

WINNERS OF THE 2011 C.B. BLETHEN MEMORIAL AWARDS

Winners & Judges Comments...

DISTINGUISHED COVERAGE OF DIVERSITY

Below 50,000 Circulation Division

1st place: Herald and News Staff for their series “Living on the Edge”

The judge wrote: Ryan Pfeil’s (File) work in this series is simply outstanding! The depth and breadth of information contained in each piece offers something for all readers, from those who enjoy a narrative to those who want their information in quick, easily digestible bites. The series tackles the story of poverty from top to bottom. It offers perspectives from those struggling with poverty or near-poverty, breaks poverty down by the numbers and provides readers with viewpoints on poverty from local officials, service providers and the community as a whole. In short, this is the complete package, brought home at a truly local level, on a topic that’s vitally relevant in these post-Great Recession times. Minor editing errors and design flaws detract somewhat from the finished product, but not enough to move the entry out of the top spot.

2nd place: The Idaho State Journal for their entry “Tribes Look Past Mistrust, Fort Hall Then & Now” by John Bulger, Vanessa Grieve, John O’Connell, Sean Ellis & Kendra Evensen

The judge said: A solid look at an important minority in the Idaho State Journal’s coverage area. The paper’s series “The Tribes” shines a spotlight on the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, touching on the past, present and future from a number of different and interesting perspectives. Readers leave the series with a solid understanding of a cultural heritage that was stripped away from native peoples by force, only to be protected through the years and reclaimed by later generations.

Above 50,000 Circulation Division

1st place: The Oregonian for “The Census and Portland” by Nikole Hannah-Jones

The judge wrote: The clear choice. Nikole Hannah-Jones does an outstanding job converting census data into something tangible, delivering an in-depth look at the shifting populations in the Portland area through The Changing Face of Oregon series and related reporting. The companion items in the entry concerning fair housing concerns provide the much-needed “why this matters to us” piece that is often lacking from this type of enterprise reporting.

2nd place: The Seattle Times Staff for their Diversity entry

The judge commented: Solid reporting and varied topics fit well in a contest that focuses on diversity reporting. The breadth of the entry is impressive and includes a wide spectrum of communities, from a healing program for Somali women to a look at a significant low-income housing area, to reporting on the community’s young black professionals, a feature on a movement/dance class for Parkinson’s patients and coverage of Native American issues. The depth found in each individual item is equally impressive. The entry would have been stronger had all the items been written by current staff members.

DEADLINE REPORTING

Below 50,000 Circulation Division

1st place: The Daily News Staff for “Shock in Rainier: Police Chief Shot, Killed”

The judge wrote: A fine example of staying with “The Big Story” and covering all the angles. From first-spot reports through backgrounds on the principals, a staff working as a team stayed with it.

2nd place: The Chronicle for “Triple Murder in Salkum” by Dan Schreiber, Adam Pearson, Brian Mittge and Brandon Swanson

The judge said: Simply one of the most interesting “hard-boiled” crime stories I’ve read in a long time. The mystery witness made it extra vivid and shed light on a criminal conspiracy that readers rarely see. The digging on the gunman’s background strengthened the entry field.

Above 50,000 Circulation Division

1st place: The Oregonian for “Behind the Portland Bomb Plot” by Bryan Denson

The judge commented: What a story! The reader is pulled into this incredible tale and as it unfolded, felt emotion and outrage as well as scared out of their pants. Bryan did a great job of putting the story in a logical and orderly sequence while not losing the reader in more than they could digest. Compelling read from the beginning until the end. Great job!

2nd place: The Oregonian for “A Quiet Town is Mangled in the Grip of a Twister” by Joseph Rose

The judge wrote: Writer Joseph Rose wove a telling story about both the history as well as the rarity of a tornado in Oregon. Good photos and background as well as quotes from the victims made the reader understand and feel as if they were there. Good job on getting the information in on deadline as well as using the online edition for further information.

ENTERPRISE REPORTING

Below 50,000 Circulation Division

1st place: Lewiston Tribune for “Thy Brother’s Keeper” by William L. Spence, Brad W. Gary, Kerri Sandaine, Kevin Gaboury and Kathy Hedberg

The judge said: A sad story with no ending, but hopefully out of this reporting will come change. Most readers were unaware of the system and how the budget and economy affect real lives, and the short-term effects will leave long-term scars. The reader is left with emptiness in that we are just spitting at the fire instead of preventing the fire in the first place. Good job at exposing the unseen effects of budget cuts and lack of proper treatment of these needy patients.

2nd place: The Columbian for “A Life Interrupted” by Laura McVicker

In the judge’s own words: This was a touching story that pulled at my heart-strings and made me feel sorry for the man who was wrongfully accused of raping and kidnapping a woman. After serving 17 years in prison, the story takes you to his current struggles on starting a new life. The story left me with wanting to know the rest of the story in a follow-up. Did his life get back on track and how is he doing today? Great Story!

Above 50,000 Circulation Division

1st place: The Seattle Times for “The Other Side of Mercy” by Ken Armstrong and Jonathan Martin

In the judge’s words: The reporting, from details about the slain police officers to the conversations between the killer and his wife is just stunning. It’s easy to see how this becomes a book-length tale. It’s cinematic in scope. Clemmons is made vividly real and entirely frightening. You can sense him walking up behind you in places. His transformation to an off-kilter religious prophet held in high esteem only by his own twisted mind is so well rendered that I forgot, for a time, I was reading nonfiction. This is a story that could only be told with first-rate journalists given the space they need to go long. This is a triumph.

2nd place: The Oregonian for “Like Father, Like Spy” by Bryan Denson

The judge wrote: The thing I like most about this story is that the writing is utterly invisible. There are no literary tricks abused here in the name of moving the story along. The story is so good, so compelling, that it didn’t need anything but the telling and the writer knew it. Additionally, it is never easy to get information from the FBI, particularly when it comes to a spy story like this, and the writer did a masterful job prying that information free. I love the image of the spying son, left with his thoughts on that second-hand couch in the final part. Very well done!

FEATURE WRITING

Below 50,000 Circulation Division

1st place: Anchorage Daily News for “Hooked: One Addict’s Story” by Julia O’Malley

The judge wrote: Fabulous work by writer Julia O’Malley. It reads like a novel. This engaging story is about a woman’s struggle to stop using heroin. Tragic as the story was, the reader could not read fast enough, wanting a different outcome, but realizing the truth behind the addiction. A reader’s left wanting to find out the rest of the story and what happens to this woman as time goes by. Does she make it or not is the question that remains? And does the state begin making better improvements in helping the lost and saving lives? Fantastic writing and a compelling read!

2nd place: The Daily Herald for “A Long-Lost Voice” by Debra Smith

In the judge’s words: This was a story that tugged on the heartstrings and made the reader go back in time, bringing up past memories of their own as well as quite a story that most of us had not heard. Really creative use of splicing Bud’s own words right into the story. Well done!

Above 50,000 Circulation Division

1st place: The Oregonian for “Can \$100 Change a Life?” by Nikole Hannah-Jones

The judge commented: Writer Nikole Hannah-Jones gives us a look into how a woman changes her own life when she sets out to change the lives of others by giving them an unexpected gift of \$100. It’s a story of personal growth, told in a quiet, thoughtful way that does justice to the subject of the story.

2nd place: The Seattle Times for “The Fight of Her Life” by Maureen O’Hagan

The judge wrote: Writer Maureen O’Hagan tells the story of Eleanor Owens, a woman who dedicated her life to improving treatment of the mentally ill after her son was diagnosed with schizophrenia. O’Hagan shows us a woman who doesn’t bow to power, bureaucracy or the pain of her son’s illness, letting both Owens and her son give us a first-hand view of living with mental illness.

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING

Below 50,000 Circulation Division

1st place: Herald and News Staff for “Chronicles: Water and Drought”

The judge wrote: The Water and Drought series by the Herald News staff was by far the most impressive of the lot. This was an unbelievably, thoroughly researched and reported series that ran at regular intervals, with each series gaining the reader’s interest. Although I found the waning days of the series less appealing/interesting, the issues reported during 2010 about farming, ranchers, retailers and government agencies answered questions those affected and far-away, non-agricultural readers and reporters, such as me, might have. The use of large photos with the subject land and farmers were well focused. This series was truly outstanding.

2nd place: The Daily Herald, Everett, Washington for “Spent: Years of Overspending” by Debra Smith

The judge said: Writer Debra Smith reports on how excessive spending and poor financial planning has left Lynnwood, Washington \$22.4 million in the hole. With big, bold graphics accompanying the story, the Herald points to 5.6% increases in overtime costs and 43.8% higher public safety costs as part of the reason for a budget deficit that will now mean layoffs and service cutbacks in the community. Citing “red ink by the barrel,” the story is aptly illustrated with a red barrel of oil. The story, clearly written and researched, is laid out with reader appeal in mind.

Above 50,000 Circulation Division

1st place: The Seattle Times for “Seniors for Sale” by Michael J. Berens

The judge exclaimed: In-depth reporting on the tremendously troubling treatment of elderly in adult homes. Analysis of death certificates, interviews w/ families and thorough review of records. Caregivers were sentenced to jail time, government agency heads were fired and the legislature passed new laws to better monitor adult homes and regulate referral agencies. Tremendous impact and change to regulate an out-of-control and unmonitored system that abuses the elderly.

2nd place: The News Tribune for “Dale Washam” by Sean Robinson

The judge said: Wonderfully entertaining read on someone who should not have been elected to office. Thorough review of records, interviews and documents from former employees, former girlfriends and family shows a crazy, paranoid perennial man who lied at nearly every turn and sued nearly everyone with whom he came into contact. The story clearly, accurately tells this tax-assessor’s story and why he should leave office. Nice writing. I couldn’t stop reading.



DEBBY LOWMAN AWARD FOR DISTINGUISHED REPORTING OF CONSUMER AFFIARS

Circulation Divisions Do Not Apply

Debby Lowman was an optimist and a fighter. She was the consumer affairs reporter for The Seattle Times until her death from cancer in July 1978. The Debby Lowman Memorial Award is a tribute to her and the standards she set for consumer affairs reporting.

1st place: The Seattle Times for “Lender of Last Resort: I am a Wolf” by Christine Willmsen

The judge commented: This is outstanding on all fronts. At the heart, it is so powerful because the central player (or villain) is given plenty of rope to tell his own story. “I am a wolf” is an extraordinary quote. The reporting then enfolds the central character with the real-life stories of those affected (or duped), and serves the reader well by explaining the tactics of hard money, one of the fallouts of the housing meltdown. Finally, the writing is clear and strong, reading like a narrative that is ultimately a human drama.

2nd place: Tri-City Herald for “Pasco Day Care’s Actions Anger Parents” by Michelle Dupler

The judge said: A thorough and compelling look into how the state monitors the quality of entities serving young children. Well reported and well written.

Congratulations to all of the winners for their excellent work!