

Buchanan, Collins Nab Controller Honors at Sun 'n Fun Fly-in

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Rusty Buchanan, a controller at Jacksonville TRACON who is currently on detail to Headquarters, was voted Controller of the Year at the Sun 'n Fun Fly-in. Photo: Jon Ross, ATO

April 13 — While Rusty Buchanan was surprised to win the Controller of the Year award at the Sun 'n Fun Fly-in held recently in Lakeland, Fla., his colleagues were anything but caught off guard. They elected him in a landslide.

Buchanan, a controller at Jacksonville TRACON who is currently on detail to Headquarters, has worked the fly-in seven times, and finds the event to be a great example of teamwork.

“As a controller when you go down there, you just love working the event and you love the camaraderie that goes across management and union boundaries, and how each individual helps the other out and watches their back for safety-related issues and what have you,” Buchanan said. “And for them to vote me into the small group of people who have received this ... it was a very humbling experience for me.”

Buchanan attributed winning the award to his ability to get along with everyone and his knowledge of the procedures at Sun 'n Fun, which requires controllers to work several different areas and handle a large number of airplanes.

The controllers at the fly-in also honored Faron Collins, a controller from Lexington Tower and TRACON, as the Rookie of the Year.

A self-described “aviation addict” who is also a pilot and aerial photographer, he had applied unsuccessfully to work Sun 'n Fun for the past several years before being selected this year.

Collins was also humbled by the award—and thrilled that it gave him the opportunity to return next year.

“That’s one of the best things about being Rookie of the Year—you get an automatic invite,” Collins said. “So I don’t have to worry this year about going next year.”

Collins said he was able to pick up the operation quickly. Controllers only had about two days of training to get ready for the event.

“It’s really a short training process, and then: Bam! You’re expected to know a whole new airport and a whole new procedure,” he said.

He said he relied on the experience and knowledge of veteran controllers who had been working the event year after year.

“Because everybody wants to be there and volunteers to be there, it’s such a positive event,” Collins said. “Everybody tries their hardest and it really shows. There’s never a

negative comment and there's never a negative attitude during the whole event. And that really makes it work."