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# With historic gift and partnership, Georgia Southern names the Fred & Dinah Gretsch School of Music

February 9, 2021



Gretsch Company owners Fred and Dinah Gretsch at the corporate headquarters (GPA Photo/Stephen B. Morton).

The “grit and grace” that defines the historic Gretsch sound is also a perfect label for Georgia Southern, as the university’s school of music will now be named after the world-famous drum and guitar maker.

With approval today from the University System of Georgia Board of Regents, Georgia Southern University has established the Fred and Dinah Gretsch School of Music and becomes the newest addition to the Gretsch family, which includes country music icon Chet Atkins, legendary rock drummer Charlie Watts, the Beatles’ George Harrison, the late great Malcolm Young of AC/DC, rockabilly and swing king Brian Setzer, the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, and many more.

Naming the university’s school of music comes after Fred and Dinah Gretsch pledged \$3 million plus their Gretsch Collection of historic drums, guitars, and company archives to Georgia Southern. While the school of music will now bear the Gretsch name, the company’s influence will be felt across all campuses and in several academic departments, the museums and the library. Georgia Southern will be able to catalog and display Gretsch’s storied instruments — a collection estimated to be valued in the millions — that tell a compelling story of musical history from American jazz to English-born rock to popular modern worship bands in Australia.

Downtown Savannah has already been identified as an exhibit venue for the Gretsches Collection. Georgia Southern is establishing the Fred and Dinah Gretsches School of Music Performance Stage at the Atlantic Building of the new downtown Plant Riverside District. Within that building, exhibit space will highlight Gretsches instruments and storyboards with QR code links to the Gretsches history and legacy. Similar exhibits will be planned at the Georgia Southern Museum in Statesboro, as well as the Fine Arts Hall at the Armstrong Campus, and can be packaged for partner shows around the world.

“The generosity and vision of this transformational gift from Fred and Dinah Gretsches is truly a milestone in Georgia Southern’s history — for the university, for the communities we serve and for our school of music,” said Georgia Southern University President Kyle Marrero. “This collaboration with the Gretsches family, the Gretsches Company and its commitment to excellence exemplifies our goal to elevate and further enhance extraordinary programs, like our music program at Georgia Southern.”

Steven Harper, chair of Georgia Southern’s music department, agreed this new partnership is a game-changer.

“Fred and Dinah Gretsches are not only major figures in the Music Industry, but they are also major figures in the advocacy for universal music education,” Harper said. “They have made access to the joy of music for everyone a high priority in their lives. That they’ve chosen Georgia Southern to help continue that work is both a great honor and a testament to Georgia Southern’s long reputation as a leader in training music educators. This gift and naming are representative of Georgia Southern’s expanding influence regionally, nationally, and internationally.

“The creation of the Fred and Dinah Gretsches School of Music, as well as the initiation of our recently-approved degree in Music Industry on the Armstrong Campus in Savannah, will dramatically increase our profile and our opportunities for serving the people of the state of Georgia,” Harper said. “I could not be more grateful and more excited about the future possibilities.”

Georgia Southern University is poised to expand an already-strong music program into “an internationally-recognized leader through the generosity of Fred and Dinah Gretsches,” said Carl Reiber, Georgia Southern University’s Provost. “This gift will not only impact the music program directly, but also other departments will be involved in the curation and display of historic documents and musical instruments to tell the story of Gretsches music from the late 1800s through today.”

Fred Gretsches is the great-grandson of a German immigrant and entrepreneur who began the company in Brooklyn by handcrafting banjos, drums and tambourines in a small workshop. Now based in Pooler, Georgia, Fred and his wife Dinah lead the family-owned company, still regarded as one of the music industry’s most influential and innovative instrument manufacturers.

The Gretsches have long been involved in music education programs and lending their name and their history to Georgia Southern was an appropriate way to honor the company’s legacy.

“We are so very enthusiastic about this partnership. Our vision is that Georgia Southern will be recognized as the very best music school in the Southeast,” said Fred Gretsches. “We are impressed with the university’s dedication to transforming lives and communities, and with their eagerness and ability to appropriately catalog our collection. This collaboration allows us to appropriately honor our company’s influence with many of the icons that are dear to us who have shaped the Music Industry.”

With the agreement, Georgia Southern will create the following positions:

- The Distinguished Scholar in Guitar/Music Industry, an assistant professor in the music school's new music industry program who will also work closely with the museum and library to document, curate and promote the Gretsch Collection.
- The Gretsch Collection Curator of Permanent Collections, a position in the Georgia Southern Museum who will provide all aspects of cataloguing, registration, collection management, maintenance and upkeep duties including activities involving the permanent Gretsch Collection, loans and exhibitions, access to collections for scholarly research, and in support of university classes and day-to-day operations.
- A project archivist for the Gretsch Archival Records, a three-year position in University Libraries who would primarily be responsible for the arrangement and description of the Gretsch archival records, to include print, photographic, audiovisual and digitally born materials.
- Two graduate assistantships in the Department of History for students who will help in organizing, cataloguing, researching, and preserving the Gretsch family's collections, exhibits, documentation, and digitization.

"This amazing gift is just part of an ongoing partnership between the Gretsch family, Gretsch Company, Gretsch musicians, our School of Music, and our Music Industry program," said John Kraft, interim dean of the College of Arts and Humanities. "This opens new doors for us to do top-tier research, teaching, and community outreach throughout the College of Arts and Humanities. The Gretsch collection of instruments and company documents is a treasure that will provide decades of scholarship and educational experiences for faculty and students."

Georgia Southern University, a public Carnegie Doctoral/R2 institution founded in 1906, offers approximately 140 different degree programs serving almost 27,000 students through 10 colleges on three campuses in Statesboro, Savannah, Hinesville and online instruction. A leader in higher education in southeast Georgia, the University provides a diverse student population with expert faculty, world-class scholarship and hands-on learning opportunities. Georgia Southern creates lifelong learners who serve as responsible scholars, leaders and stewards in their communities. Visit [GeorgiaSouthern.edu](http://GeorgiaSouthern.edu).

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