Jason Harris, Ph.D. a faculty member at the Idaho State University in Pocatello, Idaho was named the 2012 HPS Elda E. Anderson Awardee. Jason was formally presented the Award at the 2012 HPS Awards Banquet on July 22, 2012 in Sacramento, California. Jason had been jointly nominated for this award by the HPS Accelerator and Reactor HP Sections. Jason also is the 2012-2013 HPS Accelerator Section President Elect. Jason’s Elda E. Anderson Presentation is shown below. It was a most moving event and he was strongly acknowledged by the large number of HPS members and students in attendance.

“My esteemed colleagues and friends- it is a pleasure and honor to be with you all this evening. First and foremost let me begin by saying thank you to the Health Physics Society, to the Awards Committee, and the Accelerator and Power Reactor Sections for their nominations, especially Dr. David Miller, Dr. Eric Goldin, Professor Richard Brey, Mr. Michael Grissom, and Dr. Linnea Wahl, all who put in so much time on my nomination. In speaking with Past President Ed Maher, I was informed that I could give a 50 minute speech this evening. As a faculty member I was very excited because this is how long my lectures go for. I had prepared all sorts of notes and a nice Powerpoint, but after talking to him a few minutes ago, he said, no you have no more than 5 minutes. So, I am a bit unprepared. I know you are all quite disappointed to not hear me talk for 50 minutes, especially my past and current students.

But in all seriousness, I was notified that I would be receiving the 2012 Elda E. Anderson Award while attending the recent IRPA 13 Congress held in Glasgow, Scotland back in May. When I was notified of the award (during the HPS delegation caucus), I immediately began to reflect on my life and relatively short career in Health Physics. This reflection included important moments and people that have helped me along the way, many of which are past Elda E. Anderson Award winners.

My early success has come with a lot of blood, sweat, and tears, but it has also come with the help of many others, who have also given their blood, sweat, and tears.

My reflection began in the present time where I thought of my current position as an Associate Professor of Health Physics at Idaho State University. I began thinking of the influence of my dear friends and colleagues, Professors Richard Brey, Tom Gesell, George Imel, and Jay Kunze and Mr. Roy Dunker to name a few; as well as all of my students that have blessed me with a very rewarding experience. My thoughts then drifted a bit further back to my time in Graduate School where I was working on my Ph.D. at Purdue University and my M.S. at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. At Purdue, I was awarded with such a great experience in both research and teaching and was guided by great people there too — including Professors Paul Ziemer, James Schweitzer, George Sandison, Robert Stewart, Bob Landolt, John Zimbrick, and my mentor, the late great Herman Cember. I was given the opportunity to teach several courses there and again, had many great students, several of which I still keep in contact with today. At Illinois, I have to thank Professors George Miley, James Stubbins and Barclay Jones for giving me a chance and accepting me into the Nuclear Engineering program at Illinois, even though my educational background up to that point was in biology. I especially have to thank Dr. David Miller, probably my greatest friend and advisor. He has done so much for me, even today and I will never forget his endless generosity.

I then thought back even further when I essentially began my career in health physics in 1997 when I started working at a small research and development company called Clean Energy Technologies Inc. (CETI), located in Sarasota Florida. I was hired there as a scientist to do research and development in fuel cells, radioactive waste
amelioration, and tritium separation. Since I had some prior experience in health and safety I was asked to start their radiation safety program. Having really no knowledge in this area, I enrolled in a 40-hour RSO course through Engelhardt & Associates, never knowing I would enter this field and be where I am today. For that opportunity, I thank the company’s owner and my friend, J.R. Reading. Unfortunately his life was taken way too early a couple of years after that at the age of 31. I still think of you often J.R.

And then for some reason, my thoughts drifted to comic books. Makes sense as I was an avid collector when I was a young boy growing up in Baltimore. I don’t collect comic books now, but I still enjoy the big blockbuster movies that seem to come out all the time, much to the chagrin of my wife who is not as much of a fan. Movies, like the Darknight Rises with Batman, the Avengers, Thor, and Captain America, to name a few.

Now, in thinking about comic books and movies, one particular line came to mind – from the 2002 Spiderman movie staring Toby McGuire. I guess an appropriate theme, since the original storyline had Peter Parker gain his powers and become Spiderman after being bitten by a radioactive spider. If there was a health physicist present, this probably wouldn’t have happened, and we wouldn’t have Spiderman, but this did happen and I see this as another beneficial use of ionizing radiation that is not often cited- but that is a discussion for another day. Anyway, Peter’s uncle Ben had a quote in the movie, some advice to Peter – he said “With great power comes great responsibility”. I thought of this line in regards to receiving this award. Now of course receiving the Elda E. Anderson award doesn’t bring me power, but it is a distinction that brings great responsibility. And for me, this is a responsibility to serve, promote, and protect the health physics profession and along with it, its premier organization, the Health Physics Society.

So, not only do I take it upon myself, but I also ask you to join me in protecting and promoting this profession. As an academician and consultant for the nuclear power industry, I see the need for health physicists of all kinds, from different backgrounds, and at all education levels. But unfortunately even with the need, I also see the shrinking academic and financial programs and student numbers and the decreased support of all kinds. Now sure, there are programs and funding opportunities out there, but still, it is not enough. Especially with the increased use of radiation for medical diagnosis and therapy, and the need for workers for the nuclear renaissance - which is alive even with the Fukushima accident - we’re seeing plants constructed now in the US and throughout the world, still it is not enough. The need for keeping our academic programs going and staying strong has never been greater. So I ask you to join me in promoting and protecting this valuable resource by donating your time to try and encourage primary, high school, and college students to look into health physics, or at the very least a STEM discipline. Become a mentor, volunteer locally and nationally – I know many of you already are. Give money to scholarship funds at your high schools and colleges. Every little bit helps, and it is needed to make sure that we have health physicists in the future, including here for this banquet for many, many more years to come. I accept this responsibility, this challenge – will you? I hope the answer is yes.

So let me close the customary but necessary way by again thanking my colleagues, family and friends for all their support, guidance and encouragement over the years. Many of you in this room that I did not mention have had a positive influence on my life, and I thank you as well. I especially have to thank my best friend and wife Maria. If it truly were not for her, I would not be here in front of you today. Now of course, people tend to say this all the time, we hear it every year, and of course it is true. But for me it is perhaps a bit different. You see my wife (girlfriend at the time) is the one that essentially introduced me to this wonderful profession by hiring me at CETI, where I began my health physics career – she was my boss! And because of that, the monetary component of this award will go to her!

Thank you.”