



The members of Blue Highway have found harmony with each other and lots of recognition. And just this year, they found out about Colby's Pickin' On the Plains Festival.

Five-man group long on history, success

By Sam Dieter

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One of the biggest acts to play this year in Colby has never been here, but has stuck together for two decades and become famous in that time.

"We'll be celebrating our 20th anniversary next year," said Wayne Taylor, singer and bass player for Blue Highway.

He and his band mates will perform at 10:10 p.m. Friday, at 4:20 p.m. and later that night at 8 p.m.

The band is one of the biggest acts to play at the Pickin' On the Plains Bluegrass and Folk Festival this month at the Thomas County Fairgrounds. It has been nominated for two Grammys and won a Dove Award, one of the most prestigious in gospel music.

Along with Taylor, it includes Jason Burleson (banjo, guitar and mandolin), Rob Ickes (dobro), Shawn Lane (vocals, mandolin, fiddle) and Timm Stafford (vocals, guitar). Tom Adams took Burleson's place when he left the band for a couple to years. Other than that, Taylor said, the group has the same lineup as it did when it formed in 1994.

He said the band started up when he ran into Stafford early that year in Nashville.

"We were just talking," he said. "He ap-

proached me and asked if we were interested in putting something together."

So they drew up a list of musicians. It was not hard to come up with names, he said, because they had both played in various groups.

"Actually, bluegrass is a pretty tight-knit community," Taylor said. "All these guys were seasoned musicians; we had known them from other bands."

Born in Richmond, Va., Taylor said, he spent time in central Ohio when he was younger. He now lives in, Bristol, Va., in the Appalachian mountains. The other members live spread across the region, in Tennessee and the Carolinas.

Taylor said he is a huge Merle Haggard fan, but it was the band Seldom Scene that turned him on to bluegrass.

His father listened to bluegrass, so he grew up listening to it, too. But Taylor said he did not have much of an interest in the genre until he saw Seldom Scene in Washington.

"They were just doing something completely different," he said, adding that he did not even recognize their music as bluegrass. "It was just something that up until that point, it had never really been done the way they were doing it."

He added that Blue Highway reflects that innovation in stretching the boundaries of the genre; they once covered a song by the rock

singer Sting. Every band member writes music, giving the group lots of material to work with. And it is the band's cohesiveness, Taylor said, that makes it strong and has kept them together for two decades.

"We're a complete democracy," he said. "There's no boss, and there's no out-of-control egos that have to be fed."

Taylor does not think he ever played with anyone from Kansas, although the number of people he has played with over the years

means he can't be sure.

"I don't remember anybody ever saying, you know, we're from Colby, Kansas," Taylor added.

The group heard about Pickin' On the Plains through its booking agency, he said, and they are glad to have a chance for a new experience.

"Ever since we heard this was coming," he said, "we've looked forward to doing it."

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this year's
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