Billy Munn is a quiet man in many ways. I've seldom heard him talk loud; you usually have to listen close to hear him. He's not pushy, flamboyant or braggartly. He's reserved, gentlemanly and correct. He's a true southern gentleman.

He's also the 1986 winner of the Buz Buszek Memorial Fly Tying Award, presented during the 1986 International FFF Conclave ceremonies at Penn State. He won the award because the Awards Committee felt he met the criteria; excellent tyer, history of teaching others, willingness to share his fly tying knowledge, and an asset to the FFF.

Billy is aware of the winners who have preceded him. "I think this award is the greatest thing that's ever happened to me," he says. "Look at the names of the people who have won it. The award has great significance even outside FFF. People know about it. And they know that the list of winners is 'primo'. It's a fast crowd."

Billy did not start out in the fast lane, and he still lives within minutes of where he was born, about 45 miles northwest of Fort Worth, Texas. That was March 2, 1933 at Boyd, Texas, about 10 miles down the road from Bridgeport. While he was growing up, everything around him was farm country. His father was an engineer for the Rock Island Railroad.

Billy first went fishing at age 12, with a cane pole and bait. The quarry was white and sand bass. He continued to fish the ponds around Bridgeport for years, always for warm water species. He didn't try his first fly fishing until he was 26, although he had been buying cork at the local drug store for a few years to make McNally frogs for his spin gear outfit. His first fly fishing rig was a Western Auto rod with an automatic reel.

In 1965, he bought a vise at a close out sale for $5. He taught himself to tie and tied by himself for over six years. When he went to a gathering of fly tyers in 1972 at Mt. Home Arkansas, he saved the first he tied as a momento. That meeting eventually ended up being the organization meeting of the Midwestern Council of FFF.

Billy worked for the U.S. Post Office, and has lived in Bridgeport almost all his life. "Fly tyers are still pretty scarce in our neck of the woods," says Billy with a grin. But he does his part to change things.

He's been formally teaching fly tying for many years, two to three classes a year. He specializes (or at least he's most well for) deer hair bass bugs. Billy says his favorite patterns are still the five he picked out of "McNally's Fishermen's Digest." He ties a magnificent McNally frog, and Messinger hair frog.

But Billy says the man responsible for getting him involved on a broader basis was Dave Whitlock, one of the more famous Buszek winners. Billy joined the Dallas Fly Fishers the night Dave spoke to the charter membership meeting of the group. Later, Billy tied professionally for Dave; sow bug nymphs, hoppers and eventually hair bugs for bass.

Billy doesn't feel he has invented many new patterns, but he does admit that he's modified a few older patterns to better fit his idea of what the patterns should look like and how they should behave or perform in the water.

One of those taking advantage of Billy Munn's talent has been Jimmy Nix of Dallas. He used to drive an hour to reach Billy's house for an evenings fly tying lesson. "He took enough time, as a tying professional, to teach me all his patterns. It took about one night a week for months," marvels Nix. "He's the most sharing fly tyer I've ever been associated with. He has no fly tying secrets."

And Billy cares about FFF. He joined shortly after it was formed. He's an honorary member of the Fort Worth Fly Fishers as well as the Dallas Flyfishers. He won the Texas Flyfisher of 1984 Award at the first ever Texas Conclave in Austin, and a year later was presented the Southern Council's Fly
Tyer of the Year Award at the Council Conclave in Mt. Home, Arkansas.

"Conclaves are the greatest thing going to help new fly fishers and tyers," he says. "A young fly tyer can learn so many shortcuts by coming to a Conclave. I just wish they'd had something like it when I started."

They may not have been part of things when you started Billy, but they're certainly a part of you now, and we're all very grateful. Billy and his wife Shirley are appreciative of the award, and proud of their married son Bret and daughter Amy.

Billy accepting the Buszek Award from Darwin Atkin