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The Erwin plant site of Nuclear Fuel Services, Inc. (NFS) has earned a distinction that recognizes the company and the town as of historic significance as a key location for advancements in nuclear technology and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

The prestigious American Nuclear Society (ANS) 'Nuclear Historic Landmark' designation was awarded to NFS this week at the society's Annual Winter Meeting in Reno, Nev.

NFS representatives Randy Shackelford and Richard Booth accepted the award at the meeting.

Dwight Ferguson, NFS's president and CEO, said, "The designation validates as fact that NFS and the Erwin plant are of historic significance for advancements in nuclear science. This can be something of pride for our employees, retirees, Unicoi Countians and the region."

The ANS is a respected international scientific and educational organization comprised of 11,000 engineers, scientists and educators.

A press release said, "NFS's Erwin plant was selected because of its contribution to the peaceful applications of nuclear technology and nuclear energy. The company has achieved several firsts within the industry that were of major historic significance.

"Conceived in 1956, NFS began operations in 1957 as a reactor materials plant. The first significant project for NFS was for highly enriched uranium (HEU) for one of America's first commercial nuclear reactors at Indian Point near New York City.

"In the mid-1960's NFS scientists demonstrated a new fuel manufacturing process for the U.S. Naval Reactors program that became the process standard for America's fleet of nuclear-powered surface ships and submarines. The first of this new type of fuel was used to fuel the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz.

"The company helped pioneer the process and was the first large-scale converter of HEU from stockpiled U.S. nuclear weapons materials. By converting metric ton quantities of HEU into useful low-enriched uranium (LEU) to power commercial reactors, NFS provides a path for effectively recycling weapons-grade uranium into needed fuel for electric power generation.

"The process eliminates the security risk posed by the storage of excess, unneeded weapons material and preserves the environmental impact of disposing of the HEU."

The ANS Nuclear Historic Landmark designation is symbolized by an inscribed bronze plaque. The plaque will be presented by Dr. William E. Burchill, ANS President, to NFS officials, employees and community leaders at a ceremony in Erwin. The date of the event will be announced later.

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