

# Crafting guitars from the bare boards

By ERIC FOSTER  
Post Staff

If you're into the local folk music scene, you may have seen Paul Mehl before.

He's the guy who works the sound board at Chicory House concerts. He also plays banjo with the Back Mountain Reelers, a group that performs for contra dances.

But Mehl does more than play musical instruments, he makes them.

In the basement of his Shavertown home, Mehl builds acoustic guitars, banjo necks, and repairs an assortment of acoustic, and electric stringed instruments.

Mehl's career as an instrument maker began with, of all things, a bicycle ride.

In the late 70s he and his wife Marylou started bicycling from his hometown of Billings, Montana to Washington state. Along the way, they passed through a small Idaho town, Sandpoint.

"A town of 2,000 people that had three or four really well known instrument builders," remembers Mehl. "For some reason, this little town in Idaho had loads of instrument building talent."

Mehl became an apprentice of Nick Kukich, who now sells hand-made guitars to Mandolin Brothers in New York under the name of Franklin Guitars, and worked in the shop for a time.

Mehl and his wife moved to the Back Mountain in the early 1980's. While he works full-time as a laboratory scientist at the Veterans Administration Hospital, he's still making guitars.

Some "Mehl" players include Gary McCoog of Southbound, and Ray DelPrior, of the Stingray Blues Band.

Mehl begins building a guitar with wooden planks. Mahogany for the back and sides, rosewood for the fingerboard. For the top of the guitar, the heart of it's sound, a thin piece of solid spruce. A light, but very stiff wood, spruce doesn't absorb the energy of the guitar strings, but instead resonates.

Unlike many factory-made guitars, which have a top made of spruce plywood, hand-made guitars and the best factory guitars use solid spruce. A solid spruce top gives a guitar both a brighter, and richer tone than a plywood top. And the tone of a solid spruce-topped guitar improves with age, as the top becomes accustomed to resonating.

To underscore the importance the top of the guitar plays in a guitar's sound, Mehl tells a story he once read about how spruce logs used to be sent down chutes from Swiss Mountains. Italian dealers would listen to the spruce logs as they rumbled down the chutes. Some logs would make a louder and clearer note than others. Those would be marked and used to make instruments.

The starting point of Mehl's guitars is the Martin OM, the style he learned to build during his apprenticeship. The Martin is renowned for its balanced tone, both across the strings and up and down the neck.

Mehl's not afraid to experiment, though. He's built guitars with a slightly arched spruce top, and his latest project is a double cutaway guitar with an extra deep body.

"It'd probably be better if I tried little changes instead of sweeping changes," Mehl jokes.

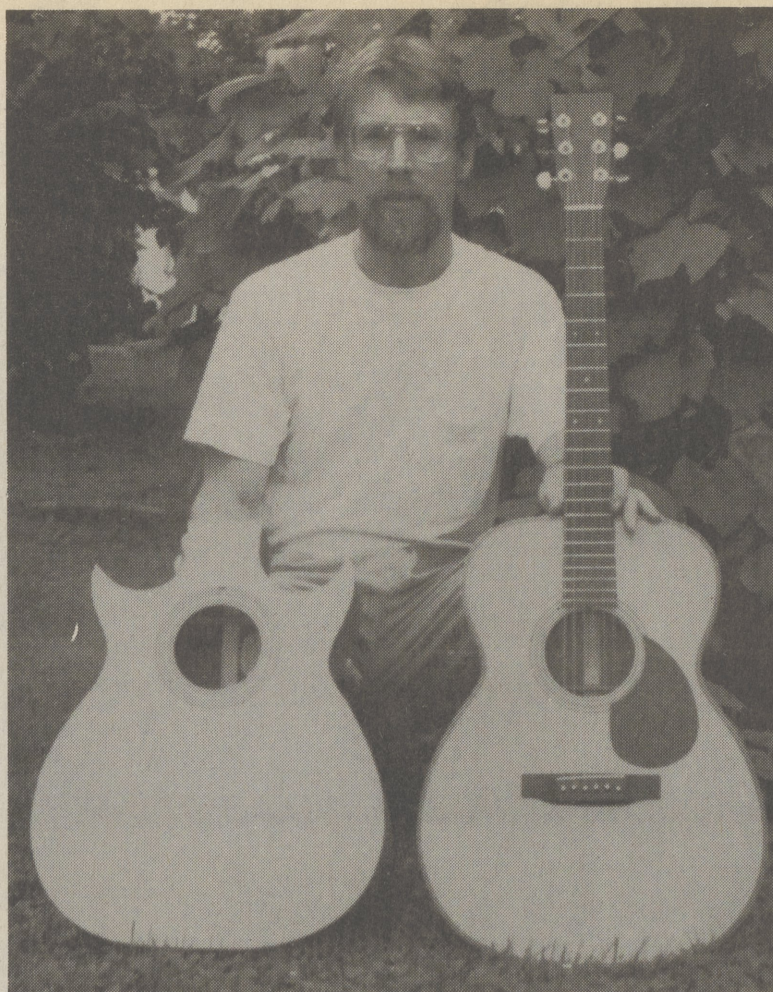
But if the guitar sounds unusual, that sound is what someone out there is looking for, he said. Working on his off hours, Mehl estimates that he can build a guitar in three months.

He's also makes banjo necks, fixes mandolins, and is currently rebuilding a harp for a Kingston man.

"I enjoy it. If I didn't enjoy it, I wouldn't do it," said Mehl. "I like taking on things like that harp. New things, challenges. If I get any time, I'm going to build a harp next."

Though he can pick up and play mandolins, banjos, and guitars, Mehl says that his family was not particularly involved in music.

"I was always interested in it,"



**GUITAR BUILDER** — Paul Mehl with the first guitar he built, at right, and his latest project, a radical double cutaway design with an extra-deep body. (Post Photo/Eric Foster)

said Mehl. "When I was 15 I used to hang out in music stores. I worked in music stores in Billings, Montana."

"I don't really have as good an ear as I'd like," said Mehl. "A lot of good builders don't play. I enjoy the engineering, the side where you're building and putting it together is really what I enjoy."

In August, Mehl will begin working with an apprentice who wants to learn how to make a classical guitar.

"The nice thing about classical guitars is they're finished with varnish instead of spray finishes," said Mehl. He adds that the classical guitar market is more exclusive than the market for steel-string guitars.

Mehl also is considering starting classes for people interested in learning to build their own acoustic guitar. The course would cost in the area of \$500 and would include the materials

for the guitar.

"The guitar business is coming back now," said Mehl. "Acoustic music is coming back I think. A lot of rock and rollers are going back to acoustic sound."

Though he builds guitars, Mehl's favorite instrument lately is the banjo.

He's not planning to start building his banjos own however.

"The thing about banjos is the hardware is so much," said Mehl. "Bell bronze is what they use. I'd have to start a bronze foundry."

One of the reasons that banjos often have fancy inlays in their necks is because that's where builders can show off their skill, Mehl said.

"I'm leaning more towards letting the wood speak for itself," said Mehl. "Finding wood with patterns made by God instead of by me."

# Miers says infra-red device might have caught fugitive Edward Price remains at large

By GRACE R. DOVE  
Post Staff

An infra-red heat-detecting device developed from military technology could have helped Dallas Township police nab Edward Price, who has been at large since he escaped from police Thursday, July 2, according to Dallas Township Police Chief Carl Miers. But the Pennsylvania State Police don't have one.

Miers described the infra-red device as a detector mounted on the outside of a helicopter, connected to a monitor similar to a television screen inside the chopper.

The detector scans the search area, displaying warm or hot objects on the monitor's screen. It can differentiate between a person and a large animal by displaying its exact shape on the screen.

"These devices are extremely helpful in tracking escaped persons through thick foliage or in the dark," Miers said. "Since our search area was heavily wooded, I feel that this equipment would have helped us in our search."

Miers said that the infra-red detector is not standard equipment on Pennsylvania State Police helicopters, although neighboring states use them.

Price escaped from Patrolmen Robert Jolley and Wayman Miers July 2 when the officers tried to arrest him at his grandparent's mobile home at Valley View Trailer Park on charges of loitering and prowling.

Police said that he is also wanted for failure to appear for weekend confinement at the Luzerne County Prison after having been convicted of burglary, criminal trespass and indecent assault in May, 1991.

Price eluded more than two dozen searchers from five area police departments, a tracking dog and a Pennsylvania State Police helicopter, as they searched a wooded area in Dallas and Franklin Townships for several hours.

Miers said that police are continuing to follow up on all leads supplied to police. Anyone having any information on Edward Price's whereabouts is requested to call the Dallas Township police at 675-5251, or 911. All information will be kept confidential, Miers said.

Police describe Price as a white male, approximately 20 years old, weighing 130-140 lbs., with shoulder-length light brown hair. He was last seen wearing blue jeans, a striped shirt and sneakers. Police do not consider Price to be armed or dangerous.

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# Eddie Turchin faces a new health challenge

By GRACE R. DOVE  
Post Staff

After having successfully beaten cancer and related health problems to become an Eagle Scout and graduate from Lake-Lehman High School, eighteen-year-old Eddie Turchin faces still another battle.

According to his mother, Bonnie Turchin, a routine scan has detected an aneurism, a sort of balloon in his carotid artery, a major blood vessel, where it splits into a "y." The family will meet with a surgeon at University of Pennsylvania Hospital in Philadelphia this week to discuss surgery to correct the life-threatening problem.

"Eddie didn't show any symptoms," Mrs. Turchin said. "He says he feels fine."

When he was eight years old, doctors found a malignant tumor the size of a walnut on his pituitary gland. A four-hour operation and 30 heavy doses of radiation stopped the tumor's growth, but Eddie must still take several kinds of medication to prevent seizures and correct a hormonal problem.

"We won't know the date of the operation until after we meet with the surgeon," Mrs. Turchin said.



EDDIE TURCHIN

"We're asking all our friends from the community to pray for Eddie. Those prayers were a great help the last time."

## Fall Fair Committee will meet Aug. 5

The Luzerne County Fall Fair Committee will meet Wednesday, August 5 at 7:30 p.m. at the fairgrounds. All committee heads and members are urged to attend and report on their progress. Placements and programs will be distributed. Ed Kelly will preside.

## Lady Toby Rebekah Lodge holds party

Mr. and Mrs. Richard Stroud entertained Lady Toby Rebekah Lodge #514 and Osage Lodge including their wives and friends on Thursday, July 16 at their home in Mooretown.

Food was served including a variety of covered dishes brought by various people and homemade bread topping the meal supplied by Sister Marion Stroud. Desserts and beverages were included. Entertainment was enjoyed by playing cards and games.

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