



**29<sup>th</sup> Joe Val Bluegrass Festival  
February 14 - 16, 2014**

**Sheraton Framingham, Framingham, MA**

**Presented by the Boston Bluegrass Union**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**BOSTON BLUEGRASS UNION ANNOUNCES  
2014 BBU HERITAGE AWARD WINNER**

**BOSTON** – The Boston Bluegrass Union (BBU) is proud to announce the recipient of the 2014 BBU Heritage Award. The award is presented each year by the BBU to honor artists and those working behind the scenes that have made substantial contributions to furthering bluegrass music in New England. The award will be presented during the 29<sup>th</sup> annual Joe Val Bluegrass Festival, Presidents Day Weekend, February 14-16, 2014, at the Sheraton Framingham, Framingham, MA.

**The 2014 BBU Heritage Award Winner is the late Don Stover**

Don Stover was one of bluegrass' best-loved musicians and, along with the Lilly Brothers, is a key figure in the long and storied history of bluegrass in the Northeast. Playing nightly engagements at Boston's Hillbilly Ranch from 1952 until 1970, the Lilly Brothers' raw-edged, authentic sibling vocal harmony and Stover's three-finger banjo and guitar work introduced generations to authentic bluegrass music, and set the standard of excellence and love for traditional bluegrass that continues to this day. Except for a short stint when he joined Bill Monroe's Bluegrass Boys in 1957, Stover performed with The Lilly Brothers at the club six times a week, 50 weeks a year, as well as on a daily radio show broadcast by WCOP. In his later years, he performed with a number of other artists, taught and served as an MC at area bluegrass festivals. While he passed away in November of 1996, Don is fondly remembered not only for his unique and engaging banjo work but for his humility and down home humor.

Don was born on March 6, 1928, in the coal mining company town of Ameagle, six miles northwest of the Lilly Brothers' home place of Clear Creek, West Virginia. Although he initially played banjo in the claw hammer style that he was taught by his mother, Stover altered his approach after hearing a Grand Ole Opry broadcast featuring Earl Scruggs playing in the more melodic, three-finger style with Bill Monroe & the Bluegrass Boys. A traveling salesman coming through town in 1945 explained that Earl Scruggs was using metal picks; Don made his first ones from a Prince Albert Tobacco tin.

Don was earning a living as a coal miner when the Lilly Brothers convinced him to pull up stakes, and at the invitation of Tex Logan, and move with them to Massachusetts. There they linked up

with Logan (their friend and a former bandmate of the Lilly's at Wheeling's WWVA) who was in graduate school at MIT and moonlighting in Boston's lively country music scene. Starting in late 1952, the four worked every day on WCOP radio and in a string of nightclubs as the Confederate Mountaineers. The Lilly Brothers & Don Stover eventually landed a sixteen-year, seven-night-a-week, booking at the rough-and-tumble Hillbilly Ranch in downtown Boston. A stream of homesick southerners, servicemen, college students, and bluegrass aficionados from throughout the world

At WCOP's Hayloft Jamboree, Don met Buzz Busby, Scotty Stoneman, and Jack Clement, who were performing there as the Bayou Boys. When Busby headed for Washington, D.C., and later the Louisiana Hayride in Shreveport between 1954 and 1956, he took Don with him. With the Bayou Boys, Don recorded the original versions of "Lost," and "Just Me and the Jukebox." On another session during this period – in their wildly offbeat comedy alter egos – Buzz Busby was "Ham," Pete Pike was "Scram" and Don Stover was "Spam."

Don Stover played banjo with Bill Monroe for about six months in 1957, recording eleven tracks with him. Historian Charles Wolfe noted that Don was one of the few banjoists who came to the Blue Grass Boys of that era with any professional experience. His playing is heard to particular effect on the Decca records: "I'm Sittin' on Top of the World," "Out in the Cold World," "Goodbye Old Pal," "Molly and Tenbrooks," and "In Despair" (which also features Don's strong lead vocal on the trio).

In those years, rock 'n roll had bluegrass and traditional country music in retreat. Don recalled that a call to work from Monroe might as likely involve plowing with a mule or loading hay bales as it would heading out on a show date. For a family man, the security of the Hillbilly Ranch was a better choice than the fleeting glory of the Grand Ole Opry. Although he went back north, Don disliked the atmosphere of Boston's seedy "Combat Zone." For a time, in 1958-1959, Stover co-led the band at Hillbilly Ranch with Bea Lilly and Chubby Anthony, while Everett Lilly went to Nashville for a second tour of duty with Flatt & Scruggs. It was this configuration that recorded for Mike Seeger on the groundbreaking Folkways album, *Mountain Music Bluegrass Style*.

In 1965, Stover moved to Washington/Baltimore to appear with Bill Harrell & the Virginians but in less than a year he returned to Boston, where the folk music boom was opening new doors for the Lilly Brothers & Don Stover in recordings and concert appearances. The boom also motivated a stream of paying banjo students, who added to Don's still-marginal income as a working bluegrass musician. In 1968, Don was invited to accompany Doc Watson, Tex Logan, and Bukka White for appearances at the Summer Olympics in Mexico City.

During two decades spent in Boston, the Lilly Brothers & Don Stover recorded two sessions for Al Hawkes' Event Records (re-released with additional tracks on the County label), an album for Folkways, and two albums for Prestige.

In early 1970, the Hillbilly Ranch era came to an end. After a farewell concert at Jordan Hall, Everett Lilly moved back to West Virginia, followed briefly by Bea. Don continued teaching banjo and organized his own White Oak Mountain Boys, mostly from the growing bluegrass community of New England. Don also emceed a number of bluegrass festivals in the northeast. In the 1970s, the Lilly Brothers & Don Stover reunited for occasional festival appearances (sometimes with Tex Logan), a gospel album on County, and two tours of Japan that produced three live LPs

Don recorded an album on the Towa label with Everett Alan Lilly and three long-overdue albums under his own name, two for Rounder and one for Old Homestead. The title song from one of these – Don’s autobiographical *Things in Life*, has since become a bluegrass standard.

From 1978 until the mid-1990s, Don teamed with Bill Clifton and Red Rector (and after Red’s death, Jimmy Gaudreau) in the First Generation, which made a series of international tours and recordings on the Elf label. Don and Red Rector played at the World’s Fair in Knoxville during 1982

Struggling with health and resulting financial issues, Don relocated from Boston to his West Virginia childhood home in White Oak, a hollow adjoining the “town” of Artie, and then to the Maryland suburbs of Washington, where he could receive needed support from family and friends. In the latter years, Hank Edenborn’s White Oak Records produced cassette tapes, LPs, and CDs of Don Stover’s playing, supplementing his income and recorded legacy.

In November of 1994, a benefit concert was organized by the Boston Bluegrass Union to help Don with mounting medical bills. The event featured Bela Fleck, Tony Trischka, Laurie Lewis, Chesapeake, Bill Keith, and Jim Rooney and many others. A video of the event was subsequently released by Homespun Tapes.

On November 11, 1996 Don passed away at the age of 68 in Brandywine, Maryland. In 2002, the Lilly Brothers and Don Stover were inducted into the International Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame.

Thanks to Fred Bartenstein, Hank Edenborn, Tom Heathwood and Everett Alan Lilly for materials used here.

We’re fortunate that there are a number of Don Stover video performances available online, including the following –

[Don Stover Video Tribute – Things in Life](#)

[Don Stover BBU Benefit Concert - What a Friend We have in Jesus](#)

[Don Stover with Laurie Lewis BBU Benefit Concert – Hide You in the Blood of Jesus](#)

*Things in Life*  
By Don Stover

Look up, look down this lonesome road  
Hang down your head and cry  
For we often lose some things in life  
That makes us wonder why

Oh the fairest love I ever had  
Now sleeps beneath the clay  
I live in hopes and dreams of her  
That we'll meet again someday

I often sit and wonder why  
Life has to be this way  
But after all is said and done  
I'm sure God has his say

I'd like to be a small part of life  
With some few things to achieve  
Just to know I've been a fruitless cause  
Would give my poor heart grief

Now when they lower my casket down  
In some lonesome grave to rest  
And you take your last look at my face  
You can say I done my best

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**Don Stover**  
**Photo © Henry Horenstein**

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