in charge of the store — though he and Barbara still work there, with no plans of retiring.

"Business is super great," Bob said.

"I keep hearing about the downturns in the economy, and I see where small independent dealers are going out of business every day, but that hasn't been the case with us. We have increased business every year, I suppose. We've never been late on a bill. We pay in 10 days because we want that extra 2-5 percent."

What's kept them going so long? Bob credits his faith, and his family's dedication to treating customers right. "I believe you treat a customer exactly the way you'd like to be treated. Every customer is special. Every one of them that comes in that door comes in for a purpose, and we treat them that way." **MI**



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