

Multimedia guitar company tunes i

Magazine, website
run from local
office

Sarah Leavenworth
Sun news

Mount Vernon may seem like an unlikely base for a multimedia company catering to a niche of guitar enthusiasts across the country, but Gearhead Communications L.L.C. Publishing believes its growing business will harmonize perfectly with small-town Iowa.

"I think Iowa is a great place to develop a multimedia business, and that's why we're here," media veteran and Gearhead Communications managing member Peter Sprague said from the company's new office off Hwy. 1 south in Mount Vernon. "Our objective is to build the ultimate multimedia business for guitar players."

Gearhead has already expanded into a multi-faceted business encompassing "Premier Guitar" magazine (formerly "Musicians Hotline") and one of the guitar industry's largest web portals and interactive gear search services, coupled with the company's recent acquisition of an east-coast-based guitar and equipment show promoter.

The name "Gearhead," company managing member Patti Sprague explains, refers to "someone who loves the guitar and the gear that goes along with it." The company, she said, caters to serious amateur and professional guitar players and gear enthusiasts.

Gearhead Communications L.L.C. Publishing - formed last year as a partnership between publisher Trent Salter and media investors including the Spragues - opened its doors in Mount Vernon Oct. 1, in offices under MIC Group. The growing company has offices in Fort Dodge and Minneapolis and manages guitar shows from Boston, but general management and accounting is now based at the



The staff of Gearhead Communications includes: Front row (from left) - Shannon Britcher (accountant), Patti Sprague (managing member), Lois Stodola (trade show coordinator). Back row (from left) - Jeff Carey (circulation manager), Peter Sprague (managing member), Patrick Huddleson (coordinator-Gear Search), Adam Moore (managing editor), Ben Otis (production manager). Not pictured (working out of the Mount Vernon office) - Sean Norfolk (coordinator-Gear Search), James Egolf (Gear Search manager), Nick Light (Gear Search assistant), Rebecca Hay (editorial assistant). Not pictured (working out of other cities) - Trent Salter (president), Todd Vote (ad production coordinator), Dav Westin (sales director), Brett Petrussek (account executive), Kevin Kopec (president, PGS).

Mount Vernon office.

Peter Sprague, a former *Wall Street Journal* reporter, said he and Patti Sprague, a University of Northern Iowa graduate and C.P.A., becoming part of Gearhead as partners "was really a function of opportunity."

Gearhead's target market - 15 million avid guitar players who "sound like nuclear physicists when they talk about gear" and descend on guitar shows by the tens of thousands - also drew the new Mount Vernon residents to the company, Peter Sprague said. Gearhead Communications, he added, is catering to its market's insatiable passion for information.

The Mount Vernon base is already "busting at the seams" with a staff of 10 - virtually all serious musicians - doing accounting, production, web services and data base administration for Gearhead, Peter Sprague

said.

From modest roots as "Midwest Musicians Hotline," covering just seven Midwest states when it debuted in 1995, "Premier Guitar" magazine now reaches an estimated 75,000 readers monthly across the country and continues to expand.

The company has also drawn 257,946 visitors and counting to its online publication and portal, www.premiorguitar.com, launched last year and currently featuring an online version of "Premier Guitar" magazine and an interactive gear search function.

The Iowa City and Cedar Rapids area is "one of the most exciting places around," Peter Sprague said, adding that the location is "a great place to raise kids; a great place to have a business."