Students remember teacher, guitar hero

By TIM BROUK
tbrouk@jconline.com

Michael Kelsey. Clayton Miller. Scott Greeson. Kyle Cook from Matchbox Twenty fame.

All have made a name for themselves thanks to the guitar and Harold Hooper, a guitar instructor at McGuire Music & Sound for almost 40 years.

Whether they were shredders or folky singer-songwriters, elementary school students or grandmothers, Hooper taught them all.

Hooper died at the age of 61 Friday at Home Hospital.

"They would run through walls for Harold," McGuire Music owner Dave Grimes said of the hundreds of students Hooper had taught since 1972. "They were quite faithful and dedicated. The people he really clicked with remained for years. They knew him quite well and are very touched by this."

Grimes said Hooper's studio in McGuire remains untouched.

"He was still teaching this time last month," he said. "It's hard for me to talk right now. This is pretty raw."

Numerous former guitar students of Hooper described a kind man who wanted his students to learn the right way, whether they were with him for weeks or years.

Local musician Steve Hill took lessons from Hooper more than 20 years apart.

"In 1978, I had my $25 Musicland guitar and wanted to learn how to play it. He was kind of the edgy one back then, the guy with the ponytail," he recalled. "He showed me the opening riff to 'Sgt. Pepper's (Lonely Hearts Club Band).' I don't know why I stopped taking lessons, maybe ran out of money.

"The last lesson, he told me 'I know you'll be back because you love guitar.' "

Hill did go back in 2000, this time as a singer-songwriter seeking new techniques.

"He remembered me. 'The

See MUSIC, Page B3

File photo

Harold Hooper (right) gives guitar lessons to Michael Will at McGuire's Music in 2007. Hooper died Friday. He was 61.

MUSIC

FROM PAGE B1

Beatles guy, right?' " Hill said, laughing. Hill said he owes his finger picking style to Hooper.

Bill Brose, guitarist for Uncle Buck's Mojo Box, went to Hooper to learn more about music theory. Brose was self-taught and already established when he first entered Hooper's studio in the 1990s.

"It was really a situation of trying to figure out why this stuff works," said Brose, whose discussions of chord patterns, minor note fittings and pentatonic scales with Hooper helped with his blues style of playing.

"Harold was a sweetheart of a guy. He really was."

Terry Potts, former singer and guitarist in Ma Kelley, met Hooper in 1974. Then, Potts was a middle school student looking to learn guitar. He stuck with Hooper's lessons for two years. Potts believed Hooper was often overlooked as a musician. He said Hooper's Gold Rush Band and Tamarov were some of the best Lafayette acts in the 1970s.

"He was like an idol to me," Potts said.

"I've got to say this about Harold: He was probably one of the most unsung heroes in this area. He totally dedicated himself to younger and more advanced students. He pretty much quit playing in bands for them. I just wish more people knew Harold and his abilities."

Potts remembered Hooper as having a strict side but it was only for the student's benefit, he said.

"He'd say 'Do it if you're going to do it and do it right.' He was demanding, but a better guy, you're not going to find."

Potts said he was an expert instrument repairman, customizer and friend.

Grimes remembers Hooper bringing more than his guitar to his shop.

"It was wasn't just music coming out of his studio," Grimes said.

"It was laughter, joy and good times, too."