

By ROBERT PIERCE • Daily Leader

On Tuesday, Nov. 11, a group of local residents traveled to Tulsa, Okla., for a concert with the band at least one of them will never forget.

At the end of the 20th century, two of their albums ranked among the 10 best-selling albums, according to the Recording Industry Association of America.

The best-selling studio album “Hotel California” is rated as the 37th album in the Rolling Stone magazine’s list of the 500 greatest albums of all time, and the band was ranked number 75 on the magazines 2004 list of the 100 Greatest Artists of All Time.

The Eagles broke up in 1980, but reunited in 1994 for “Hell Freezes Over,” a mix of live and new studio tracks. They have toured intermittently since then and were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1998.

In 2007, the Eagles released “Long Road Out Of Eden,” their first full studio album in 28 years.



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Larry Phillips said the group got to the dressing room of Eagles bassist Timothy B. Schmit prior to the band's performance in eastern Oklahoma.

Phillips said the meeting happened because of a lifelong family friend – Butch Kneeland – and his wife, Pat.

“They used to own Kickshickers Club here in Liberal,” he said. “They live in Amarillo now. My father passed away about 15 years ago, and he was a musician. He is actually the one who got Butch on stage for the first time in his life when Butch was 16 years old. My dad was playing in a band at the Shangri La, an old club here in Liberal.”

Phillips said his dad introduced Kneeland, and the young guitarist was scared to death, but took the stage despite his fears.

Phillips said Kneeland, at that time, asked his father, Melvin Phillips, what to play, and Melvin suggested playing some Elvis Presley music.



“Butch played an Elvis Presley song,” he said. “The crowd clapped and went wild, and Butch said ‘I knew at that very moment, I was going to be a musician.’ He has his whole life.”

Phillips said when his father died, Kneeland offered his family \$1,000 to keep a 1970 Fender jazz bass guitar as a collector's piece.

“We agreed to it,” he said. “They were very close friends all their lives. ”

Phillips said a little more than four years ago, Pat Kneeland won a couple of free tickets to see the Eagles in Albuquerque, N.M.



“They went to the concert, and Butch noticed (Schmit) was playing an old Fender jazz bass very similar to my dad’s,” he said.

Phillips said Kneeland read that Schmit collected vintage instruments and came up with a plan to give the 1970 model to the Eagle.

“He left a note on a calling card with the stage hand that said, ‘If you’d like a free jazz Fender bass guitar, I would donate it to you.

Call me,’” Phillips said. “He said about four or five days later, he gets a call. The guy says, ‘Is this Butch?’ He goes, ‘Yeah.’”

The man on the other end of the line, according to Phillips, was fellow Eagle Joe Walsh, who told Kneeland that Schmit wanted to talk to him about a bass guitar.

Phillips said Kneeland initially did not believe it was Walsh, nor did he believe it was Schmit when Walsh handed the phone to the bass player.

“(Schmit) said ‘Well, what if I send you a picture?’” Phillips said.

“(Kneeland) said, ‘Send me a picture with all the Eagles signatures on it, and I might believe you.’ He got one in the mail. Don Henley, Glenn Frey, Joe Walsh and Timothy had all signed it. They got to going back and forth across the phone, and they finally boxed (Kneeland’s bass)

up.”

In June 2004, Phillips said Schmit sent a letter, along with guitar pics and other photos to himself and his sister, Joy Beasley, and his brother, Curtis.

Phillips said he and the other members of the group who traveled to Tulsa last week sent Schmit an e-mail prior to making their way across the Sooner State.

“In the letter he sent to us thanking us for letting him have his guitar, he sent us an e-mail with his private e-mail address,” he said. “We had also talked to Butch, and he started calling. He knew Timothy’s secretary.”

Phillips said the plan came together quickly with e-mails and phone calls exchanged.

“They sent Butch and Pat an e-mail, which they gave to us, saying there would be four free tickets at the Will Call office at the BOK Center in Tulsa,” he said. “Be there by 5:30. The doors opened at 6.

There would also be four hospitality suite passes.”

After some excitement finding hospitality passes, Phillips said the group eventually found their way to the hospitality suite at the BOK Center.

“We got back there, and we found the hospitality suite,” he said. “It had little round tables that you stand at. There were snacks and chips and dips and sodas. There were just four of us, and another couple showed up.”

Phillips said the group followed a stage hand through the area of the arena behind the stage.

“We followed him around behind the stage area,” he said. “He took us down to a little dead end corner, and on the side of the door, it said dressing room.”

Phillips said he wasn't sure he was in the right place at that moment, and his group wasn't sure what to expect.

The stage hand knocked on the door, and in a few moments, the locals were in Schmit's dressing room.

“He was in just a T-shirt and blue jeans,” Phillips said.

Phillips said Schmit welcomed the group into the dressing room.

“He again thanked us for giving up that guitar,” he said. “He said ‘Butch knows I love those guitars.’ He said ‘Look, here's mine.’ He had his bass sitting right behind him on a guitar stand. He picked it up and turned it around, and on the back, there was no paint, no enamel. It had been rubbed down to the wood on the back side of a

1963 Fender jazz bass.”

Phillips said Schmit considered this his favorite guitar.

“He's still playing with it – he used it most of the concert, along with about six others at different times,” he said.

The 1970 model Schmit had received from Kneeland was still in mint condition, and the bassist

said he would never get rid of it, according to Phillips.

“He started playing guitar when he was 15 years old in Sacramento, Calif.,” he said. “He told us he was very proud to own our dad’s bass and it was such a great bass in mint condition,” Phillips said. “He said he had come into another great guitar not too long ago.”

Phillips described how Schmit related he was in his first band in the early '60s, and the three of them idolized the Kingston Trio. Schmit said they dressed like them, played their songs and even cut their hair like them. In 2008, Schmit said he was asked to play at John Stewart’s memorial by his widow – she had heard of Schmit’s love of the Kingston Trio. At that service, Schmit got to meet his idol and the band member he mimicked as a teen – Nick Reynolds.

Reynolds was fairly ill at the time, but they became friends and communicated quite a bit. Schmit said Reynolds gave him his old Martin 4-string tenor guitar Reynolds had made famous in the '60s and '70s. Unfortunately, Reynolds died shortly after that, and Schmit played at his memorial service, also.

Phillips said he and the group spent about 10 minutes in the dressing room with Schmit.

The bassist offered to sign CDs and DVDs the group had brought from Liberal, including a copy of a CD from the box set, “Eagles: Selected Works 1972-1999.”

Phillips asked Schmit if he had ever imagined selling 170 million albums with the Eagles.

“He looked at me and said, ‘If you’d even told me back then that at 61, I’d be playing these huge sold-out arenas, I’d told you that you were crazy,’” he said.

Phillips said Schmit was very generous, and he has a lot of respect for the Eagle.

The group was then taken back to the seats, which were about 20 yards away from the stage, according to Phillips.

He said he was overwhelmed by the concert.

“I didn’t realize they could make that much music and with those harmonies,” he said. “It was like sensory overload. When I got through, it was like I could hardly talk. I had a grin on my face that was probably there the next morning when I woke up. It was just a lot of fun, and it was all because of Butch taking the time to contact them. If he hadn’t gotten involved like that, none of this would’ve come true. It was a great treat and something I’ll never forget the rest of my life.”