On an international scale, not many people know the 1976 winner of the Buz Buszek Memorial Award for fly tying excellence. That's not entirely happenstance. John H. Schollenberger (he prefers Johnny) of Tower City, Pennsylvania likes it that way. He purposely avoids the limelight and would just as soon avoid publicity of any type. In these days of ego-mad "experts," that's a refreshing change.

Still, Johnny was the 1976 winner of this prestigious award and we have to tell you why. It doesn't take a very extensive research project. There are many legitimate reasons, and Johnny's friends know that he is very well known in his area of the world for his generosity and talent.

"I've never known Johnny to take money for a fly," says Lefty Kreh. "I've known him for years, and as far as I know, he's given away every fly he ever tied."

Johnny was born February 17, 1931 in Pine Grove, Pennsylvania. He was raised there, and did his first fishing in the area as a youngster for trout and bass using bait and flies. He started to fly fish seriously when he was 14, but didn't really get heavily involved with tying flies until he was 22. One of his early instructors was Paul Seigar, formerly of Tower City.

Johnny has spent innumerable hours instructing fly tying classes. He's never accepted payment for any of it. Over the years, local rod and gun clubs, Trout Unlimited chapters and FFF clubs have been the recipients of his skill. He's also made donations of shadow boxes filled with flies to most groups he's worked with, FFF and The American Museum of Fly Fishing have been the proud recipients of his shadow boxes.

And his flies are something else. He specializes in the small sizes, #20-32. Those who nominated him for the award cited his many hours of free labor, plus his skill with small flies. There's one called Vinny's Midge that he originated in collaboration with FFF longtimer Vincent Ringrose, and he's been known to tie extended bodies on #32's.

"My goal has always been practical perfectionism," explains Johnny. "I feel my flies, especially my midge patterns, have been credible artificials which work in the stream. In my frames, I try to depict the beauty and tradition of the artificial fly as a feasible yet artistic imitation of various phases of insect life."

It seems the award committee picked up on this, and presented him with the Buszek award in 1976.