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SSIT Presents Carl Barus Award to Dr. Kymn Harvin

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Description

This article from IEEE Technology and Society Magazine describes the award given to Dr. Harvin and the circumstances surrounding it.

Body

Dr. Kymn Harvin, a former Director at the Salem Nuclear Power Plant in Lower Alloways Creek, NJ, was presented with the IEEE Society on Social Implications of Technology (SSIT) Carl Barus Award for Outstanding Service in the Public Interest, on April 26, 2006. The Award was given in recognition of Dr. Harvin's contribution and personal sacrifice in drawing attention to significant safety problems at the Salem nuclear facility.

The ceremony for Dr. Harvin took place at a Trenton, NJ, news conference commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl accident in the former Soviet Union. The Barus Award is given to engineers who jeopardize their careers or lives in efforts to uphold critical engineering ethics principles. Dr. Harvin was fired in 2003 by the Salem plant operator, PSE&G, after she spoke out about the facility's safety problems.

In conferring the Barus Award to Dr. Harvin, SSIT Past-President and current IEEE Div. VI Director Clinton Andrews noted that the Barus Award is not given annually,

but only when someone of “heroic proportions rises against the odds to work for the public interest.” Dr. Harvin, he said “did so at the cost of [her] high-level position at PSE&G... She has endured lies and threats... [but] undaunted, continues to speak out... She exemplifies the ethical stance [that SSIT supports, in an] engineering professional.”

“Being a whistleblower is not easy,” Dr. Harvin acknowledged in her remarks, as she traced the history of her actions and ordeal. “I lost my job, friends, and for a time, myself. I felt betrayed by a company who was supposed to protect the public.” Dr. Harvin said that she gained strength as she met supporters like Peter Barus (who is the son of the late Carl Barus, for whom the Barus Award is named) and SSIT’s Mal Benjamin, and as she learned of IEEE-SSIT’s work on society’s behalf, as well as the work of groups such as the Union of Concerned Scientists.

Prior recipients of the Carl Barus Award have included David Monts in 2003 who lost his engineering job at the University of New Orleans after he exposed safety-related building code violations, Salvador Castro in 2001 who was fired for calling attention to a defective medical device, and Rebecca Leaf in 1997 for her work on rural electrification in Nicaragua.

The event was held in an ornate meeting room at the New Jersey State Capitol building in Trenton. The news conference commemorating the Chernobyl accident was organized by the New Jersey Public Interest Research Group (NJPIRG).

-T. Bookman

Notes

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