



lion pays your \$8,000 tax bills on time. Between all the interference from the city and the state and the liquor commission, I calculate it cost me well over \$7 million in lost income during fifteen years.

Within months of my selling the bar to the politically connected, the no cover law was eliminated. This is the main reason other big bars, such as Kahunaville, soon opened in Delaware. The no-cover law really limited me with regard to the concert acts I could book.

In June 1974, I had to cancel Billy Joel. He upped his price from \$3,500 to \$7,000 for two nights just days before his appearance because the "Piano Man" album had taken off.

I was threatened by the Delaware Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission with a weekend closure and a fine if I charged a \$5 cover charge for an unknown in the music business called Billy Joel. Around this time I was offered David Bowie for \$9,500 for one night, Sly and the Family Stone for \$7,000, and Hall and Oates, who had the number one album in the country, for \$10,000.

A year later Daryl Hall dropped by the Balloon and had fun. The next day his manager called, and I booked Hall and Oates for the first of their five appearances at the Balloon over the years.

If I had been allowed to charge a \$10 cover over the years, I could have booked Aerosmith, David Bowie, the Beach Boys, Chicago, and the Doobie Brothers, just to name a few bands that were offered to the Balloon because they were driving up or down Interstate 95 and wanted to fill an open date.

That July I was surprised to hear a song I liked on WMMR in Philadelphia. I was sure I knew this song from somewhere, but I didn't know where. I almost ran off the road when the DJ said it was Bruce Springsteen.

I drove to Wonderland Records across from the Deer Park and asked Larry, who owned the store with his wife Joan, if they had the Springsteen album. They said they did, and it was just getting a new push from the record company. I wore out the album and soon bought the cassette. I couldn't wait until August 7 for Springsteen's concert at the Balloon, just one month away.

July flew by, and I decided to let the Jack of Diamonds open for Bruce even though they had never played the bar before. All my other established bands were pissed, but I had gotten to know Ed Shockley and the band, and I knew they could handle it. By this time Bruce was really gaining popularity. August 7 came, and I got to the bar early to make sure everything went smoothly. The Jack of Diamonds were arriving at noon to get set up. Bruce and the band were due around three o'clock. Four o'clock came and some people were already lining up at the door.

At five o'clock I got a call from Bruce's manager. Bruce was sick. At the same time two members of his band crew showed up with Clarence "Big Man" Clemmons, the sax player in the E Street Band. I ran downstairs to see what was up. I asked Clarence what was going on. He was as surprised as I was to hear Bruce was sick. We went upstairs, and he told me he hadn't talked to Bruce since yesterday and hadn't stayed at his house last night.

I went into my office, and Clarence called his manager. He was on the phone talking fast. He asked if Bruce was going to be OK. Then Clarence put his hand over the mouthpiece and said, "Bruce might have been attacked by mistake last night on the boardwalk, but he's going to be OK."

Not to be cruel, I said, "OK, when? Now or later? Is he coming tonight?"

## Bruce Springsteen Rocks the Balloon

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Clarence shook his head no. He hung up. We were standing there looking at each other. He said, "I have to go see Bruce."

Bruce's manager called right back and told me he had cancelled next Tuesday's booking in North Jersey, and the band would do the show next week at the Balloon, but what a disaster for that night.

Ed Shockley, the drummer and lead singer of Jack of Diamonds, told me his version of this part of the story in the spring of 2005 while we were having lunch at the beach.

Jack of Diamonds were upstairs in the new band dressing room. While building the new addition, I built a staircase that led directly to the new stage so the bands didn't have to fight their way through the crowds. The band was upstairs when I made the announcement that Bruce was postponed until next week.

Most people had heard on WMMR that Bruce had been stabbed by mistake the night before, so it wasn't a total surprise. I then said the good news was Jack of Diamonds were still making their Stone Balloon debut and would be on stage shortly.

Half the crowd booed, and the other half clapped. Ed said he just about fainted upstairs before going on stage. Obviously Jack of Diamonds did great. During the next ten years they opened for Robert Palmer and others and released an album, "Dodge City," on my new record company, Ransom Records, in 1981.

By Tuesday August 13, radio stations had been playing the E Street Band's new single, "Rosalita," for a week. I knew that it was going to be crazy the week before when Bruce cancelled, but that day I was hearing from press as far away as Boston. This was the last time Bruce was going to be playing for a while as the record company was setting up a national tour. The album sales were just about to go off the charts.

The Stone Balloon could legally hold roughly eight hundred people at this time. At least that's what I thought until this night. Fans of Bruce and the E Street Band started arriving around 10:00 a.m. I was so nervous I couldn't wait for him to show up.

Mother, Flag and Country were the band of the week, so they ended up hitting the Bruce lotto. The Buoys offered to play for free. Around 2:00 p.m. I saw a rental truck pull up in front of the package store. Two roadies piled out, and I felt great. At the same time I turned around and saw Bruce Springsteen walk around the corner of the bar by the package store, and four hundred people in line went crazy.

I saw Clarence. We all shook hands, and I led them upstairs to the dressing rooms. I asked Bruce how he felt, and he said fine. The incident that had forced the cancellation of last Tuesday's show was really nothing and had been blown out of proportion.

I was just glad he was in town, and because it was so hot, I invited the band back to my house in Hockessin. The band and I hung out and watched television and talked about music for two hours. The group loved my Bose speakers, and I blasted one of my favorite bands, Chicago, on the stereo system. Soon it was time to return to Newark with the band and do the sound check.

There were more than one thousand people inside, and another thousand outside. It was now around 8:00 p.m., and Bruce was due on stage at 10:00. I was thinking it might be a good idea to put Bruce on at 9:00. Just about then Eric Holley, the head doorman, walked up to me and said, "You have some important company at the front door."

"Eric," I said, "we can't let anyone else in, period."

"I'll tell the Newark police chief you're busy," he said.

I followed him up to the door. There stood Bill Brierly, head of the Newark police department. This was the night when I realized how lucky Newark was to have this man run-



ning its police department. He was tough, someone you always told the truth to, or else, but he was also fair over the years.

We walked down the steps, and he asked me if I had expected this many people. I told him that this had all happened so quickly I was surprised. While we were talking, a van from Channel 6, a Philadelphia television station, pulled up. I thought, "This is incredible. TV from Philadelphia."

The chief decided that putting Bruce on at 9:00 would be a good plan. He then ordered his department to ask traffic at the end of Main Street down by McDonalds if they were planning to go to the Stone Balloon. If they said yes, they were told to turn left off Main Street and head out of Newark, as the concert was sold out. He wished me good luck and left.

Just then my wife and her friend walked up to me out in front of the entrance to the Balloon and said, "Eric won't let us in to see the Springsteen concert."

I walked up and said, "Eric, grow up, you are a fool."

He pointed out that I had told him nobody else, period, could enter the Balloon, regardless of who it was! That's when they all started laughing. Eric had told Jill to tell me he wouldn't let them in as a joke. They got me. It was funny and took the pressure off for a few minutes.

Thank goodness I decided to put Bruce and the E Street Band on at 9:00 because there was a small equipment problem, and he finally walked up three steps to go on stage at 9:50. If you were one of the thousand people inside the bar that night, you know two things: it was hot, and this band was going be gigantic.

Somehow the magic of Main Street in Newark was coming alive. I take a lot of credit for the successes of my bar, but there was something special about downtown Newark, Delaware, at this time in 1974, and only the people doing business there during the last thirty years will understand what I'm saying. The downtown magic should be protected today, and I wish I had the money to buy this bar back, but the group that owns the property has the right to do what they want to do. I truly believe that if the current owners of the Stone Balloon want to build eighty condos on Main Street, they should be allowed to do exactly what they want to do.

There was no question it would be a historic night if the Springsteen concert ended without trouble. The only thing I didn't know about Bruce then, which everyone knows now, is this: if he is having a good time, he will play for hours.

At 12:45 a.m. he was still going strong. Two or three people passed out from the heat. The doors were wide open, so everyone outside could hear the concert. It didn't matter. There was no breeze. Around 1:30 I thought Bruce had stopped. "Thank God!" I thought, but I was wrong. This would be his fifth encore. The law in Delaware said everyone had to be out of the bar with the doors locked by 2:00 a.m. It was now 1:50, and Bruce was just having a blast on stage. I was a dead man walking.

I felt a tap on my shoulder and turned to see Chief Brierly standing next to me with two detectives. I walked out the side door with them, and he asked if I had a plan. I told him I had told Bruce twice that he had to be off stage at 1:30. The chief looked at his watch to see what time it was. I already knew it was 2:20; so did he, I'm sure.

Just about then I heard Bruce yell, "Good night, Delaware, I love you all."

People started piling out the exits. They were still singing Bruce songs. I hugged Bruce and Clarence and the rest of the band. They ran to their vehicles and took off.

## Bruce Springsteen Rocks the Balloon

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Bruce Springsteen waiting to go on stage.  
This photograph was later used in *Wilmington News-Journal* stories in 1976 and 1977.  
(Picture courtesy of News Journal Co.)