



2020 NJ-SPJ Signature Awards (for work done in 2019)

The contest was judged this year by the Colorado Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists. The judges provided comments on the first- place honorees.

David Carr Reporter of the Year

This award recognizes the best collection of work in a given year and honors the memory of David Carr, the former New York Times media reporter and SPJ member who lived for many years in Montclair.

Dustin Racioppi, The Record /northjersey.com
Stories revealing patronage-hiring scandal at NJ Schools Development Authority

Judge's comments: Judge's comments: Mr. Racioppi's extraordinary scoop and his continued and sustained coverage of the scandal involving the New Jersey Schools Development Authority is the work that would make the great David Carr, a true master of the craft, proud.

Wilson Barto Award for outstanding "rookie" journalist of the year

This award is in honor of Wilson L. Barto Sr., the founding president of the New Jersey SPJ Professional chapter in 1959 and New Jersey's first newspaper ombudsman in 1975 at The Times of Trenton. Barto, of Skippack, Pa., finished a 40-year career in 1992 after working for five New Jersey papers and two in Pennsylvania. He was the only person to serve as city editor of both Trenton dailies. Barto died in 2010 at the age of 83. Colleagues remember him as a person who encouraged beginning reporters to aspire to become great journalists.

1st place: Scott Yunker, *The Coast Star*
Profiles of three local personalities: John Belding, Jackie Morgan-Stackhouse and Leslie Naughton

Judge's comments: He displayed a nice touch, particularly for a young writer, and demonstrated an ability to converse with (and draw out) people from a variety of backgrounds and across age groups. The 92-year-old historian, who is retiring, explained: "You get a little tired." The genealogist who tracked her family tree back into the days of slavery explained her search. And the librarian, who was honored by the Chamber of Commerce, made it clear why.

2nd Place: Alexis Shanes, The Record/northjersey.com

Collection: “ ‘My lungs were chemically burned,’ ” Expert sniffers tackle invasive species threat,” “Toni Morrison’s life celebrated in NYC”

Ron Miskoff Educator of the Year

This award is named after Ron Miskoff, a long-time journalism educator and former president of our chapter.

Joe Amditis, NJ College News Commons at the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University,.

For programming that taught student journalists how to develop stories about climate change.

Herbert Morrison Award for best audio story

This award is named after the radio broadcaster Herbert Morrison, whose dramatic on-the-scene coverage of the Hindenburg explosion in May 1937 in Lakehurst N.J. is still remembered today.

1st place: Karen Rouse, WNYC

“Criminal justice reformers say let inmates vote,” “Some N.J. lawmakers raise concerns over bill to legalize recreational marijuana,” “Coalition of black organizations challenges status quo in Trenton.”

Judge’s comments: Strong reporting and storytelling made these stories entered by Karen Rouse interesting for listeners.

2nd place: Scott Gurian, Far From Home podcast
“Visiting Chernobyl”

3rd place: Dino Flammia, NJ 101.5
Child Mental Health

Gabe Pressman Award for best news video:

This award honors the late Gabe Pressman, a veteran reporter for WNBC whose six-decade career began with a stint at the Newark Evening News.

1st place: Walt Kane, Anthony Cocco, Karin Attonito, News 12, New Jersey
“Kane in Your Corner: Bullied at School”

Judge’s comments: Strong reporting and storytelling made these stories entered by Karen Rouse interesting for listeners.

2nd place: Eric Scott, Lou Hochman, Patrick Lavery, Dan Alexander, NJ 101.5
“Opioids and Addiction: Get Help Tonight”

3rd place: Heather Berzak, The Montclarion
“Vaping Trend Goes Up in Smoke”

Barbara Reed Award for Best grass roots journalism

In her long and continuing service to NJ-SPJ, Barbara Reed is a strong advocate for local journalism in New Jersey. This award goes to the print weekly or local website that does the best, most comprehensive job covering the community which it serves.

This award is meant to honor the best in grassroots journalism, meaning publications, whether in print or online, that cover local communities exclusively.

1st place: Rema Rahman and Mark Bonamo, TAPinto Newark

Collection: “Newark embarks on ambitious homeless efforts,” “What the latest Port Authority lease really means,” “Cost of building schools in Newark far exceeded limits set by legislature,” “Sopranos prequel brings 1967 Newark back to life.”

Judge’s comments: An interesting group of stories about life in Newark from murals to helping the homeless population.

2nd place: Matt Kadosh, TAPinto Westfield

Multiple stories, including coverage of a lawsuit claiming NJ trooper was texting moments before crash that killed Westfield girl, and stories about sexual abuse allegations against local priests.

3rd place: Al Sullivan, Hudson Reporter

Stories involving questions about the handling of rape allegations made by Katie Brennan against a member of the governor’s campaign staff

Tim O’Brien award for best use of public records:

The award honors journalists specifically for investigative work based on public records requests. This award pays tribute to Tim O’Brien, whose investigative reporting, first at The Star-Ledger and later at The New Jersey Law Journal, exemplified the qualities of courage, thoroughness, integrity, persistence and quiet idealism that we seek to honor.

1st place: Katie Sobko and Kristie Cattafi, The Record/northjersey.com

“North Jersey officials spent over \$350K of your tax money during a trip to Atlantic City”

Judge’s comments: This was a tough category to judge because of all of the important public records reporting taking place. The stories by Katie Sobko and Kristie Cattafi on the outrageous spending of taxpayer dollars by the League of Municipalities edged out the others.

2nd: Jay Rahman, Paterson Times

Stories about some high-ranking Paterson officials bypassing biometric system to record work hours

3rd: Michael Symons, New Jersey 101.5

New Jersey's incredibly shrinking property tax relief program

Stuart and Beverley Awbrey Award

Since its creation in the 1990s, this award has sought to honor both hard-hitting investigative journalism that is public-spirited as well as more “uplifting” efforts such as creating care packages for soldiers overseas or helping a handicapped child get an education. The Awbrey pays tribute to Beverley Awbrey and her late husband, Stu, who ran The Cranford Chronicle from 1978 to 1988. The Awbreys believed their 100-year-old weekly was more than a livelihood; they saw it as an opportunity to contribute to the civic life of Cranford.

1st place: Jaime Julia Winters

Montclair Local

Articles about the future of Lackawanna Plaza, Montclair

Judge’s comments: This is what community journalism is all about – taking an issue and staying on top of it – meeting after meeting, development after development, and in this case, a lawsuit. Nice work informing the public.

2nd place: Rob Anthes

Community News

“Hacked in 7 minutes: questions of vulnerability surround New Jersey’s aging voting machines”

3rd place: Maureen Berzok

TAPinto East Brunswick

Multiple stories, including the sudden death of a local teen, township redevelopment and a local Chinese New Year celebration.

Best Investigative reporting

1st place: Abbott Koloff and Jean Rimbach, NorthJersey.com/The Record

Cashing in on Charter Schools

Judge’s comments: “Cashing in on Charter Schools” is an in-depth look at charter schools and their funding, where the money comes from and where it goes to — and the inconsistencies in the funding mechanisms. Great work.

2nd place: Al Sullivan, The Hudson Reporter

Firing of former NJ Gov. Jim McGreevy as head of the Jersey City Employment Training Program

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