

# Expanding the Guitar Parts Business

By Freddy Villano | Posted: Sunday, May 24, 2015 12:15 am

Central New York boasts a rich and vibrant music history. A lot of musical talent comes from, and continues to reside in, this part of the state. In addition to the musicians, central New York has also been home to many innovative music companies. Moog is one such brand that quickly comes to mind. Another company at the cutting edge of their respective field is Interlaken-based Hipshot Products, Inc., makers of top-notch guitar replacement hardware. Founded by Dave Borisoff in 1983 in a small shop in Van Nuys, California, Hipshot quickly built a reputation for his ingenious designs that improved or enhanced the performance of electric guitars and basses. Hipshot moved to Interlaken in 1994.



The two inventions that launched Hipshot were a string bender for Telecaster-type guitars and the now-iconic D-tuner (now called Xtender) for bass guitars. Both products remain a staple of Hipshot's ever-expanding line of products, which also includes (among other things) guitar, bass and banjo tuning machines, guitar, and bass bridges and headless systems for both guitar and bass. Fortunately, for both Hipshot and Interlaken, this product line will continue to evolve thanks to some recently acquired financial assistance from the Seneca County IDA (Industrial Development Agency). The IDA loan provides Borisoff with the resources he's needed to expand the business. "We're not moving to another location," clarified Borisoff. "Nor are we outsourcing anything different, we're just growing our facility here in Interlaken."

Borisoff purchased the building, located at 8248 State Route 96 (Main Street) in 1994. It was an egg processing plant at that time. "When I first moved here I hit the bricks running and never really took the time to work on the plant," he says. "It was a good egg processing plant, but for a manufacturing plant, it wasn't so great. The IDA loan is allowing us to bring the infrastructure up a bit—to focus on our needs. We've really been concentrating on that for the last two years."

According to General Manager Jason Ungleich, one major area of need included the capacity to accommodate more people. "As our product has gained in popularity, we needed more employees. Some of the stations we had set up were not big enough to accommodate more workers," he explained. "For example, our buffing room was typically three guys for many years, but now we're up to about six or seven, so we had to expand and build a new room to accommodate them." They've done that with the assembly areas as well. As a matter of fact, Ungleich says they've expanded just about every square foot of the building and now have about 18,000 square feet of usable space, with 36 employees in total. One of those employees, Gabriel Lopez, manager of the polishing department, came with Borisoff from Los Angeles, demonstrating that Hipshot is also a good, reliable company to work for. "I think I hired Gabriel in 1984," said Borisoff. "He came to New York with me, and he's still here."

Believe it or not, Hipshot actually ended up in Interlaken for personal reasons. Borisoff's late wife, Kate McDonald, was from the area and still had family there. "Never agree to move in seven years when your wife

asks,” he advised with a laugh. “Because seven years do pass, and they pass quickly.” He also stressed that in the 1980s “Los Angeles was no place to raise kids.” He found the factory at 8248 State Route 96 and with the help of the IDA and some loans moved from L.A. “Luckily for us, our product is small enough that UPS will take it,” he said. “There’s nothing large, and I don’t rely on local economy. As a matter of fact, 30 percent of our sales are overseas. So, we actually bring overseas money into Interlaken, which is a good thing. The rest of our business is nationwide.”

And so, because Hipshot benefits from making a small product and strong overseas business, the relative isolation of Interlaken does not pose a logistical problem for them. “I was thinking the other day about how business was before the Internet—it was horrible,” he said with a laugh. “I would get up at 6 a.m. to make calls because New York was three hours ahead. This is pre-fax machine too. I had an electric typewriter—no computers. I’m dating myself, but it was tough. Nowadays with websites and Facebook and everything else you can practically be on the moon and conduct business.”

Borisoff said that working with Seneca County and the IDA has been a pleasant experience. “They have good programs to help get us employees when we need them and good training programs too.” Ungleich adds that the skill set for working at Hipshot really depends on what position they are hiring for, but a lot of folks that come in have little or no experience. “We can train them in the specific area they’ll be working in,” he said. “We also try to promote from within. Say we have a CNC [Computer Numerical Control machine] position open. We typically take one of our guys who are already doing second operation machinery and put them up to that position. That way they can grow within the company.”

Hipshot has a couple of exciting new products coming down the pike that are aimed at the mainstream musical instrument market. “The Les Paul has been around for 60 some-odd years and the Tune-o-matic bridge is a standard in the industry,” said Borisoff. “This is the standard bridge that comes on a Les Paul. We noticed that even when you buy a new, improved, after-market bridge, it’s basically the same bridge re-packaged. We came up with a brand new replacement for the Tune-o-matic that solves a lot of problems players have been experiencing since day one. And it enhances the tone and volume of the guitar. We’re about ready to release that and that’s very exciting.” They are doing the same with a bass bridge. “We’ve got a new design of an old familiar bass bridge that we’ll be coming out with. Solving problems is our business. What we do is we go back and improve and enhance the functionality of pre-existing designs.” Thanks to the Seneca County IDA, Borisoff is now applying the same philosophy to the building that’s been home to Hipshot for the last 20 years.