

Society of Professional Journalists San Diego Pro Chapter — 2022 Journalism Awards

Below are comments the judges made on some of the award-winning entries. Judges did not provide comments for all first-place entries.

Audio — Business/Consumer Report (Single Story or Series)

First Place: “Military contractors play a hidden role in U.S. wars”

Steve Walsh (KPBS)

Comment: Fantastic and well-sourced story that highlights a pattern that the average American probably wouldn't even consider. It sheds a light on military contractors with impactful stories straight from the people affected and expert sources.

Audio — Feature Story

First Place: “An unexpected letter”

Kristy Totten, Matthew Hall and Glendon Romett (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Comment: “An unexpected letter” is a fascinating feature story that teaches the audience an invaluable lesson.

Audio — Investigative/Enterprise - Single Story

First Place: “Mission act radio”

Jill Castellano (inewssource)

Comment: “Mission act” is bold and powerful. The in-depth reporting and story shows how a powerful health institution has hurt the public. This story exemplifies why investigative, watchdog journalism matters — hold the powerful accountable, effect change.

Audio — Podcast

First Place: “‘At the expense of my life.’ Aaron Harvey’s journey from wrongful gang charges to UC Berkeley graduation”

Claire Trageser and Emily Jankowski (KPBS)

Comment: “At the expense of my life” wins for solid audio design and impeccable storytelling. Not only does this story pull at the heart strings as we learn about Aaron Harvey's struggles, the audio is a delight to listen to. Bravo.

College Media — Arts/Entertainment Story

First Place: “Immortalizing NC’s beloved photographer”

Nicolette Monique Luna (The Southwestern College Sun)

Comment: Exceptional reporting and storytelling that immortalizes Memo Cavada.

College Media — Best News Media Website

First Place: City Times Media

City Times Media staff

Comment: This website demonstrated competence in functional design and navigation for a multimedia platform: newspaper, magazine, TV/video and radio/podcast, using drop down menus and other tools to maximize space and uses.

College Media — Best Newspaper

First Place: The Southwestern College Sun

Sun staff

Comment: Good job of covering their college campus and including stories for student interest.

College Media — Column

First Place: “Journey for justice”

Julia Woock (The Southwestern College Sun)

Comment: Powerful and provocative, Julia Woock's words combines prose with poetry to force a reaction to the tales of human suffering; compelling change within her audience hearts, so in turn there may be change for the vulnerable people in harm's way. Exceptional entries for column category.

College Media — Feature Photo

First Place: “Heaven help day laborers”

Julia Woock (The Southwestern College Sun)

Comment: The photo by Julia Woock is clear and to the point on church and community assistance given to local day laborers. Good hook for the reader to find out more.

College Media — Feature Story

First Place: “Chicano activist powered by paint”

Julia Woock (The Southwestern College Sun)

Comment: Lots of sources and interviews make this informative, interesting to read. Very mature storytelling, from lead to end, about a subject beyond college life.

College Media — In-Depth Reporting Story

First Place: “Haitians flood Tijuana”

Camila Gonzalez (The Southwestern College Sun)

Comment: Impressive writing, researching. The quotes really enhance and advance this heart-wrenching story.

College Media — Layout & Design (Story or Series)

First Place: “What’s in a name?”

Camila Gonzalez (The Southwestern College Sun)

Comment: Strong focal points or center of visual impact supported with ample white space, photographs and art to pull the reader through the multi-page presentation.

College Media — News or Feature Series (Any Subject)

First Place: “Holtville series”

Julia Woock (The Southwestern College Sun)

Comment: Julia Woock's work is incredibly impressive for student submissions: The reporting and writing are fantastic. I see she shot her own photos as well. Going on assignment truly gave her the leg up in this competition.

College Media — News Photo

First Place: “Unto dust you shall return”

Julia Woock (The Southwestern College Sun)

Comment: Strong feature capturing an emotional and powerful news moment.

College Media — Newscast

First Place: “Newscene, Dec. 1 edition”

CTTV/Newscene Staff (City Times Media)

Comment: It was hard to believe this was a student run news production. Everything was professionally presented. The editing for sound and video were excellent. The reporting was exemplary. Even the transitions and banter was seamless. Well done. These students have careers ahead of them.

College Media — Original Illustration or Cartoon

First Place: “Stop Asian hate”

Ji Ho Kim (The Southwestern College Sun)

Comment: Effective illustrations showing depth to pull the reader into the packaging of the story. Good use of color to move the eye through the illustration.

College Media — Sports Story

First Place: “Southwestern 1, Yankees 0”

Andrew Sanchez (The Southwestern College Sun)

Comment: The author did an excellent job of going back in history to explore a fateful decision made decades ago. Well-researched and well-composed. Professional level of writing.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Arts/Entertainment Story

First Place: “Arts + Culture section: My last gig”

George Varga (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Comment: "My last gig" offers readers an unexpected angle about the impact of the pandemic on the performing arts industry. The extraordinary collection of stories featuring the firsthand point-of-view of some of the impacted performing artists tug at the readers' heart strings. Bravo.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Business Story

First Place: “Concerns linger over a secretive Texas company that owns the largest share of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline”

David Hasemyer (InsideClimate News)

Comment: The reporter writes with authority and dives deeper into the secretive Hilcorp. This sentence sums up why this reporting matters. — "Experts, environmental advocates and residents worry the aging pipeline, which went into operation in 1977, will likely become even more vulnerable to disasters in the years ahead, as the financial stability of the pipeline grows more uncertain." — The story is digestible and fascinating. Solid reporting.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Education Story

First Place: “A new window into how San Diego schools are performing”

Will Huntsberry (Voice of San Diego)

Comment: What is a test worth? It's a question that's been asked for years. Will Huntsberry does an excellent job of trying to provide the answers in this two-parter.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Environment Story

First Place: “Heat deaths”

Zoë Meyers and Kate Sequiera (inewssource)

Comment: The authors use colorful imagery, human experiences, hard data and accountability reporting to highlight the issue of heat deaths and the factors behind their increasing prevalence.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Feature Story

First Place: “Two San Diego pastors are lost to the coronavirus, and the grief extends across the border”

Kate Morrissey and Alejandro Tamayo (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Comment: This was such a powerful and important story. The extensive amount of reporting shows.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Food Story

First Place: “‘It’s like a war,’ San Diego restaurateur says of struggle to find workers”

Lori Weisberg (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Comment: Journalistically, this was the best entry in this category. The author interviewed multiple restaurant owners and provided data and context making this a food story that isn't a review.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Health Story

First Place: “Sharp doctor learns firsthand the importance of catching colorectal cancer early”

Beth Wood (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Comment: An excellent story that is sure to have readers thinking twice about skipping an upcoming colonoscopy! Featuring the firsthand experience of a doctor turned patient lends added credibility to this incredibly important topic. The story drove home the importance of early detection, and sadly, how deadly colorectal cancer can be if diagnosed and/or treated too late. Leaving the reader with common disease symptoms helps to remind them that the disease may be preventable with timely screenings. Great job!

Daily Reporting and Writing — Housing/Development Story

First Place: “Fire insurance”

Camille von Kaenel (inewssource)

Comment: Great example of "news you can use" journalism that makes good use of data and data visualization. This is a major issue facing California as a whole that only stands to get worse, so this piece will be a good resource for residents and hopefully enact change.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Investigative/Enterprise Story (Series)

First Place: “‘Volunteer’ city real estate guru got paid millions”

Lisa Halverstadt (Voice of San Diego)

Comment: The judges weighed these great entries on the following criteria: enterprise, doggedness, courage, writing, impact, innovation and revelation. This series blew us away, especially in its doggedness, courage and revelation. The attention to detail, and explication of a highly questionable deal, were astounding. The reporter's initial curiosity and skepticism — and willingness to invest the time — are what leads to great journalism. Kudos.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Investigative/Enterprise Story (Single Subject)

First Place: “Mission act”

Jill Castellano (inewssource)

Comment: We judged this contest on courage, doggedness, innovation, revelation, enterprise, writing and impact. This project was a fantastic work of journalism.

Daily Reporting and Writing — News Feature Story

First Place: “A completely broken behavioral health system”

Teri Figueroa and Gary Warth (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Comment: The story of Steven Olson could have easily ended with headlines about his death and criminal history, but the reporters took time to understand who Olson was beyond his struggles, and to research the larger issues in a system that failed him.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Opinion/Editorial

First Place: “I was babysitting my friend’s children on 9/11. I never asked them what they recall until now.”

Laura Castaneda (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Comment: Harrowing recollection on the events of 9/11, especially with the ethical dilemma of what to do when taking care of small children who were not her own. Well written question on how does one handled that? Her explanations why she made the choices she made serve as good guidelines for an opinion/editorial. After speaking with them 20 years later on what they remember, she is validated she made the right choice.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Political/Government Story

First Place: “Series: Secret police funding committee no longer operating in secret after LPSD lawsuit”
Arturo Castañares (La Prensa San Diego)

Comment: This series shows how a diligent review of publicly available documents can reveal shadowy stories hidden in plain sight.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Review/Criticism

First Place: “Rubén Blades: Salswing!”
Jim Trageser (All About Jazz)

Comment: A music review written with authority — the author clearly knows his Big Band music — as well as the same flair that Ruben Blades and Co. showed on the album.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Sports Story

First Place: “Encinitas teen ready to run at Tokyo Paralympics”
Alexander Nguyen (KPBS)

Comment: Stories on the Paralympics tend to be overwrought, which is actually condescending. Here, Nguyen treats his lead subject as an adult, and the reader as one, too.

Digital — Blog

First Place: “Cannabitch”
Jackie Bryant

Comment: Colorful, expressive (sometimes hilarious, other times heart-breaking), well-written blog about lobsters, bonsai and other general thoughts with weed. Bryant’s pacing and descriptions captivate the reader, taking us on a journey. Every step of that journey is enticing, so we cannot wait to take the next step. Her prose is intelligent, sophisticated, probably cannabis-induced genius. If smoking a bowl is the secret to her success, then we should all be doing it.

Digital — Social Media Personality

First Place: “Dana Williams — multiplatform reporter”
Dana Williams (NBC 7 San Diego)

Comment: Informative, witty and compelling — strong balance of professionalism and ability to relate personally to your audience. Great work!

Digital — Social Media Storytelling

First Place: “That vaccinated feeling: San Diegans react to getting their second dose”
Dana Williams and Mark Leimbach (NBC 7 San Diego)

Comment: Loved this reporter's series of entries — but this one in particular was my favorite because the bite-sized interviews are a perfect way to keep people's attention on social media. It felt like a perfect fit for social media instead of just a TV story reposted as is.

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Arts/Entertainment Story

First Place: ““The next comic coming to the stage has a vagina””
Ombretta Di Dio (AwkwardSD)

Comment: Needless to say, this isn't a typical winner in this category — and that has nothing to do with the headline. It has everything to do with the introspective first-person approach that still involves multi-sourcing. This could've been a whining screed, but instead, it's a self-deprecating (the writer's word) lesson. You're smarter and more sensitive having read this.

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Business Story

First Place: “Goodbye, Sunshine: Iconic Encinitas business to close after 50 years”
Charlene Pulsonetti (North Coast Current)

Comment: Local businesses are more than just a business — they're people in the community. This story does a great job highlighting the people in this business and giving us wonderful details about their relationship with the community.

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Crime/Courts Story

First Place: “Asian Americans experience pandemic with a side of hate”
Sylvia Mendoza (Respect)

Comment: Sylvia Mendoza wrote a well-written informative article using creative prose. Her work was well researched with supportive documentation, legal experts, legal statutes, statistics and history. She included strong use of sidebars for further supportive historic landmark case material.

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Education Story

First Place: “Students at Poway Unified have new Japanese language and culture program”
Regina Elling (Poway News Chieftain)

Comment: Language classes are about more than language alone, and this article captures that reality by offering perspectives from students, teachers and administrators.

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Environmental Story

First Place: “The wine bottle dilemma: The environmental impact of a bottle”
Elena Gomez and Heidi Greenwood (Campestmag)

Comment: Excellent package (copy and illustrations) — compelling way to tell an environmental story and truly connect to your audience.

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Feature Story

First Place: “Homeless Court: A helping hand for those trying to escape legal quicksand”
Ron Donoho (San Diego Sun)

Comment: Feature stories aren't a synonym for happy stories. They can tackle serious issues, even the newsiest of topics. This is Exhibit A for a feature approach to a news story.

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Health Story

First Place: “Personal stories from San Diego nurses on the front line”
Jennifer McEntee (San Diego Magazine)

Comment: This submission did an excellent job of portraying the new reality facing San Diego-area nurses as a result of COVID-19. In fact, many of these stories spoke to the broader impact of COVID-19, as seen through the eyes of specific nurses who are treating COVID patients. Details on how COVID has changed the lives and lifestyles of the nurses featured (as well as patients and their families) enriched the reader's understanding. For example, learning that nurse Michael Manriquez normally would have "played basketball with friends" or "taken the kids to the zoo" in his off-duty, down-time — but now had to get creative and find new ways to cope at home (as a result of COVID shutdowns) — made the story even more relatable to the average reader. Another incredibly important topic addressed in this story was the impact on nurses when the public does not adhere to recommended healthcare protocols. The quote from nurse Kristin Wagner ("It's such a dagger to our souls to have the public doubt us.") was very powerful and really encapsulated some very difficult challenges facing healthcare professionals. I felt it was beneficial to the reader's understanding to make the distinction between challenges facing nurses that are from the illness itself, vs. challenges they have had to deal with due to public attitudes and behaviors. Finally, the additional sidebar information about the nursing profession (i.e. about nursing salaries, nursing education programs, etc.) was an outstanding addition to this series of specific, frontline stories. All in all, superb reporting and exceptional writing!

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Investigative/Enterprise Story (Single Subject)

First Place: “Wellfield Park playground closed over safety hazards, trash and transient issues, officials say”

Julie Gallant (Ramona Sentinel)

Comment: This is a fine report on an important matter, namely the safety of children in the city parks. The writer did a fair job obtaining information and points of view from both sides.

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Political/Government Story

First Place: “RB's Azucar Way residents are tired of waiting for promised street repair”

Elizabeth Marie Himchak (Rancho Bernardo News Journal)

Comment: When a news outlet's reporting improved a daily aspect of people's lives, that's good journalism. In the future, please make sure to include follow-up stories in your entry showing the impact of your reporting.

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Series

First Place: “La Jolla Heroines series”

Elisabeth Frausto (La Jolla Light)

Comment: Highly informative and well-researched series that highlights local women who have worked to further the evolution of La Jolla and area beyond. Done in Q&A format with narration for all five profiled with excellent questions and follow through. I felt as if I had the chance to get to know all five women personally, and I was very impressed. Great work.

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Sports Story

First Place: “Latina Golfers Association: One woman’s quest to level the playing field”

Sylvia Mendoza (Hispanic Outlook on Education)

Comment: Interesting and enlightening take on a rare topic — the effort to get more Latina women involved in golf. Well researched and written. Covers all angles.

Photography/Headlines — Feature Photo

First Place: “Hair raising fun”

Thomas Melville (Peninsula Beacon)

Comment: Nice action when working with the rule of thirds. A fun photo.

Photography/Headlines — Headline

First Place: “Scott headline compilation”

Peggy Scott (San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance)

Comment: Clever words to work with the photographs.

Photography/Headlines — News Photo

First Place: “Police clear our farmworker encampment near border”

Zoë Meyers (inewssource)

Comment: Captured an important news moment with dignity to all.

Photography/Headlines — Photo Essay

First Place: “Scenes from Calexico: Farmworkers and life on the border”

Zoë Meyers (inewssource)

Comment: Compelling images that tell a story on the harsh but necessary conditions of encampment for farmworkers on a small piece of land alongside the U.S.-Mexico border wall. Without it, the Mexican farmworkers would experience even harsher commutes to and from work. Photos are editorial; journalistic art.

Video — Investigative/Enterprise (Series)

First Place: “Drugs, death and foster care”

Adam Racusin and Geoff Stevens (KGTV 10News ABC San Diego)

Comment: Scary situation in California's foster care system. This investigation brings these issues to light.

Video — Investigative/Enterprise (Single Story)

First Place: “Sex assaults inside a SoCal psychiatric hospital”

Jennifer Kastner (KGTV 10News ABC San Diego)

Comment: Good information about a troubling loophole in which troubled male and female psychiatric patients are not segregated. Hopefully, this investigation will help bring about change.

Special Awards

First Amendment Award

“San Diego Police use force most often in neighborhoods south of Interstate 8”

Claire Trageser, Nic McVicker and Michael Wayne (KPBS)

Comment: This is a superb use of data combined with storytelling. Very thorough, very visual, very compelling. An engrossing multimedia experience for the reader/viewer/listener. This a tangible, deep dive into an often intangible, hard-to-prove topic. The team's dogged research and journalistic persistence paid off.

Gloria Penner Award for Political Affairs Reporting

“Ash Street scandal roils City Hall”

Jeff McDonald (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Comment: This exhaustively thorough series shed light on a botched real-estate deal, endorsed by the highest levels of city government, that so far has cost taxpayers at least \$60 million for a 19-story high rise that cannot be safely occupied. Stunning revelations in each story made this the news story of 2021, and new details continue to emerge. Local investigative journalism at its finest.

Neil Morgan Community Impact Award

“Mission act”

Jill Castellano (inewsourc)

Comment: Stellar work that is thoroughly reported, sensitive and skillfully written. Inewsourc exemplifies investigative journalism at its highest level. Neil Morgan was a voice for underdogs and a strong supporter of veterans. He would have loved this outstanding series.

Sol Price Award for Responsible Journalism

“Death of a migrant”

David Hernandez, Wendy Fry, Kristina Davis and Alejandro Tamayo (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Comment: This is breathtaking work on a critical subject so many American journalists get wrong. The reporters and photojournalists showed uncommon sensitivity by following the bodies of dead migrants back home for burial by grieving families. Immigration reporting is often too much cold data and not enough humanity. This was coverage at its most human.

Diversity Prize

“Accountability reporting in communities of color”

Jennifer Bowman (inewsourc)

Comment: Well-researched stories bringing light to challenges faced by traditionally marginalized communities.

Top Awards

2022 Distinguished Coverage Award

“Race, sports and schools. Issues of identity roil local campuses”

Kristen Taketa (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Comment: Great reporting by Kristen Taketa on race in school sports. She captured the emotionally charged incidents and aftermath and educated audiences about the conflicts in schools today.

2022 Excellence in Journalism Award

“Walled off”

Kate Morrissey and Alejandro Tamayo (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Comment: As readers, we were taken to the front lines — making it impossible for this to be “out of sight, out of mind”; we cannot underestimate the amount of commitment, dedication and danger it took to tell these stories — the team was physically THERE, walking in their subjects’ footsteps and putting a human face to a human rights crisis. Incredibly nuanced and moving storytelling.