There are many gifted fly tyers throughout the United States, and each year the Federation of Fly Fishers recognizes one of them with the Buz Buszek Memorial Fly Tying Award. The award, one of the highest given by the FFF, goes to a tyer who has shown exceptional tying skill and creativity, and has furthered the art by sharing knowledge through teaching or publication.

Professionally, the 1993 recipient of the Buszek Award, Chuck Echer, is a scientist operating an analytical electron microscope for Lawrence, Berkeley Laboratory in Berkeley, California.

Perhaps it's the inclination toward scientifically exacting accuracy that makes Echer particularly gifted as a fly tyer, but Frank Stolten, past fly tying chairman of the Northern California Council's annual Conclave, describes Echer as "a highly creative tyer, always striving to develop and teach new techniques with new materials."

Echer has become particularly noted for four original patterns (and many variations) he created. The first was the Mad River Special, a steelhead fly he designed in December 1987 as kind of a cross between a common commercial lure called the "Spin N Glo" and a small piece of red or salmon-colored yarn.

The second, known as the Highwood Hound with color variations called the Bow Rat and Bow Bunny, was his adaptation for the high, off color water conditions he found on the Bow River in July 1989. The imitation looks a little like the Montana Wool Head Sculpin, but is tie with lead eyes and body flash that take it deep and cause it to ride upside down, hook up, in a jig-like action.

For Nevada's Pyramid Lake Lahontan cutthroat, Echer created a dragon fly nymph pattern that may be his most notable contribution. Chuck's Pyramid Dragon incorporates the use of a glue gun, monofilament, and lava-lace to form a keel style body which imitates the wide-bodied nymph extremely well.

Such renowned freshwater accomplishments would be less than finished if such skills were not use toward saltwater challenges. So in September 1991 Echer announced the completion of a series of field tested saltwater sailfish streamers, 7 - inch densely tied patterns that grew out his Bow River sculpins. Spun hair heads and as many as 70 hackles intermixed with flash strands create full silhouettes, durability and good action in these patterns, tied in white, green and yellow (for dorado), gray and white (for mullet) and pin and white.

One of his patterns, incidentally, has placed him in the IGFA Fly Rod Line Class World Record books for cutthroat trout and dolphin in 1990 and 1991, respectively.

Echer says he started fly tying in 1948 at the age of seven, in Trinidad, Colorado, when his uncle Dan Massero taught him some basic patterns that caught trout. In 1991 his mother, Lois, found some of his early "creative" flies in his fourth grade English book - a hint, perhaps of what he really thought about in English class.

Those early flies, he describes, "include extended body deer hair adult damsels and may fly patterns which today are called no-hackles." The colors of the patterns were not totally true, but tying techniques were the same then as they are today. "These flies were created in 1950, but each fly had at least thirty turns of thread for each head, certainly something I have improved on today."

Echer considers trout flies his specialty, "if I have one' he says. It's only been in the last four years that opportunities to fish saltwater have had their influence. "My problem is that I enjoy fly fishing for all the game species. Therefore, I find myself researching and subsequently tying fly patterns for a particular trip."

The result is that Echer currently ties everything from size 24 midges to his 7-inch sailfish streamers.
Echer was nominated for the Buszek award by friend and fishing partner Gary Gould, whom he'd met in 1987 at the funeral of their mutual fly fishing friend, John Moschette. Since then, partly in memory of Moschette and partly out of the joy of fishing, they have fished many waters in Alberta, Montana and northern California.

Echer is a strong believer that fly fishers should learn to tie their own flies because the art form enhances the knowledge of what the fish eat as well as the satisfaction of catching and releasing fish. He offers these four good reasons for tying:

- The fly shops are usually out of whatever flies the fish are feeding on.

- You can tie your next day's fly arsenal in your motel room or camp when all the shops are closed.

- You can learn to tie the right fly on location when needed.

- When you learn how, you can create a better or more versatile imitation than those you'll generally find on the market.

A good vise and scissors are essential, he advises, "in addition to excellent eye sight, dexterity, and patience." Two of his favorite tools are Cal Bird's dubbing tool and the John Foust bullet head tool. "The primary objective in fly tying, in order of priority." He says, "is to produce an artificial fly which has the right silhouette or shape, is the right size and has the right texture and color when wet."

Precise in technique, Echer considers himself "a tyer who predominantly ties impressionistic flies but who will attempt realistic versions, too."

Regarding the important aspects of a well-tied fly, Echer says of the dry fly it is without question a matter of building the right proportion; i.e. the right shape which results in the right performance.

Wet fly and streamer patterns, he says, require not only the right shape but also must be tied with soft, supple materials that produce tantalizing action when fished.

The fact that Echer has taught thousands of students in the fly tying classes he has held is a good example of why he received the Buz Buszek Award. Though he holds a California teaching credential, teaching has not been his profession. Rather it is an extension of his love for the sport and his exploration of the techniques and knowledge it takes to be an outstanding fly fisher.

Echer's advice is that tyers strive to pride themselves in all aspects of a well-tied fly. It will enhance their love of the sport and enjoyment of the art form that complements it so well.