The 13th winner of the Buz Buszek Memorial Fly Tying Award was Darwin Atkin, of Porterville, California. I've had considerable contact with Darwin over the years, and I consider him to be one of the true gentlemen of the sport of fly fishing and fly tying. I know my opinion is shared by many others. Happily, his attitude about sharing his skills and friendship is not uncommon in FFF. Darwin is a typical, good federator.

But to the details perhaps less known about Darwin, you should be told that he was born on Christmas eve in 1937 in his home town of Porterville. He has a degree from Cal Poly at Pomona, California and he was employed as a researcher for the citrus agency of the University of California until his retirement in 1998. He has a daughter named Suzanne and a very understanding wife named Anna.

Darwin became seriously involved with fly fishing in the late 50's when summer work with the U.S. Forest Service took him into California's high Sierra. He started tying flies out of economic self defense in 1959. Largely self taught, he remembers paying $2 for a copy of "Family Circle Guide to Trout Flies." He says his interest in fly tying had reached such proportions by his senior year in college that he's amazed he graduated.

Darwin knew Buz Buszek, and watched him tie and learned from him. He also attributes significant input coming from other Buszek winners like George Grant (73) and Dave Whitlock (72). He also chummed around with Frank Johnson (84) and Boyd Aigner(80). But still, Darwin's fly tying skills are largely self taught. He has an extensive fly tying library and a unique workshop behind his house remodeled into an expansive fly tying parlor at his place in Porterville.

Darwin has long been active on the tying circuit; banquets, conclaves, youth programs etc. He's a good, patient teacher. He's also an amazingly innovative and versatile tyer. He'll experiment with any material, and considers that part of the fun of it all. He's developed a deer hair compression tool, a Vise Offset Adapter and the now publicly marketed Waste-Trol. He builds beautiful fly plates for FFF auctions. He's attended conclaves continually and was in charge of all the tyers at a couple of those.

Darwin is proud of the Buszek Award. He feels all honest tyers with any long term commitment to FFF and fly tying would have to admit that they'd like to receive the award too. Darwin is intent on giving as much to the sport as it has given him. That was his attitude before he won the award, and it's his attitude now. It's also an attitude shared by all previous winners, and probably all future winners as well.

Darwin hasn't neglected conservation issues either. He's been an active member of the Kaweah Fly Fishers and he and other club members worked hard on protecting and enhancing the North Tule River. He's also a member of the Pasadena Casting Club. A life member of FFF, Darwin has Charter Life #L49 and Charter Associate #0645.

The big sculpin pattern, the cricket, and the unique silver and gold metal "logo" fly that Darwin considers his personal signature are flies he is famous for. "I've become know for my deer hair type flies such as sculpins, Fraud Hoppers, Field Crickets, multicolored terrestrials and specialty flies," says Darwin. "But the fly tying isn't all of it! There's the fishing trip to try out the flies, the stalk of the pool to keep from scaring the fish, the cast, the strike, the catch, and finally --the return to the stream for a repeat at some other time."

Darwin Atkin is a tremendously talented fly tyer, and a Federator through and through.