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Juan Manuel of El Salvador sings a song after receiving an acoustic guitar from Washburn Guitars in Mundelein. He'll use the guitar to record a theme song for a network of orphanages where he was raised.



Mundelein guitar maker gives gift of song to El Salvador musician

By Lee Filas | Daily Herald Staff

A gift from USM Music and Washburn Guitars in Mundelein means Juan Manuel of El Salvador can continue to thank to those who help him.

The company presented the 20-year-old singer and musician with an acoustic guitar that he intends to use to record the theme song for Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos El Salvador, a network of orphanages in Central America and the Caribbean.

Music is an important element in Manuel's difficult life. It's his way of giving back to the orphanage where he was raised, and to the scores of people who have helped him rise above many physical problems in his young life.

The soft-spoken singer was born with a cleft palate and dental deformities. His mother died when he was 9 due to an ulcer, and he was raised in an orphanage after her death. He also lost both of his legs in a fire when he was just 2 years old.

He turned to music - he has written 10 ballad and folk-style songs - and uses it to say thanks to the orphanage, as well as the many people who help cover the expenses of needed facial surgeries.

"Music is one way for me to say thank you," Manuel said through an interpreter after receiving the guitar. "I'd like to teach other people to express their gratitude with song."

Since 2007, he has received medical help from Shriners' Hospital in Chicago and from doctors from University of Illinois at Chicago. During visits to Chicago for treatment, he has entertained audiences at churches and special events.

Marissa Osheff, marketing and talent relations assistant for USM, said the company often helps out in charity situations like this to keep music going. However, she said, the company likes to remain low-key about it.

"We are very honored to do something like this," she said. "We are a very philanthropic company and we love doing things like this."