

## FACES IN THE NEWS

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# Guitar tutor's coloured strings make Threat of blindness gave me bright idea

By BARRY McDONALD

**G**UITAR tutor Wendy Leckerman loves music, so when doctors told her she could lose her sight Wendy decided to fight back and came up with a unique invention to help her students and those with eye problems.

Four years ago Wendy developed glaucoma – an irreversible condition which causes the optic nerves to die. After several operations she was told there was nothing more doctors could do for her sight and she would have to let the glaucoma take its natural course.

However, Wendy, 44, is not someone who takes no for an answer: “I was only in my early 40s and thought ‘I’m not going to lose my vision’.

“I did some research and came across a specialist at the Moorfields Eye Hospital in London who is highly regarded in the glaucoma field.

“I wrote to him and asked if he could help me and he invited me down. He said he was sure he could help.”

It was during one of the 80 return trips to London she’s made in the last two years that Wendy hit on the idea of creating coloured strings for guitars.

“I just thought there must be something to make it easier to see. Why not make them in colour?” said Wendy, who runs the Glasgow Guitar Studio in Battlefield with husband Alan

“Eight or nine years ago, classical traditional Spanish guitars were all either cedar or spruce fronts and they started bringing our colour guitars.

“From that I thought ‘if



Wendy's coloured strings are the first of their kind

they can make coloured guitars, there must be a way to make coloured strings’.

“We approached lots of people and they all laughed at us. They thought we were off our heads. We were told there’s no demand.”

Eventually, after much searching, Wendy found an American company which was willing to manufacture

**“The kids love the coloured strings, I’ve never had any negative feedback**

the special strings. “It had to get machines specially made to make the strings,” Wendy laughs.

During the two years that Wendy spent travelling up and down to London she didn’t miss one day of teaching: “I don’t like letting the kids down,” she explained.

“They really enjoy their lessons. If I’m able to teach I’ll teach them. If you let things slide they lose the continuity.”

And her pupils have found her invention to be a great help in learning to play the guitar.

Wendy says: “The kids love the coloured strings,



I’ve never had any negative feedback. Children can instantly identify what string I’m talking about.”

As well as brightening up guitar lessons, there are other advantages to Wendy’s patented coloured strings – they also make it much easier for those with sight problems to identify individual strings.

Wendy’s invention has not only captured the imagination of the guitar world, Wendy’s Strings have attracted the attention of the people behind the BBC2 television series, *Dragons’ Den*.

Wendy, however, is adamant it’s not a path she wants to pursue. “We were asked a few times to go on *Dragons’ Den*.

“I don’t want these people to make money from me.”

A guitar teacher for over

20 years, Wendy takes private classes and teaches three days a week at the Belmont House School in Newton Mearns.

She has had problems with her sight from an early age.

However, Wendy’s trips to the London specialist were well worth the effort as now her sight is stable at around 90%.

**“There’s a high chance now that my sight won’t deteriorate**

Wendy explained: “The specialist discovered my problem was that I’m a very quick healer.

“This is fine for a lot of illnesses – for example if I cut my finger, it heals within a couple of days – but with



# playing and teaching easier



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glaucoma operations they make a wee channel in the eye and it's not meant to heal."

**S**HE added: "The problem with me is it's healing all the time. He did several operations on me and found I was healing immensely quickly, he'd never seen anything like it.

"He put in an implant and things have started to stabilise.

"There's a high chance now that my sight won't deteriorate, it's just a case of monitoring the situation.

"I still have to be very careful as any knocks and bumps could burst the eye open. I'm just taking things as they are."

● For more information on Wendy's Strings go to [www.glasgowguitarstudio.co.uk](http://www.glasgowguitarstudio.co.uk)



■ Wendy, above, demonstrates the effectiveness of her coloured strings and, left, the Glasgow Guitar Studio which she runs with husband Alan