

► MUSICIANS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1

Escondido-based company keeps registry of gear

Music Trade magazine recently estimated that more than 1 million guitars, horns and violas are stolen each year in the United States, making instruments as popular to thieves as cell phones, car stereos and jewelry.

"We're teaming with manufacturers, dealers and law enforcement to stop the rampant theft of instruments," said Snagg President Don Baskin. "One of the advantages of the system is that the chip can't be removed without significantly damaging the instrument."

So far, Snagg's Internet registry lists guitars and other instruments owned by more than 300 musical luminaries, among them Creed, Peter Frampton, members of the oldies band Sha Na Na and Green Day's record producer.

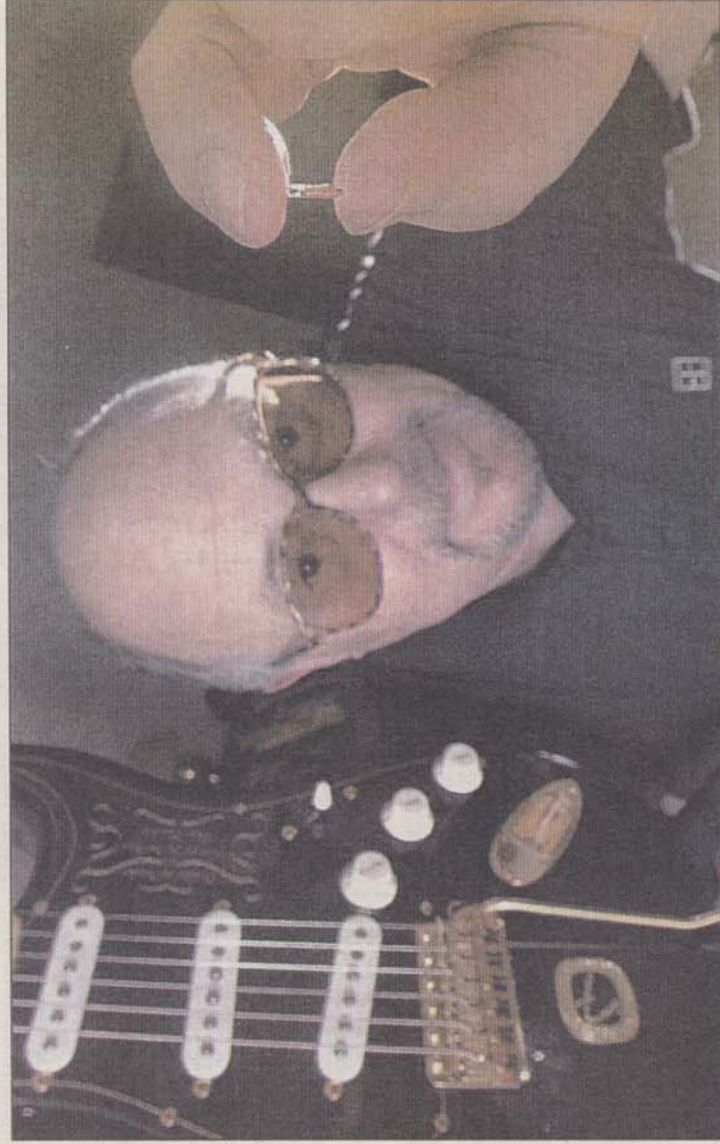
The fledgling company's microchips have been installed by Fender in 30,000 of its guitars, and Baskin said Snagg is in negotiations with Gibson and other instrument makers.

Moreover, 85 upscale music shops across the United States, including five stores in San Diego County, are using its scanners for anti-theft and inventory purposes.

Snagg's devices are "an added measure of security, especially for working musicians on the road who leave their instruments in the van at the Motel 6," said Morgan Ringwald, a spokesman for Fender Guitar Co. "For us, there's a minimal cost to add the chips to our high-end product."

Likewise, law enforcement officials said the system could potentially cut the traffic in illegal music equipment. As much as 90 percent of stolen instruments are resold on the secondhand market.

"The system definitely has merit," said Scott Fyfe, president of the National Associa-



Don Baskin, president of Snagg, displayed the anti-theft microchip designed for musical instruments. Scott Linnett / Union-Tribune

Baskin sang lead and played guitar on the Syndicate of Sound's 1966 langy "Little Girl," a Top 10 hit considered one of the great garage-band songs in the rock pantheon.

The quintet subsequently opened for James Brown and the Yardbirds, among other acts, and appeared on such teen dance shows as ABC's "Where the Action Is." Baskin may even tour with his old band this summer alongside a new edition of the Yardbirds.

Before founding Snagg several years ago, Baskin had a company that produced rings, plaques and other awards for *Billboard* magazine to present to chart-topping artists.

The idea for Snagg came to Baskin at a veterinarian's office one day, when he noticed the chips implanted in pets for identification.

"I had lost a soprano saxophone when I was a kid, and it broke my heart," Baskin recalled. "I could see the potential value of the microchips for music."

Baskin said he and his partners have invested \$180,000 to launch the business.

Now Snagg is looking at ways to expand its technology for use in tracking such products as heavy construction equipment.

"You could spray on the microchip in a lacquer substance and it would be so small nobody could see it," Baskin said.

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vided free to retailers and manufacturers, Baskin said.

(The company plans to provide free scanners to police departments once 100,000 chip-encoded instruments are in circulation, which could happen later this year.)

When a musician sells a guitar, it costs \$10 to transfer the title at the registry.

"We expect that about 70 percent of the business will eventually involve the retrofitting of used instruments," Baskin said. For example, Snagg is talking to music department officials at the University of Columbus in Ohio about implanting microchips in more than 1,000 pieces of music equipment at an average of \$30

apiece. Snagg's Web site, which was activated earlier this month, has not yet helped to identify any stolen merchandise.

Baskin, whose name may seem familiar to pop-music aficionados, said he has had many friends in the music industry who have lost valuable instruments over the years.