
2024 Golden Press Card Awards

List of winners of the 2024 Golden Press Card

East Tennessee SPJ



May 15, 2025

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2024 Golden Press Card Winners

Here is the list of winners of the Golden Press Card Awards of the East Tennessee Pro Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists.

This year's contest was judged by the Oklahoma Pro SPJ Chapter.

The winners were announced on May 15, 2025, at Maple Hall in downtown Knoxville.

All Media

ARTS & CULTURE REPORTING

First Place:

A different way of seeing Knoxville's music scene

Ryan Wilusz, Brianna Paciorka, Caitie McMekin (and the entire photo staff)

News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: *In depth coverage that was both entertaining and informative. I enjoyed reading each one, and the level of detail was impressive.*

Second Place:

Knoxville's concert scene, Dollywood and chicken 'Wingz'

Devarrick Turner, Brianna Paciorka

News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: *I like the style of this writer's writing, and the stories show deep reporting, lots of sources, trends and statistics and more. It's not just entertaining, it's business heavy.*

Judges' Comments on Category: *Great stories all around and I especially liked the video of the Appalachian film makers. This was a very hard category to judge simply because the quality of all the work was high.*

Newspaper (Large)

PERSONAL COLUMNS/REVIEW/CRITICISM

First Place:

How music and sports can bring Knoxville together

Ryan Wilusz

News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: *More than just commentary, this writer showed effort in reporting as well. The articles were interesting and helpful to readers. Great job.*

Second Place:

Ideas at the Leading Edge

Mark Harmon

News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: *I really liked all the columns this writer wrote. He shows passion, yet lays out his arguments and positions well.*

Newspaper (Small)

PERSONAL COLUMNS/REVIEW/CRITICISM

First Place:

Lessons from a meteor shower

Shanon Adame

The Daily Times

Judges' Comments: *Heartfelt and vulnerable while not becoming self-pitying. This was a very nice read with lovely imagery. I was right there with you, gazing at those stars.*

Second Place:

An Ode to Bob

Steve Wildsmith

BLANK Newspaper

All Media

FREELANCE WRITING

First Place:

And Beyond / First Amendment Defender / Vote of Confidence

Nancy Henderson

Super Lawyers Magazine

Judges' Comments: *Wow! What a lede. You had me hooked from the very beginning to the very end. Great reporting and writing and a well done and enjoyable profile.*

Second Place:

Troubled Tennessee

Mark Harmon

Tennessee Lookout

Judges' Comments: *This columnist isn't afraid to call it as he sees it and he does his reporting. Well done.*

Digital Only**FEATURE REPORTING****First Place:**

Amanda Gouldie: Grant's widow-A hero like him!

Tom King

Knox TN Today

Judges' Comments: *Well written and you made me really feel for the spouse of this hero. I hope this wonderful profile led others to get checked for colon cancer. It would surprise me if it didn't*

Radio**FEATURE REPORTING****First Place:**

A Smoky Mountain Christmas

Pierce Gentry

WUOT

Judges' Comments: *I loved this story. What a unique subject to write about and you did a great job humanizing this business story/profile story.*

Second Place:

'Plein Air' painters persist through the rain in Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Pierce Gentry

WUOT

Judges' Comments: *Lots of great reporting and coverage. Your story makes me want to travel to the mountains to watch painters.*

Newspaper (Small)

FEATURE REPORTING

First Place:

Don't Forget Us

Grace Teater

Johnson City Press

Judges' Comments: *Lots of deep details and reporting on a hard story about resilience and recovery. Well done.*

Second Place:

A Labor of Love

Steve Wildsmith

BLANK Newspaper

Television

CONTINUING COVERAGE

First Place:

Manhunt for McCowan's Killer

WVLT Staff

WVLT

Judges' Comments: *Excellent live anchoring and reporting throughout. Showcased team coverage, in both during hours-long breaking events and in reporting of emotional followups.*

Second Place:

Crumbling School: What will it take to fix issues at Jefferson Elementary?

Olivia Dague

WBIR

Judges' Comments: *Perfect example of journalism shining a light on a problem, leading to change. Great to see the initial report lead to so much response. Reporter owned the story.*

Judges' Comments on Category: *Winning entry showcased excellent live anchoring and live reporting throughout. Excellent team coverage, in both during hours-long breaking events and in longer-format reporting.*

Television

DEADLINE/BREAKING NEWS REPORTING

First Place:

Hurricane Helene Floods the Mountains

WVLT Staff

WVLT

Judges' Comments: *Relied heavily on live anchoring. from journalists gathering new info in real time. weaved in weather, traffic, live reporters, live interview, etc. in a way that flowed smoothly.*

Second Place:

DeHart arrested

WBIR staff

WBIR

Judges' Comments: *lots of elements that flowed seamlessly. great 4 box off the top. Every live shot was showing me something.*

Television

GENERAL REPORTING

First Place:

Odometer Rollback

Don Dare, Dave Wignall

WATE

Judges' Comments: *old-school consumer reporting that feels truly on the side of the regular viewer. Proof that local journalists can bring real change*

Second Place:

Tennesseans worry about Canadian Dog Abuse Investigation

Shea Smith

WBIR

Judges' Comments: *Reporter handled unique challenges in gathering facts from two countries with different laws for journalists. Loved seeing the work lead to results with Rover removing the profiles.*

Judges' Comments on Category: *Winning entry featured old-school consumer reporting that feels truly on the side of the regular viewer. Proof that local journalists can bring real change*

All Media

PHOTOJOURNALISM – BEST PHOTOGRAPHER

First Place:

Caitie McMekin's favorite photos of 2024

Caitie McMekin

News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: *In particular for the Elk River walker, which demonstrated the enormous scope of the storm's destruction but an unspoken resilience in the presence of a survivor amidst it. Her eye for special moments during an event demonstrated in the human centered photos of the marathon runner with a baby and a child's inquisitive mind during a public event*

Second Place:

Brianna Paciorka's favorite photos of 2024

Brianna Paciorka

News Sentinel

All Media

PHOTOJOURNALISM – BEST SPORTS PHOTOGRAPHY"

First Place:

Flying high

Angelina Alcantar

News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: *For capturing in perfect clarity an athlete in midair, while also showing the suspense of that moment visible in the player's expression.*

Second Place:

Sportsmanship in action

Saul Young

News Sentinel

Newspaper (Small)

DEADLINE/BREAKING NEWS REPORTING

First Place:

JCP Breaking News

Newsroom/Staff

Johnson City Press

Judges' Comments: *In-depth reporting on a challenging situation. Great immediate response to breaking news.*

Digital Only

HURRICANE HELENE IN-DEPTH COVERAGE

First Place:

After the Flood

Kim Trevathan

Compass

Judges' Comments: *Excellent writing and very good use of details.*

Newspaper (Small)

HURRICANE HELENE IN-DEPTH COVERAGE

First Place:

JCP Helene in-depth

Grace Teater, Brandon Smith, Laken Greene

Johnson City Press

Judges' Comments: *Nice photos and details and descriptions.*

Second Place:

A Volunteer State of Mind – How Appalachia has rallied to help with Helene recovery efforts

Luke Brogden

BLANK Newspaper

Television

GOVERNMENT & POLITICS REPORTING

First Place:

Carter County has up-to-date emergency plan despite mayor's claim

Caleb Perhne

WCYB

Judges' Comments: *The follow ups and fallout of the initial piece are where this shines. Excellent use of FOIA to get records to outright call the mayor's claim "false."*

Second Place:

East Tennessee schools navigate arming teachers law

Maria Guzman

WBIR

Judges' Comments on Category: *Winning entry highlighted how important FOIA is for reporting. Great job requesting records and being brave enough to call the mayor's claims "false."*

Student Journalism

STUDENT - HURRICANE HELENE BREAKING COVERAGE

First Place:

TVA releases water from Douglas Dam, sparking concerns of flooding downstream in East Knox County

Pierce Gentry

WUOT

Judges' Comments: *Great story behind the story for the journalist!*

Student Journalism

STUDENT - HURRICANE HELENE IN-DEPTH COVERAGE

First Place:

Hurricane Helene Hits East Tennessee

Pierce Gentry

WUOT

Judges' Comments: *Very interesting and thorough reporting, especially the misinformation story.*

Second Place:

After Helene Special Edition
Macy Strader, Newsroom/Team Staff
The East Tennessean

Newspaper (Small)

SERIES/PACKAGE/PROJECT WRITING

First Place:

JCP Package entry
Brandon Smith
Johnson City Press
Judges' Comments: *Impactful and watchdog reporting.*

Newspaper (Large)

HURRICANE HELENE IN-DEPTH COVERAGE

First Place:

Government response
Allie Feinberg
News Sentinel
Judges' Comments: *Great watchdog reporting*

Second Place:

From climate causes to community meetings in the aftermath
Daniel Dassow
News Sentinel

Television

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING

First Place:

KCSO K9 bite leaves woman with scars, hundreds of thousands in medical bills

Ellis Rold

WBIR

Judges' Comments: *Horrifying police body cam. Reporter was relentless in trying to gather as much information as possible on the officer, the dog, proper conduct, and past instances with the dog.*

Second Place:

The Sean Williams Saga

Jeff Keeling, Katherine Simpson

WJHL

Judges' Comments: *Thorough and continuous reporting. Impressed with the volume of reporting on this topic, following filings and updates.*

Newspaper (Large)

FEATURE REPORTING

First Place:

Gatlinburg's charm makes it home away from home for many. For 3,577 people, it's just home

Hayden Dunbar, Caitie McMekin, Angelina Alcantar

News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: *I loved the angle of looking at the regular residents of a tourist town. The historic context and information woven throughout was well done and interesting. Thanks for giving us a peek underneath Gatlinburg's skirts, so to speak!*

Second Place:

How does Habitat for Humanity build much-needed homes in Knoxville where the median price is \$400K?

Devarrick Turner, Hannah Mattix

News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: *This story effectively combined business and real estate reporting with a feature-like twist that made it both entertaining and educational to read. Neat angle.*

Judges' Comments on Category: *Every story in this category deserved an honor. It was an enjoyable afternoon reading all the different angles and story topics.*

Television

FEATURE REPORTING

First Place:

Surviving the streets: A glimpse into the daily reality of homelessness

Sam Perez

WBIR

Judges' Comments: Great reporting on a tough subject, but this piece humanized homelessness and was a look on the challenges of the social problem. Good job.

Second Place:

Making Popcorn's legacy shine

Jillian Taylor, Brittany Bailey

WBIR

Judges' Comments: Really nice tribute and profile of an historic figure in Tennessee. Nice wrap up with the timely angle of partnering with Ole Smokey, making this not only entertaining but relevant.

Judges' Comments on Category: *I wish I could have given more than first and second place. So many great, heartfelt and spectacularly reported stories. Big shout out to WBIR for the Drag King story and the Premature Foal Story. I was especially touched by the death row inmate story as well.*

Newspaper (Large)

HURRICANE HELENE BREAKING COVERAGE

First Place:

Helping people navigate the damage

Knox News Staff

News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: Tons of usable, important information and great storytelling about how Helene affected the communities. This entry showed dedication to not only informing readers, but inspiring and educating them as well. Stellar job.

Second Place:

How plant that produces radioactive nuclear fuel weathered Helene
Daniel Dassow
News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: *What an important topic to write about following a disaster. The reporting was clean, concise and full of information. I am positive this story probably relieved a lot of people.*

Newspaper (Small)**HURRICANE HELENE BREAKING COVERAGE****First Place:**

JCP Helene Breaking News Coverage
Brandon Smith, Robert Houk, Newsroom/Team staff
Johnson City Press

Judges' Comments: *Thorough coverage by a team that obviously cares and was entrenched in the devastation of Helene. A good mix of storytelling and fact sharing. Kudos to excellent coverage.*

Television**HURRICANE HELENE BREAKING COVERAGE****First Place:**

Hurricane Helene Hits the Mountains
WVLT Staff
WVLT

Judges' Comments: *Solid team coverage of breaking news, not just in the moments it was happening, but in the following days. Good to see your main anchors out in the field.*

Second Place:

Hurricane Helene: In The Eye Of The Storm
Terry Craig, Anslee Daniel
WJHL

Judges' Comments on Category: *Winning entry showcased solid team coverage of breaking news, not just in the moments it was happening, but in the following days. Good*

to see your main anchors out in the field.

All Media

HORACE V. WELLS JR. COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

First Place:

Sheriff's office told DA video of a raid didn't exist – but it did

Tyler Whetstone

News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: Fantastic investigative work that pulled in experts from many different fields. This investigative work clearly exposes the problem of oversight and abuse. The reporter showed tenacity and left no stone unturned. I hope this piece spurred a national conversation about oversight and accountability. Good job.

Second Place:

VOTING MATTERS: Covering the Issues that Matter to You

TVC Staff

The Volunteer Channel

Judges' Comments: Such an important special report, especially in an age of disinformation and mistrust. Kudos to the team for putting together a primer that was easy to understand, clearly explained, not biased and thorough. This piece should be included in school curriculum!

Judges' Comments on Category: *Every single piece entered deserved an honor. The Helene coverage was heartbreaking, but inspiring as well. I especially enjoyed watching the special by WVLT on After Helene and The Johnson City Press' special on how media covered the event. Both were staggeringly well done. WBIR's coverage was also outstanding, and the News Sentinel piece about the Starbucks manager was deeply moving and impactful. Finally, I can't tell you how much in love I am with the piece about Eyes on LaFollette. I've been to that community, and this is such a wonderful tradition and recordkeeping effort for small coal towns. Again, every single piece deserved an honor.*

Television

HURRICANE HELENE IN-DEPTH COVERAGE

First Place:

WBIR Hurricane Helene

WBIR Staff

WBIR

Judges' Comments: *Well compiled and timestamped into ONE piece. Thoughtful cover letter as well. great emotional sound. Love the "verify" segment. 30 min special. station hosting toy drive. Fully invested in community.*

Second Place:

Impact Plastics Deaths

Yannia Nordelo, Troy Prater, Jason Hutchinson

WCYB

Judges' Comments: *Unlike other entries, it was nice to see continued coverage of one particular issue and developing story during hurricane-the plastics employees. The bilingual reporter was essential.*

Television

BEST ANCHOR

First Place:

Brittany Tarwater Anchor

Brittany Tarwater

WVLT

Judges' Comments: *Lots of unscripted breaking news anchoring, showed emotion, comes across as very sincere, personable, excellent style*

Second Place:

Casey Wheelless Anchor

Casey Wheelless

WVLT

Judges' Comments on Category: *Brittany showed multiple examples of commanding the desk during breaking news at the desk. Showed emotion and came across as very sincere and personable. Polished style both in dressy and casual settings.*

Television

BEST NEWSCAST

First Place:

May 8, 2024 Severe Storms

Alyssa Stoney

WBIR

Judges' Comments: *great transition to weather. weather wasn't rushed. toss back from weather was smooth. didn't love the storm day stinger. the storm graphic stayed up behind anchors for shooting coverage. anchors and weather man were excellent. large reporter presence, bad tech support pkg, reporter jumped out of frame out of frame was distracting.*

Second Place:

WVLT News at 6

WVLT Staff

WVLT

Judges' Comments: *well put together graphics, including live box at the top. Great production quality throughout.*

Judges' Comments on Category: *Started with excellent transition to weather. Meteorologist was strong from start to finish. Good toss back to news coverage. Breaking news coverage was compelling. Smart teases with promises delivered in the next block.*

Newspaper (Small)

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING

First Place:

JCP Investigative Journalism

Brandon Smith, Allison Winters, Kimberly Harr

Johnson City Press

All Media

BUSINESS & TECHNOLOGY REPORTING

First Place:

ORNL Deepfake Detection Technology
Don Hudson, Bill Greene
WATE

Second Place:

There's energy behind East Tennessee's business identity
Daniel Dassow, Caitie McMekin, Saul Young
News Sentinel

Judges' Comments on Category: *WATE: The story's timeliness and urgency to inform the public about AI technology's dangers shines with expert sources, and a local angle. It is also well balanced with research on the benefits of this technology's rapidly evolving role in society.*

All Media

PHOTOJOURNALISM – BEST NEWS PHOTOGRAPHY

First Place:

Destruction from the Elk River
Caitie McMekin
News Sentinel

Second Place:

Remembrance and reflection
Saul Young
News Sentinel

Judges' Comments on Category: *Demonstrated excellent skill in capturing the physical scope of Hurricane Helene's destruction while also conveying resilience in the hiker's triumphant walk above the debris.*

Newspaper (Small)

GENERAL REPORTING

First Place:

Don't Forget Us: Small mountain community a portrait of resilience for East TN
Grace Teater
Johnson City Press

Second Place:

An Attitude of Gratitude: J.C. Haun returns to Waynestock a changed man
Steve Wildsmith
BLANK Newspaper

Judges' Comments on Category: *The journalist captured the reader's attention right from the lede with the human aspect of Hurricane Helene's impact on survivors. The featured subjects carry the reader deeper into what would have otherwise been a simple staff report documenting the path of the storm and related facts. Such depth demonstrated the reporter's dedication to good storytelling and excellent fact gathering.*

Radio

DEADLINE/BREAKING NEWS REPORTING

First Place:

Dynamite found at CMC Recycling causes 30 hour evacuation
Pierce Gentry, Jon Knowles
WUOT

Judges' Comments: *In a classically utilitarian fashion, Gentry delivers the who, what, when, where and how elements necessary in all breaking stories straight away. But he doesn't stop there. Gentry proceeds to raise the stakes of the dynamite problem faced by the local community and what's being done to mitigate the danger as it gets worse. The cherry on top: The known street closures in the affected area. That's gold for local commuting listeners. The digital webpost does exactly what it should: Add context and essential information that didn't fit in the broadcast.*

Digital Only

SPORTS REPORTING

First Place:

'You don't have to tell your story. Time will.'

Maria Cornelius

Knox TN Today

Judges' Comments: *The feature on Candace Parker gave us a very insightful look at one of the best basketball players for the University of Tennessee and a longtime professional standout for the WNBA. Her accolades are infinite. Her athletic and personal achievements are standouts in not only collegiate basketball but also in the pro ranks and in her personal life. An excellent portrait of an individual role model by Maria Cornelius that gives us a window into the person as well as the athlete. Through injuries and surgeries, she always set goals and then achieved them. I feel like I have met her without actually meeting her through Maria's writing. Well done!*

Second Place:

To heck with Ohio State, 2024 was a good year

Marvin West

Knox TN Today

All Media

BEST PODCAST

First Place:

The Scruffy Stuff

Ryan Wilusz (host), Brianna Paciorka (producer), Allie Feinberg (guest host) Daniel Dassow (guest host)

News Sentinel

Digital Only

GENERAL REPORTING

First Place:

From the Ashes

Angela Dennis
Compass

Digital Only

GOVERNMENT & POLITICS REPORTING

First Place:

2024 Elections
Jesse Mayshark, Scott Barker
Compass

Radio

GENERAL REPORTING

First Place:

Celebrating 100 years of the Smoky Mountain Hiking Club
Pierce Gentry
WUOT

Judges' Comments: *This feel-good story is a textbook example of how the right ambient sounds can truly immerse listeners in a story. From the constant bellow of the wind in the background, to the trickle of a lazy stream and the crunchy footsteps of the hikers trekking on the earth's bare crust, Gentry paints a picture that's familiar in the minds of Americans who love the outdoors. What's interesting - and essential - is that every sound Gentry includes in the piece would have sounded pretty much the same 100 years ago. Talk about capturing history! The sense of place brings the stories told by the hikers to a level of palpable importance.*

Newspaper (Large)

GENERAL REPORTING

First Place:

Knox County lacks sidewalks, yet kids must walk to school
Areana Arora, Angelina Alcantar

News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: *The reporter demonstrates a good eye for an issue that impacts the community at large. The article is strong with solid data, expert sources and those affected by a key issue overlooked by policy makers. The story also presented readers with solutions for potential actions to bring officials.*

Second Place:

Muslims say religious freedom violated by sheriff's office after University of Tennessee arrest

Angela Dennis

News Sentinel

All Media

DIGITAL COMMENTARY

First Place:

Airport, CEOs and the pandemic's legacy

Daniel Dassow

News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: *I love the style and voice of this writer, who kept me hooked with every sentence, thanks to seamless transitions of paragraphs and thoughts. You have a lot of personality to your writing.*

Second Place:

The how and why of what we cover

Joel Christopher

News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: *The first person accounts work so well with these three pieces, and I love how you link to stories that resonate with the topic.*

Judges' Comments on Category: *Another wonderful category that was so hard to pick winners. They were all so equally well written.*

Television

SPORTS REPORTING

First Place:

Heartbeat in the Boxing Ring

Katie Inman

WBIR

Judges' Comments: *What a great story highlighting a local athlete. The interview was done well, and the girl highlighted seems so charming. I especially liked the "twist" of a girl boxer who is so humble too.*

Second Place:

After 75 Years, Petty is still The King

Heather Williams

WCYB

Judges' Comments: *Tons of history, great characters, wonderful legacy. I enjoyed watching this piece, even as a non-NASCAR expert.*

Judges' Comments on Category: *This was a fun competition to judge.*

All Media

SPORTS BEAT REPORTING

First Place:

University of Tennessee Lady Vols: Cora Hall

Cora Hall

News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: *I love how this writer makes every story come alive. Every character adds to the personality of the team, and she goes way beyond simple sports coverage. I feel like I'm part of the team now too.*

Second Place:

University of Tennessee athletics: Mike Wilson

Mike Wilson

News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: *From hard news to feature writing, I enjoyed every entry in his writer's repertoire. The James Pearce feature was especially interesting angle to me. GREAT JOB.*

Judges' Comments on Category: *Tennessee loves its sports, and with journalists who tell stories like this in their reporting, it's easy to see why. Every entry was worthy of an honor.*

Student Journalism

STUDENT - BEST NEWS COVERAGE

First Place:

Dirty Dirt
Connor Spelta
UT Chattanooga

Second Place:

Sun-Less Soiree
Maleah Holder
UT Chattanooga

Judges' Comments on Category: *Very impressed with the young reporters in East Tennessee.*

Student Journalism

STUDENT - CONTINUING COVERAGE

First Place:

Election Coverage
Mallori Crocker
UT Chattanooga

Student Journalism

STUDENT - BEST FEATURE STORY

First Place:

Chain Breakers
Lexi Foley

UT Chattanooga

Judges' Comments: *Fantastic story. Inspiring and engaging. Great work!*

Second Place:

Lucky Seven

Kylia Berry

The Volunteer Channel

Judges' Comments: *This story had me rooting for Seven from start to finish. Now that is the sign of a great story!*

Judges' Comments on Category: *Lexi Foley is a great reporter and very versatile, as evidenced with the "Chain Breakers" submission.*

Student Journalism

BEST STUDENT JOURNALIST

First Place:

Kylia Berry Reports

Kylia Berry

The Volunteer Channel

Judges' Comments: *Well done!*

Second Place:

Alexie's Side of the Field

Alexie Cowan

The Volunteer Channel

Judges' Comments: *Great work!*

Judges' Comments on Category: *Nice submissions in this category.*

Student Journalism

STUDENT - COMMENTARY

First Place:

Ansley Graves

Ansley Graves

The Daily Beacon

Judges' Comments: *A great writer.*

Second Place:

Cryptids of the South

Elias Murphy

The East Tennessean

Judges' Comments: *Engaging and interesting.*

Judges' Comments on Category: *Some solid entries in this category.*

Student Journalism

STUDENT- PHOTOJOURNALISM: BEST NEWS PHOTOGRAPHY

First Place:

Helping Henegar

Caleb McCool

UT Chattanooga

Second Place:

Best News Photographer

Dora Mercado

The East Tennessean

Judges' Comments on Category: *Some solid entries in this category.*

Student Journalism

STUDENT - PODCAST

First Place:

Megan Cooper Reports

Megan Cooper

UT Chattanooga

Judges' Comments: *I am really proud of the reporting they are doing. Fantastic coverage!*

Student Journalism

STUDENT - SPORTS REPORTING

First Place:

Olivia Reeves Wins Gold

Trevor Jolley

UT Chattanooga

Student Journalism

STUDENT - SPORTS BEAT REPORTING

First Place:

Sports Beat Coverage of UT Chattanooga

Trevor Jolley

UT Chattanooga

Second Place:

Trevor McGee Sports Reporter

Trevor McGee

The Daily Beacon

Judges' Comments on Category: *Good coverage of sports, especially wrestling.*

Student Journalism

STUDENT - PHOTOJOURNALISM: BEST SPORTS PHOTOGRAPHY

First Place:

Mocs Win

Trevor Jolley

UT Chattanooga

Second Place:

Ryan Beatty Photography

Ryan Beatty

University of Tennessee for USA TODAY

Judges' Comments on Category: *Engaging and action-oriented photographs.*

Radio

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING

First Place:

As Knoxville College applies for accreditation, viability of finances and campus are uncertain

Jacqui Sieber

WUOT

Judges' Comments: *In this series of stories, Sieber depicts a classic struggle between local communities and outside interests competing for something they both hold dear - albeit for their own reasons. And like the best investigative pieces out there, she keeps pace with the complications in the lives of real people caught up in the mix. The use of sound in the first piece, paired with the visual descriptions Sieber narrates, creates the intended picture. The dash of irony in reading the school motto was classy and appropriate for the story's context. Lastly, but certainly not least, Sieber does a wonderful job using available records to suss out the role of money in the story. She lays bare the just how deeply indebted the college is while it continues to recruit students.*

Radio

GOVERNMENT & POLITICS REPORTING

First Place:

Knoxville Voters Faced with 'At-large' Decision

Pierce Gentry

WUOT

Judges' Comments: *While the piece outlines the basic mechanics of the charter amendment and its outcome, the explanation of the policy change could benefit from clearer, more concise framing. Also, the story includes solid voices from both sides, but the "No on 2" side—the winning side—feels a bit underdeveloped.*

Newspaper (Large)

SPORTS REPORTING

First Place:

Zack Dobson was fueled by brother's death for 5 years before spiraling. Then Eric Berry 'saved my life

Angela Dennis

News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: *The story flowed smoothly, interlacing nostalgia and his life today. The quotes were used well to add perspective, and the organization made the piece easy to follow and engaging.*

Second Place:

Hits Close to Home'

Adam Sparks

News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: *This story is a well-crafted blend of nostalgia and news. The narrative flows smoothly, the quotes are purposeful and personal, and the structure allows readers to clearly see how one image became the catalyst for a powerful branding decision. The narrative could be tightened in places. While the story is rich with detail, some sections could benefit from more concise language to maintain momentum and keep the reader fully engaged.*

Digital Only

HURRICANE HELENE BREAKING COVERAGE

First Place:

Helene hits the mountains

JJ Stambaugh, Thomas Fraser, Hellbender Press staff

Hellbender Press

Digital Only

DEADLINE/BREAKING NEWS REPORTING

First Place:

Digital only: Helene breaking news coverage
Thomas Fraser, Paige Penland, JJ Stambaugh
Hellbender Press

Digital Only

SERIES/PACKAGE/PROJECT WRITING

First Place:

DIGITAL Hurricane Helene full coverage
Thomas Fraser, JJ Stambaugh, Hellbender Press Team Coverage
Hellbender Press

All Media

BEST NEWS VIDEO

First Place:

TVA reopens Hibbs Island
Angelina Alcantar
News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: *Clever use of editing to allow the subjects of the video to tell the story of what's going on without needed a reporter's narration. Clear explanation of the subject matter with good shots of the river and project make this piece a solid entry.*

Second Place:

Raw video from Nolichucky River flooding
Brianna Paciorka
News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: *Great video from the site of dangerous conditions the public needs to know about. Narration isn't needed to convey the gravity of the situation.*

Judges' Comments on Category: *All entries are from one news outlet and all are raw video. Clever and effective use of editing. Would have preferred some narration or at least on-screen graphics to give more background on the situations shown. Reliance on captions outside the video itself should not be a trend.*

Radio

HURRICANE HELENE BREAKING COVERAGE

First Place:

Record breaking floodwaters impact East Tennessee in wake of Hurricane Helene
Pierce Gentry, Jacqui Sieber, Jon Knowles

WUOT

Judges' Comments: If I were a local resident of Cocke County, or East Tennessee, this news spot and 10-minute breakdown of the response to Hurricane Helene's destruction is precisely what I'd want to catch playing on the radio as I tried to figure out what was happening. The reporting is sufficient enough in scope and scale to warn folks in Tennessee and nearby North Carolina about what they can expect during commutes and other forms of travel. Flooding everywhere. Don't travel. By the end of the report, that's the main message and arguably one of the most vital. Well done!

All Media

BEST DIGITAL CONTENT

First Place:

WVLT's Best Digital Content from Camruinn Morgan-Rumsey

Camruinn Morgan-Rumsey

WVLT

Second Place:

Top features for KnoxTNToday

Beth Kinnane, Melanie Staten

Knox TN Today

Judges' Comments on Category: *Three excellent examples of news coverage from Camruinn Morgan-Rumsey and WVLT show versatility, effective multimedia, digital content that informs, while dealing with moving timelines and developing facts. Digital news has*

taken conventional print reporting and thrown it for a loop. The emerging and changing paradigms of digital news content are dealt with here with a good anchor on facts and detail. All three stories submitted on the policy changes for the hospital, the hold on death penalty cases, and the interactive elements used to report on causes of homelessness show a digital newsroom product that other digital news outlets can learn from. The second place stories from Melanie Staten and Beth Kinnane showed one hard news story and two very informative feature products. ALL entries here are excellent! Choosing was a challenge, as I'm sure it was a challenge for all these journalists from all these news outlets to produce these excellent digital stories. You gave the judges a real challenge. Very well done to all!!

Radio

HURRICANE HELENE IN-DEPTH COVERAGE

First Place:

Continuing Coverage of the aftermath of Hurricane Helene

WUOT News Team

WUOT

Judges' Comments: Consider me swept away. The breadth and depth of coverage by the small team at WUOT is profound. From the immediate aftermath, to the harrowing relief efforts and the inevitable politics of it all, the team traverses hundreds of miles across their coverage area to tell a complete and tragic story of Mother Nature's wrath.

All Media

CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT REPORTING

First Place:

Coal, clean and seismic energy in East Tennessee

Daniel Dassow

News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: In-depth, thorough reporting of environmental issues that uses good interviews, data and clear explanations.

Second Place:

Nolichucky River forever changed

Kimberly Harr

Johnson City Press

Judges' Comments: *A great series about the after-effects of a storm on a significant portion of the local environment. In-depth.*

Judges' Comments on Category: *RUNNERS UP: - Microplastics - 'Bears are gonna be bears': Why Gatlinburg has seen so many - and why humans are the problem*

Television

SERIES/PACKAGE/PROJECT WRITING

First Place:

Appalachian Unsolved

Jerry Owens, Tim Dale, Brittany Bailey

WBIR

Judges' Comments: *The 'Appalachian Unsolved' series at WBIR is so good it should probably be taken in manageable doses, lest one becomes addicted. Readers have been warned. From story to story, I found myself in an intoxicating journey of mystery and intrigue, confusion, hate, passion and hope. Think true crime, but with the chilling reality of these events taking place in an Appalachian community's back yard. And your back yard, probably. And mine too.*

Second Place:

MORE THAN A NUMBER

Maria Guzman

WBIR

Television

DOCUMENTARY/PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROGRAMMING

First Place:

Helene's Aftermath - 96 Hours In Asheville

William Winnett, Abby Ham, WBIR Asheville Team

WBIR

Judges' Comments: *This documentary is painful to watch. But also hope-inspiring. It displays in full effect the eternal struggle between entropy and the human will to fight it*

with order. Hurricane Helene was so unexpectedly devastating for countless individuals, as many natural disasters are, and the reporting displayed in the half an hour film shows full picture of just how bad things can get when we don't take care of our planet.

Second Place:

Strikes and Solidarity in Southwest Virginia:

Jon Chriswan, Ryan Renfro

WCYB

Newspaper (Large)**CONTINUING COVERAGE****First Place:**

After the collapse of I-40, when - and how - will the major route reopen?

Allison Kiehl, Caitie McMekin

News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: In addition to my other comments, this series of articles informed the community of the travel restrictions after Hurricane Helene. Seeing the news on TV is one thing. Reading about it in greater detail was the achievement of this series. Thanks.

Second Place:

Honeybee loses its 'hiveminds' in bizzare biz shakeup

Daniel Dassow

News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: Good to see the local community come together to help a company. The community realized how important the coffee house was to its employees and customers. It provides a story of resiliency against the odds.

Judges' Comments on Category: *It is always difficult to judge so many great entries. I wish I could award each of you a first prize. Since I cannot, I will do my best to identify the top two. Thanks!*

Newspaper (Large)**DEADLINE/BREAKING NEWS REPORTING****First Place:**

French company announces major investment in nuclear enrichment plant

Daniel Dassow

News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: *Having access to an embargoed press release and gaining information in time and in sync with the announcement of the business coming to town is not always an easy process to complete. This type of news story can be one of the most complicated ones because how such actions can influence the marketplace and investments. The page views speak to the the people who were concerned and interested in this topic. Thanks!*

Second Place:

Tennessee AG sues NCAA over NIL-recruiting ban

Adam Sparks

News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: *The NIL story is an example of a very complicated story that the reporter did a good job explaining. I imagine the reporter will consider establishing a timeline that will give a perspective to what happened involving the UT redshirted QB's interesting relationship with the university. The topic is a complicated one that is still evolving. Thanks.*

Judges' Comments on Category: *For all of the entries that I am judging, again, I would like to award each and every entry. When I did do my best to single out the top two, the articles on the new company coming to town and the NIL lawsuit from the Attorney's General office were the winners for me. Thanks.*

Newspaper (Large)

GOVERNMENT & POLITICS REPORTING

First Place:

The politics of power, from TVA to Oak Ridge National Laboratory

Daniel Dassow

News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: *The Tennessee Valley Authority and Department of Energy subject has a regional and strategic national implications. The reporter helped to keep the public informed of the project. It was great that the reporter saw the topic was not being covered by other outlets.*

Second Place:

What would Project 2025 do for education: Why the conservative plan may not sound new in Tennessee

Areena Arora
News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: *Because Project 2025's report is voluminous, it was ideal that the reporter identified a section related to the state. The information was presented in digestible portions for the reader. It will be interesting to see if the parallels between Project 2025 and the governor's education agenda continue. Thanks.*

Judges' Comments on Category: *Every entry is providing light on subjects that the public needs to know. I wish each entry could be a winner. After reviewing the entries, I selected the Tennessee Valley Authority and Project 2025 articles to be winners in this category. Thanks!*

Newspaper (Large)

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING

First Place:

A station in a shakeup, WUTK evolves while losing its leader
Keenan Thomas, Ryan Wilusz
News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: *The reporter traced the story from its beginning to its unfortunate end with the former general manager. I am glad the students have been able to resurrect or continue the radio programming. Unfortunately, accounting procedures were not communicated effectively to this university program. The reporter did a great job following the story as far as he went with it. Thanks.*

Newspaper (Large)

SERIES/PACKAGE/PROJECT WRITING

First Place:

Black in Business: The "lifeline and lifeblood" of Knoxville's Black community
Reporters: Daniel Dassow, Keenan Thomas, Devarrick Turner, Ryan Wilusz, Photographers: Hannah Mattix, Caitie McMekin, Brianna Paciorka, (Knox News editing, planning, reporting and visuals staff)
News Sentinel

Judges' Comments: *I was impressed with the depth and breadth of the reporting on*

identifying minority businesses contributing to the local economy. It shared the successes and challenges of operating a business. I believe the community appreciated the in-depth coverage. Thanks.

Second Place:

Knox County Schools promised raises for all staff. Some got just a few cents more
Areena Arora
News Sentinel

Judges' Comments on Category: *The entries merited awards and recognition for their extensive coverage. I wish each entry could receive a number one rating. I thank each applicant for the presentation and delivery of great work! Thanks.*

Best of Show

GOLDEN PRESS CARD

Continuing Coverage of the aftermath of Hurricane Helene
WUOT News Team (Jon Knowles, Pierce Gentry, Jacqui Sieber, Riley Thompson, Justin Hicks and Ryan Van Velzer)
WUOT

Judges' Comments: The depth and scope of the ongoing reporting displayed by WUOT is as impressive as it was hard-hitting and impactful. All angles were covered, and the reporters worked to highlight everything from stories of hope to the political aftermath in balanced and easy-to-digest ways. I am blown away by the level of journalistic talent displayed by the team.