

Society of Professional Journalists San Diego Pro Chapter
2023 Journalism Awards

The judges were asked to make comments on the award-winning entries. A comment was not provided for all winners. Below are the comments provided.

Audio — Feature Series

First Place: “The Miramar Air Show: ‘Fight, Evolve, Win’”

Phil Farrar and Charles Newton (KOGO)

A Sonic Spectacle of a series featuring colorful, descriptive writing, appropriate ambient sound, audible interviews acquired under challenging conditions, local focus, and information updated consistently for the half-million anticipated spectators. Phil "lands" this one.

Second Place: “Child care providers are a casualty of California’s transitional kindergarten”

Claire Trageser (KPBS)

The very sound of love and concern for the health, safety, well-being and development of young children and their families. The series features solid reporting of financial aspects of transitional kindergarten, but Trageser brings the VOICES of moms and educators to communicate the heart of the stories.

Audio — Investigative/Enterprise (Series)

Two well-reported, well-told stories of coping during the COVID crisis. The contrasting responses of those who enlighten and entertain us, and among SOME of those who protect us, is striking.

First Place: “Questions raised over similarities in San Diego Police Department requests for COVID-19 vaccine exemptions”

Claire Trageser and Katy Stegall (KPBS)

Trageser & Co., make good use of the audio-medium to report about some law-enforcement officers who attempt to skirt the law by making clumsy claims of obedience to a "Higher Authority."

Second Place: “Two years of performance in the COVID-19 pandemic: 3-part series”

Julia Dixon Evans and Emilyn Mohebbi (KPBS)

Audio — Investigative/Enterprise (Single Story)

First Place: “More San Diegans could enter mental health conservatorships. But the system is already struggling”

Jennifer Bowman (inewssource)

A compelling narrative; good interviews and field-reporting.

Second Place: “Police discrimination cases are now public records, but few released by San Diego County departments”

Claire Trageser (KPBS)

Trageser brings multiple voices and perspectives to this report, and raises questions about the spirit, enforcement, and effectiveness of well-meaning legislation.

Audio — News

First Place: “A tenant was killed. Employees weren’t surprised.”

Cody Dulaney (inewssource)

Well reported and presented report.

Audio — Newscast

First Place: “5:00 News with Phil Farrar”

Phil Farrar (KOGO)

An exemplary holiday newscast, featuring Farrar anchoring many program-elements, audio sources and transitions among global, national and local stories. Good pacing, strong writing, and appropriate tone.

Audio — Podcast

First Place: “Happy Half Hour”

Troy Johnson and David Martin (San Diego Magazine)

The "Happy Half Hour" entries are each generous servings of sweet, tart, and sometimes salty conversation. The ingredients include intelligence, knowledge, and grand dollops of humor.

Delicious, satisfying, and fun.

Audio — Sports Story

First Place: “Game on: Pickleball battles San Diego for space in the kitchen”

Claire Trageser (KPBS)

A Dill-y (sorry!) This comprehensive report explores the phenomenon of pickleball; including the origin of the sport, gear, demographics, court-dimensions ...and social dimensions. Trageser is also a cool cucumber while recording and analyzing a heated encounter among pickleballers and tennis enthusiasts who compete for municipal courts and resources.

College Media — Best News Media Website

First Place: “City Times Media”

San Diego City College staff

City Times had an easy to find stories layout with the most up to date stories prominently featured.

College Media — Best Newspaper

All the entries were impressive in their writing skill, layout and design, and execution. Each took on bold stories and topics, and showed creative ways of engaging and informing their readers.

Choosing a winner was extremely difficult. Well done to all who submitted.

First Place: “The Southwestern College Sun”

Southwestern College Sun staff

From front to back this paper was well put together and engaging. It looked professional and high quality. It’s a valuable resource for the community at large and the school.

College Media — Column

First Place: “Chicanisma”

Nicolette Monique Luna (The Southwestern College Sun)

The writer handled compelling subjects with style and grace.

College Media — Feature Photo

First Place: “No home in this world”

Esteban Preciado (The Southwestern College Sun)

A well-framed and utterly heartbreaking portrait. There is so much information and feeling conveyed in a single moment and subject. Photos like this inspire the phrase of such being "worth a thousand words."

College Media — Feature Story

All of the articles submitted in the competition were well written and told great stories.

Everybody who entered should be proud of their work.

First Place: “We must never forget”

Nicolette Monique Luna (The Southwestern College Sun)

Tells the beautiful, personal and interesting stories of Holocaust survivors. It sucks you in from the first paragraph and doesn't let go. The article is supplemented by interesting facts and old photos that flesh out these survivors and their families even further. It also perfectly weaves in the unfortunate reality of the conversations surrounding the Holocaust and the state of antisemitism in the country today, and continues those conversations by amplifying important voices.

Second Place: “Tribe adapts to increased temperatures, drought to preserve cultural roots”

Aurora Slaughter (SDSU Journalism School)

A great piece of journalism examining how the global issue of climate change impacts a Native American population. The article is able to express the tragedy of the population's history and the continuing struggles to preserve its culture, while also capturing a hopeful tone in the survival and resilience of the people leading them through it all.

Third Place: “Letting their hair down”

Diego Higuera (The Southwestern College Sun)

A great, well-written business feature that highlights the importance of inclusivity in a business industry that tends to serve people through a gender-binary lens.

College Media — Headline Writing

First Place: “Acknowledging a tragic history and other headlines”

Nicolette Monique Luna (The Southwestern College Sun)

Clever writing.

College Media — In-Depth Reported Story

First Place: “Rosarito: Paradise under attack”

Camila A. Gonzalez (The Southwestern College Sun)

Beautifully written story about a complex environmental problem.

Second Place: “No home in this world”

Esteban Preciado (The Southwestern College Sun)

Well-written and thorough examination of the homeless problem.

Third Place: “Contrary to popular belief, litter and encampments are not as bad a threat to the health of San Diego beaches as old sewage systems are”

Justin Cox (SDSU Journalism School)

A well reported and written examination of a persistent and serious environmental problem.

College Media — Multicultural Story

Third Place: “City College celebrates its first ‘Lavender Graduation’ ceremony”

Jakob McWhinney (City Times)

Forward-thinking & progressive piece!!

College Media — News Photo

First Place: “Monumental struggle”

Ailyn Dumas (The Southwestern College Sun)

Context, creativity and color come together to tell a story of massive importance. Bravo to the photog!

College Media — News Series

First Place: “Student homelessness”

Liliana Anguiano (The Southwestern College Sun)

This is important and fantastic reporting on an issue that often doesn't get the attention it deserves. Bravo!

Second Place: “The knowledge industry”

Jakob McWhinney and Philip Salata (City Times Media)

Nice work on an issue that impacts many students and potential students.

Third Place: “The UAW Academic Union workers strike”

Niloufar Shahbandi, Tianrui Huang and Kaitlin Lee (UCSD Guardian)

Great work. I liked how you included bullet points of the issue at hand. It's a great and smart way to break it down for readers.

College Media — News Story

First Place: “SDSU mum on rape charges”

Han Psalma and Camila A. Gonzalez (The Southwestern College Sun)

The timeline really helps to contextualize the story for readers who haven't followed the case.

College Media — Newscast

First Place: “Palomar News – Ep.113”

Reina Leftwick, Patrick Shartzter, Kyle Patton, Joseph Serrata and Raelle Vargas
(Palomar News)

Great work. Looks professional! Bravo.

Second Place: “CTTV Newscene”

CTTV Staff (City Times Media)

Nice work and good content. Keep it up!

Third Place: “The Daily Aztec Live! Nov. 30, 2022”

Mackenzie Stafford and Flower Smith (The Daily Aztec)

Good work including local headlines that students will be sure to want to catch.

College Media — Opinion/Editorial

First Place: “Racists co-opt First Amendment”

Camila A. Gonzalez (The Southwestern College Sun)

Each essay is an eloquent, well-supported, impassioned declaration of commitment to providing reliable information, necessary or making informed, reliable decisions.

Third Place: “Surfers as modern-day transcendentalists”

Steve Anderson (The Point)

A thoughtful exercise about individuality within society and nature.

College Media — Original Illustration or Cartoon

First Place: “Blame game”

Alicia Rivero (The Southwestern College Sun)

An effective depiction of the swirl of comments and judgement confronted by too many victims of assault.

Second Place: “Come back when normal”

Ji Ho Kim (The Southwestern College Sun)

The illustrator challenges viewers to regard the eyes of one who is the target of (ignorant) rejection and exclusion.

Third Place: “There’s always beer”

Ji Ho Kim (The Southwestern College Sun)

An ARTIST uses simple lines to illustrate a sudden shift from hopeful idealism to sad cynicism when confronted by "health" policy. And is the student-subject of drinking age?

College Media — Photo Essay

First Place: “Mexico’s women demand change”

Ailyn Dumas (The Southwestern College Sun)

This is truly an astonishing photo essay. Incredible action photos, excellent variety of images that tell a critical, too-often-overlooked story.

Second Place: “No home in this world”

Esteban Preciado (The Southwestern College Sun)

Brilliant photography here that speaks to grit of the streets and the struggle to survive. Truly outstanding work.

Third Place: “Wonderfront music festival rocks San Diego”

Ethan Karlin (The Daily Aztec)

This photographer did an excellent job of capturing the emotion of this concert in vibrant color. Great work!

College Media — Review/Criticism

First Place: “Review: Native American cast revitalizes Predator franchise with ‘Prey’”

Noah Lyons (The Daily Aztec)

This was a well-written review. It gives a great synopsis without giving away spoilers and has a good amount of personal touches to it. Nicely done.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Arts/Entertainment Story (Performing Arts)

First Place: “Gone, but not forgotten: San Diego’s five best concert venues you can no longer visit”

George Varga (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Nicely written and interesting nostalgia piece.

Second Place: “Is 1972 the best year ever for great albums? From Aretha and Stevie to Bowie and the Stones, quite possibly”

George Varga (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Interesting analysis and convincing argument.

Third Place: “From Oceanside to the open road: Kimmi Bitter’s musical journey”

Charlene Pulsonetti (North Coast Current)

Nicely reported and written profile.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Arts/Entertainment Story (Visual Arts)

First Place: “‘Park Social’ to bring art to San Diego parklands”

Julia Dixon Evans (KPBS)

This is a nicely written piece with great visuals of the art installation. Nicely done.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Breaking News Story

First Place: “Murders of journalists spur marches in Mexico”

Tania Navarro (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Thorough and well-written coverage of a huge problem for Mexican journalists and democracy in their country.

Second Place: “Ukrainian family fleeing Russian invasion turned away from U.S. border”

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

Well reported and written story about questionable behavior by first responders in a crisis situation.

Third Place: “Heroic bystander and deputies save drowning woman at Lindo Lake”

Miriam Raftery and Shiloh Ireland (East County Magazine)

Well reported and thorough story about a controversial case with huge public interest.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Business Story

What a great category to judge! So many high-level entries made this challenging.

First Place: “‘She was on top of the world’: The rise and fall of San Diego’s largest Ponzi schemer”

Lori Weisberg, Greg Moran and Adriana Heldiz (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

This series exemplifies the standards of investigative reporting. It’s solid all around — the research, the context, the fact-checking and editing, all with a compelling writing style that keeps the reader engaged. Congratulations on a job well done.

Second Place: “As life science grows, small businesses scramble for space in Sorrento Valley and Sorrento Mesa”

Natallie Rocha (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

An interesting and well-sourced story that speaks to the importance of business journalism and creates value for the business community and consumer-reader alike.

Third Place: “Want to work at an office but can’t find child care in San Diego? These moms have a solution”

Natallie Rocha (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

This was a fun, interesting, and very useful piece!

Daily Reporting and Writing — Column

First Place: “Fine city”

Jesse Marx (Voice of San Diego)

Compelling journalism. Tackles big issues from the perspective of people whose lives are impacted: struggling sanitation workers on strike, mobile home owners confronting the reality of a tenuous living situation at the mercy of park owners, causes and impacts of voter apathy. Clear prose, great style, perfect cadence. Also, excellent photos by the columnist. Jesse Marx nails it.

Second Place: “Tania Navarro’s column”

Tania Navarro (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Navarro brings her experience as a bi-national journalist moving between two very different worlds to life with her columns about coping with — and reporting on — the violent deaths of two former journalist colleagues in Mexico. Two very impactful pieces balanced with a column about holiday traditions in her native culture. Really good work.

Third Place: “The Old World (of textbooks) is dying, and the New World (of textbooks) hasn’t arrived” “Walking the Red Road — How cultural education has encouraged a culture of educating” “Chula Vista already had community schools — nearly 50 years ago”

Jakob McWhinney (Voice of San Diego)

Lots of detail and context. Clear writing. McWhinney engages the reader quickly and does not disappoint. Well done.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Criminal Justice Story

First Place: “What happened after the city cracked down on homeless camps”

Lisa Halverstadt (Voice of San Diego)

This story describes the important intersection between criminal justice and housing. The story complicates the narrative that sees housing insecurity as a contributor to criminal activity, while identifying policy that criminalizes homelessness.

Second Place: “A small court with a big mission: A second chance for criminals with mental illness”

Teri Figueroa and Morgan Cook (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

A story that identifies a clear response to a problem of the way mental health is handled in the criminal justice system.

Third Place: “Stopped by police in San Diego? A lot depends on where you live, drive”

Greg Moran, Lyndsay Winkley and Lauryn Schroeder (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Data visualizations make for an engaging and interactive storytelling of what it means to be stopped by police — depending on who you are.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Education Story

First Place: “Hundreds of San Diego Unified students could need special education. Many wait months for access”

Andrea Figueroa Briseño (inewssource)

This is an extremely important story. It's happening in many places across the country. This writer is to be commended for the depth of the work and the engaging way it is written.

Second Place: “The messy road to bring a bachelor’s degree to San Diego City College”

Jakob McWhinney and Philip Salata (Voice of San Diego)

Interesting story that brings a lot of light to a relatable but complex subject.

Third Place: “San Diego Unified flagged for unfair discipline toward Black special education students”

Andrea Figueroa Briseño (inewssource)

Great story. Hits hard.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Environment Story

First Place: “Crossing Imperial County’s open desert, migrants increasingly find death”

Sofia Mejías-Pascoe (inewssource)

Desperate migrants, U.S. border policy, climate change combine to produce deadly result along California border region. Very well-done. Good reporting, clear writing, good structure.

Second Place: “Honeybees, consumers face threat from mite-fighting pesticides”

J.W. August (North Coast Current)

Interesting and well-researched account of how some of the pesticides that are decimating the honeybee population are being smuggled across the U.S. Southern border.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Feature Story (Light Subject)

All of the entries were incredibly well written and enjoyable to read. It was tough to come up with only three to honor with awards, and everyone who entered should be proud of their work.

First Place: “Amid the Comic-Con crowds, one group of teen artists looked for validation - and found it”

Blake Nelson (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Excellent writing and reporting to tell the necessary story of up-and-coming young comic book artists. Stood out among the rest of the competition.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Feature Story (Serious Subject)

All of the articles submitted in the competition were well written and told incredibly important stories. It was tough to choose the winners. Everybody who entered should be proud of their work.

First Place: “A voice message in a laundromat, and a rebirth across the border. One trans woman’s journey to U.S. soil”

Kate Morrissey and Ana Ramirez (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

This article brilliantly told a hopeful story about the struggle and perseverance of a trans woman crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. The reporting effectively captures the emotional journey of its subject, while also shining a light on the realities and human impact of the Title 42 policy.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Food Story

First Place: “This San Diegan’s BBQ sauce earned a spot in grocery stores across SoCal. But it wasn’t easy getting there”

Natalie Rocha (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

The piece on the barbecue is well written and held my attention. Nicely done.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Government Story

Hard-hitting journalism at every level of government.

First Place: “Developers paid \$1.8B to San Diego communities, but few reap benefits”

Crystal Niebla (inewsourc)

Engaging data visualization combined with strong narrative and images highlight the disconnect between development funding intended for community growth and how money is spent in affected neighborhoods.

Second Place: “The U.S. sends millions to Mexico for migrants. Tijuana shelters ask where it’s going.”

Sofia Mejías-Pascoe (inewsourc)

An informative dialogue of U.S.-Mexico relations unfolding locally. The ties to the San Diego community are striking in a way that transcends borders.

Third Place: “Encinitas City Council unanimously sacks Planning Commission chairman”

Roman S. Koenig (North Coast Current)

Real local journalism with deep impact, this story describes the frustrating intersection of planning and politics.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Health Story

First Place: “Chula Vista mother fought to get her ‘little warrior’s’ rare disease diagnosis confirmed”

Lauren J. Mapp (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

“Chula Vista Mother...” is a remarkable, skillful use of science, simile and story-telling.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Housing Insecurity Story

First Place: “‘These people do heroic work.’ Outreach workers refuse to give up on the homeless”

Kelly Davis (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Engaging, informative, and impactful storytelling. This story actually feels like two distinct stories woven into one — there is hope, but still so much work left to do.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Housing/Development Story

First Place: “San Diego officials said rural homes were safe from fires. They were listening to developers”

Camille von Kaenel (inewsourc)

Well reported and written examination of why so many houses were built in fire prone areas.

Good public service.

Second Place: “Why is San Diego falling so far behind on housing? Here are a few reasons”

Cody Dulaney (inewsourc)

A good detailed look at a serious urban problem. Well written.

Third Place: “UCSD students fight for a voice in University City zoning debate”

Andrew Bowen (KPBS)

A strong localization of a national urban problem.

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

First Place: “Eviction series: Who gets to live on Bermuda Avenue?”

Roxana Popescu (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Well reported and well written comprehensive look at a major urban problem effectively localized for readers.

Second Place: “Veterans Village investigation”

Jill Castellano (inewssource)

Well reported and written story with good follow-up.

Third Place: “Active-duty service members are dying by suicide at alarming rates”

Will Huntsberry (Voice of San Diego)

Nice localization of a serious national problem.

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

First Place: “Docs: City officials knew ‘volunteer’ real estate guru wanted compensation”

Lisa Halverstadt (Voice of San Diego)

Wow - corruption on display here. Seems like there’s even more to be told about what actually went on. Corrupt real estate broker paid off by developer to get city to sign two lucrative leases with developer, when he was supposedly working as a — volunteer — real estate advisor to the city. Turns out some city officials knew of his undisclosed deal with developer. Who else got paid?? Great job digging this out.

Second Place: “Requesting asylum is supposed to be free. But corruption in Tijuana means many have to pay”

Kate Morrissey (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Important story that sheds light on danger and corruption faced by asylum seekers at the border. An excellent read.

Third Place: “County health clinics turn away undocumented San Diegans without IDs, advocates say”

Sofia Mejías-Pascoe (inewssource)

Dumb bureaucracy or maybe something worse setting up roadblocks for people who want to get the COVID-19 vaccine but are prevented for lack of photo ID. This reporting obviously had impact.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Multicultural Story

First Place: “As part of cultural revitalization, Kumeyaay community celebrates launch of 50 tule boats”

Lauren J. Mapp (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

This is a beautifully written piece on the return of tule boat making. It follows a closely honed narrative with rich descriptive detail that brings out the cultural heritage behind this practice. The piece is accompanied by a wonderful photo essay that allows the reader to see firsthand this important tradition.

Second Place: “DJ, producer and UCSD ‘Blacktronika’ creator King Britt does it all: ‘He’s had so much impact on so many’”

George Varga (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

This is a wonderful portrait of a professor who, in a short time, has contributed immensely to his students’ understanding of Black culture in America through his “Blacktronika” course.

Third Place: “Kumeyaay tribal members want tipis at Lake Cuyamaca campground removed”
Lauren J. Mapp (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

This piece is a critical look at the wrongs of cultural appropriation, particularly for-profit appropriation. Excellent work.

Daily Reporting and Writing — News Story

First Place: “Media, legislators sound alarm on law enforcement radio encryption”
J.W. August (North Coast Current)

Important story that might seem like inside baseball to readers but has important government transparency implications.

Second Place: “Why are cops leaving the San Diego Police Department? City sees biggest spike since 2009”

Lyndsay Winkley (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

A well-written and thorough examination of an issue with serious public safety implications.

Third Place: “For reporter, ‘The press was her family’”

Tania Navarro (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Well written and nicely detailed story on the problems the media faces in Mexico.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Opinion/Editorial

First Place: “Don’t look up global warming...”

Chris Reed (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

A compelling segue from an existential threat to U.S. democracy to the threat to our existence posed by climate change. Reed describes how ideological inconsistencies (and greed) endanger us all.

Second Place: “Education can’t solve poverty alone, but it should do its part”

Will Huntsberry (Voice of San Diego)

A journalist closes a chapter on his term covering the education beat by reminding: segregation + poverty = poorly-performing schools.

Third Place: “Video games don’t undermine society”

Chris Reed (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

A seldom-considered case FOR video gaming: creating cogs for capitalism. An interesting observation, well-stated and supported.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Profile

First Place: “Who was Thomas Moreno?”

Shiloh Ireland (East County Magazine)

This was beautifully done. It has great visuals - and the in-depth reporting is spot on.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Review/Criticism

First Place: “Olivia Rodrigo gives fans one Shell of a time at sold-out San Diego debut concert”
George Varga (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

This review draws an interesting contrast between two pop superstars of different decades visiting the same city for performances the same night.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Science/Technology Story

First Place: “ICE uses cellphones to track thousands in San Diego, Imperial counties”

Sofia Mejías-Pascoe (inewssource)

An important look at the potential hazards of SmartLINK.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Series

First Place: “Jail deaths”

Kelly Davis (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Well written and reported stories raising serious questions about how inmates with mental health problems are handled in jail.

Second Place: “Conservatorships”

Jennifer Bowman (inewssource)

Well written and reported story on a little-known issue with serious consequences.

Third Place: “SDSU gang-rape investigation”

Teri Figueroa and Lyndsay Winkley (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Well reported and written examination of the problems of prosecuting rape cases.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Travel Story

First Place: “Best vacation rentals in Charleston, South Carolina”

Kristen Castillo (House Digest)

I want to visit Charleston, South Carolina, now and enjoy a cool house.

Design Elements — Headline

First Place: “What’s the skinny on ‘Fat Leonard’s’ escape?” and other headlines

Andrew Kleske (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Clever headlines that pique reader interest.

Design Elements — Layout and Page Design

First Place: “Arts + Culture: Spring Arts 2022”

Gloria Orbegozo (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

A lively and attractive layout that would draw in readers.

Second Place: “Slower tempo”

Martina Schimitschek (Coronado 365)

Nice use of cover photograph.

Design Elements — Photo Essay

First Place: “12 paths to housing: What happened after San Diego’s hotel shelters closed”

Zoë Meyers (inewssource)

This photographer gained an incredible level of access and beautifully portrayed a critical housing story that afforded dignity to her subjects. Outstanding work.

Second Place: “Studio of the Streets”

Peggy Peattie, Jackie Bryant and Samantha Lacy (San Diego Magazine)

This is just a plain great idea for a photo essay. Wonderful portraits. Great to see these street artists' work displayed so prominently. Street artists truly are among those we so often overlook in our society. Excellent work shining a light.

Third Place: “A look inside the movement reshaping politics in one California border city”
Zoë Meyers (inewssource)

Another truly great photo essay by Zoë Meyers. Excellent work!

Digital — Blog

First Place: “Off the Mapp Food, Beverage and Travel Blog”
Lauren J. Mapp (Off the Mapp)

Love the food and travel blog. Great topics - strong writing with great visuals.

Digital — Entertainment Site

First Place: “The San Diego Union-Tribune – Entertainment”
Arts & Entertainment Staff (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

The San Diego Union-Tribune had a nice variety of entertainment and arts stories. They ranged from books to TV to arts, etc. Nicely done.

Digital — Multimedia Presentation

First Place: “Poison pill: San Diego’s battle against fentanyl”
Catherine Garcia, Aws Haidari and Sarah Lee (NBC 7 San Diego)

This was very nicely put together. I really enjoy the quiz - it makes it very interactive. The Podcast, videos and graphics are great.

Digital — News Site

First Place: “The San Diego Union-Tribune”
Staff (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

An attractive and easy-to-navigate website with broad coverage of news, sports, business, entertainment, lifestyle and more, plus a Spanish-language option. Top notch.

Digital — Social Media Storytelling

First Place: “In your neighborhood: What’s happening this weekend in San Diego”
Brenda Gregorio Nieto (NBC 7 San Diego)

Great story-telling piece!!

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Arts/Entertainment Story (Performing Arts)

First Place: “The Petty Nicks Experience coming to Poway on July 8”
Elizabeth Marie Himchak (Rancho Bernardo News Journal)

Very well written.

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Arts/Entertainment Story (Visual Arts)

Several authors covered particularly interesting topics.

First Place: “Totally metal”

Mateo Hoke (San Diego Magazine)

The author has strong, distinctive voice, and it goes well with the Western theme of jeweler and her jewelry.

Second Place: “Palm trunk is carved with images to represent Pacific Beach resident’s memories”

Regina Elling (PB Monthly)

Told in engaging way so reader cares about the decades long story of Carol and her palm tree/art.

Third Place: “‘Beyond Van Gogh’ to land at Del Mar Fairgrounds”

Michael J. Williams (Del Mar Times)

Author uses strong quotes from historian, so info feels more personal than a compilation of facts would have.

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Criminal Justice Story

First Place: “43 years later, siblings from Cardiff seek answers in brother’s unsolved murder at Torrey Pines State Beach”

Luke Harold (Del Mar Times)

Compelling piece. Nice job!

Second Place: “Husband of first defendant sentenced in PB riot begs court to place her in women’s prison”

Drew Kendra Sitton (San Diego Downtown News)

Nice work on the personal story AND the overarching issue.

Third Place: “San Diego community demands more from law enforcement than non-binding policies to increase police accountability”

Roberto Camacho (Prism Reports)

Well-researched story.

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Education Story

First Place: “UCSD professor was punished for working with Chinese scientists. Is it an ethics breach or discrimination?”

Elisabeth Frausto (La Jolla Light)

Strong, interesting, important reporting and writing that connects the political climate of the Trump presidency to impacts on higher education.

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Environment Story

A good variety of topics and approaches.

First Place: “Consider the whale”

Mateo Hoke (San Diego Magazine)

This entry stood out in a field of solid entries. A totally enjoyable, well-paced, informative read. Initially I wasn't sure I was going to appreciate the author's "voice" in this piece — mistakenly thought it might be intrusive, but it turned out to be quite the opposite.

Second Place: “Aldi warned that fairy shrimp habitat may need to be restored near Ramona store”

Julie Gallant (Ramona Sentinel)

Clear, thorough examination of a complex subject made easy to understand, without jargon or legalese. Well done.

Third Place: “Urban forest tempers heat waves”

Drew Kendra Sitton (San Diego Downtown News)

Informative, clear writing makes this subject relatable to an average person who perhaps never appreciated the value of streetscape trees in a city.

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Feature Story (Light Subject)

First Place: “Old drought new wine”

Jason Wilson and Eric Wolfinger (San Diego Magazine)

A light read about turning water into good wine and a pertinent issue at hand due to climate change. This story was visually interesting and attention grabbing.

Second Place: “For the love of Black community”

Nylah Burton and Ariana Drehsler (San Diego Magazine)

A gorgeous spotlight of Black feminism in small business.

Third Place: “With a Little Free Library, Pacific Beach residents share their love of reading with neighbors”

Elizabeth Marie Himchak (PB Monthly)

What a fun story about communities of book-lovers. A real page-turner.

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Feature Story (Serious Subject)

First Place: “Veterans seek help in keeping Liberty Station’s deteriorating 52 Boats Memorial on eternal patrol”

Regina Elling (Point Loma-OB Monthly)

A wholesome story about a worldly monument — representing local bravery — worth remembering.

Second Place: “Rancho Bernardo woman and sister recount horrors of Holocaust in new book”

Elizabeth Marie Himchak (Rancho Bernardo News Journal)

A powerful juxtaposition between two sisters' experiences during the Holocaust, and the lifetime battling antisemitism since.

Third Place: “RSF resident helps father and others leave Ukraine”

Joe Tash (Rancho Santa Fe Review)

A wonderful example of journalism looking for “the helpers” in the community.

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Government Story

Largely covered matters of concern in solid, engaging ways.

First Place: “Exclusive: ‘I’m a Whistleblower’ — former SD City COO confirms she leaked”

Arturo Castañares (La Prensa San Diego)

Gives exclusive, firsthand insights about a significant scandal for city, and explains important pending lawsuits and proposed settlement. Strongly engages reader's interest.

Second Place: “Torrey View construction prompts height concerns”

Karen Billing (Carmel Valley News)

Covers in great detail both the ways a community feels deceived and harmed by a building development the city approved on its own, and the developer's rebuttal. Strong, interesting quotes.

Third Place: “Del Mar Fairgrounds board responds to court injunction”

Luke Harold (Del Mar Times)

Covers reason for injunction about county fair midway, how fair board defends itself, and fairgrounds' COO assurance fair will happen. Topic likely of wide interest for area.

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Housing Insecurity Story

First Place: “Solana Highlands tenants prepare to vacate as redevelopment proceeds”

Luke Harold (Solana Beach Sun)

"Revitalization" and "gentrification" from the perspective of the families that are being displaced from their homes, perfectly executed. Strong lede. Good story flow and pace. Very well done.

Second Place: “Rent prices increase up to 100% at North Park building”

Drew Kendra Sitton (San Diego Uptown News)

Heart-rending stories from tenants about to be displaced by — greedy — building owners. Good job reporting this story out and communicating its impacts to readers.

Third Place: “Michael’s House in Ramona closes after 45 years of serving people with disabilities”

Julie Gallant (Ramona Sentinel)

Compelling story at the top about the people being displaced by organizations with a new goal of smaller residential units. I thought it fragmented when it veered off into a story about the organization itself and details about its founders. Story also could have used more explanation of the new goal that's being implemented that's reducing the size of these households.

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Housing/Development Story

First Place: “State law has turned to ADUs to help address the housing crisis”

Luke Harold (Del Mar Times)

Luke Harold seems to have uncovered a loophole in this housing incentive framework that lawmakers didn't want to discuss. Great work.

Second Place: “Mission Valley is finally growing up”

Jennifer McEntee (San Diego Magazine)

Good community profile piece. Covers a lot of territory, many aspects of the area. For a place that's maturing, there's certainly.

Third Place: “20-story building opens in Bankers Hill”

Drew Kendra Sitton (San Diego Uptown News)

Interesting story, but it left me wondering what neighborhood residents actually thought of this new building, the tallest in the city.

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

First Place: “28 years, 160 arrests: What one man’s record reveals about San Diego’s broken justice system”

Kelly Davis (The Appeal)

An important examination of faults in the criminal justice system and gaps in mental health care and drug rehabilitation services. Well done.

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — News Story

First Place: “Discomfort stations? Locals frustrated by ‘terrible state’ of restrooms, showers at Shores’ Kellogg Park”

Elisabeth Frausto (La Jolla Light)

This headline is fantastic and immediately drew me in. The story is great - and the visuals are a nice touch.

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Politics/Election Story

First Place: “San Diego race will decide new leadership for California’s deadliest jail system”

Kelly Davis (Bolts Magazine)

Hard-hitting election coverage of who controls the criminal justice system. Attention usually clamors to races at the top of the ballot, but this level of enterprise journalism for a sheriff’s election is eye-opening and necessary to protect a vulnerable, inmate population.

Second Place: “‘Jamuligan’ running for CV mayor contradicts himself on residency issues”

Alberto Garcia and Arturo Castañares (La Prensa San Diego)

A wonderful example of shoe-leather and outside-the-box document reporting.

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Profile

A number of very fine entries in this category made for good reads. Finally narrowed down to four and had some thinking to do about order and which of them would make the top three.

First Place: “The not-so-lonely hedonist”

Jackie Bryant (San Diego Magazine)

This was a lively, beautiful piece of writing that made this reader feel as though I had been in the room with the reporter and subject. Excellent work.

Second Place: “Catholic University law student Joseph Hurley persists despite tragedy”

Jennifer McEntee (The National Jurist)

Moving without being maudlin, this profile is inspiring. Great work.

Third Place: “Temple Adat Shalom’s cantor to retire after 40 years in trailblazing role”

Elizabeth Marie Himchak (Rancho Bernardo News Journal)

Took the reader on the journey with the subject from a childhood dream to a goal well accomplished. Good read.

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Review/Criticism

Food and theater, two of this judge’s favorites. Every entry was excellent and deserving of awards, making this a difficult judgment.

First Place: “Sea change”

Troy Johnson and Kimberly Motos (San Diego Magazine)

This piece showed great knowledge of the subject and was compelling in the way in which it was written. Most excellent in a field of excellent entries.

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Science/Technology Story

First Place: “Successful local sports analytics business Hookit acquired by New York-based software company”

Joe Tash (Encinitas Advocate)

Good writing here.

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Series

First Place: “No room to rest — a series on homelessness”

Elisabeth Frausto and Ashley Mackin-Solomon (La Jolla Light)

Well-organized, important, and in-depth work. The considerable investment on the part of this publication is to be commended. I got lost — in a GOOD way! — in these narratives.

Second Place: “Rancho Bernardo man’s 3,400-mile cross-country bike trip to raise money for diabetes research; RB man completes 3,373-mile cross-country bicycle ride”

Elizabeth Marie Himchak (Rancho Bernardo News Journal)

This series was a lively and very interesting read!

Third Place: “Roadblocks to repair — a series on fixing the streets”

Ashley Mackin-Solomon and Elisabeth Frausto (La Jolla Light)

This series covers an everyday issue — road infrastructure — with a well-organized, well-researched, and interesting approach.

Nondaily Reporting and Writing — Travel Story

First Place: “Montréal’s Women of Wine”

Laura Feinstein (San Diego Magazine)

Interesting story. Well written with great illustrations.

Second Place: “Barcelona: Back from the brink”

Jackie Bryant (Cannabis Now Magazine)

Not your usual travel story.

Video — Breaking News Story

First Place: “Dashcam catches plane making emergency landing on San Marcos road”

Madison Weil and Raymond Higgins (KGTV 10News ABC San Diego)

Great storytelling and I loved the use of the incredible visuals of the plane coming down. This is a perfect example of how breaking news should be done.

Second Place: “Drivers rescue CHP officer from gunman on I-8”

Deyja Charles, Eric Solomon, Kimberly Hunt, Derek Staahl and Frank Castillo Jr.
(KGTV 10News ABC San Diego)

Nice, smooth job informing viewers, taking them through the breaking situation step by step.

Third Place: “San Diego DA’s Office won’t charge former SDSU football players accused of sexual assault”

Brenda Gregorio Nieto, Eric S. Page, Rafael Avitabile, Christina Bravo and Dave Summers
(NBC 7 San Diego)

Good, informative update on an important story.

Video — Investigative/Enterprise (Series)

All in this category were wonderfully done. The reporters were thorough in their research and found the right experts needed to substantiate their stories.

First Place: “A plastic surgeon. A dead patient. A broken system.”

Jennifer Kastner (KGTV 10News ABC San Diego)

Thorough reporting and persistence made this a standout

Second Place: “A schizophrenic veteran legally buys a gun & murders his neighbor”

Jennifer Kastner (KGTV 10News ABC San Diego)

Another fine piece by the same reporter who takes first place in this category. The organization is fortunate to have a staffer with such ability.

Third Place: “Used, reused or euthanized: A dog’s life in animal research”

Maya Trabulsi (KPBS)

Another well told story, well researched and reported.

Video — Investigative/Enterprise (Single Story)

First Place: “Sheriff conceals multiple jail overdose death records”

Jennifer Kastner (KGTV 10News ABC San Diego)

This is what investigative journalism is all about, uncovering the truth that leads to change.

Second Place: “When a tree falls”

Adam Racusin, Raymond Higgins and Steve Reusch (KGTV 10News ABC San Diego)

A very powerful piece, lives forever altered or lost because of something totally avoidable.

Third Place: “Advocates alarmed by use of private messaging app by San Diego public officials”

Claire Trageser, Katy Stegall and Nicholas McVicker (KPBS)

Wow, what a way to avoid transparency in government.

Video — News Feature (Light News Reporting)

First Place: “Oh my darling, Clementine”

Joe Little (NBC 7 San Diego)

Beautiful story. Beautiful shots. Fantastic use of sound. A+

Second Place: “Right at home where he belongs”

Andrew Luria, Ruby Chen, Doug Downing and Aaron Eudaley (FOX 5 San Diego KSWB)

A wonderful story, well told.

Third Place: “Goodbye Chopper”

Joe Little (NBC 7 San Diego)

A beautiful tribute piece.

Video — News Feature (Serious News Reporting)

First Place: “Poison pill: San Diego’s battle against fentanyl”

Catherine Garcia, Aws Haidari, Elroy Spatcher, Sarah Lee and Jay Yoo (NBC 7 San Diego)

I was glued to this piece from start to finish. Excellent reporting on an important topic — a topic everyone should know about. From the visuals, to the interviews with family members who lost loved ones, to the statistics — you included everything this story needed and it worked extraordinarily well. Kudos!

Second Place: “Innocent but guilty”

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

Very compelling piece. Nice work.

Third Place: “Family torn apart by war in Russia kept apart by U.S. immigration policy”

Kitty Alvarado (KPBS)

Good job localizing a major international story.

Video — Newscast (Evening)

First Place: “ABC 10News at 4 - Padres Game 3 NLDS team coverage Oct. 14, 2022”
Sofia Seikaly, Natay Holmes and Eddie Ray (KGTV 10News ABC San Diego)

What a fun show!

Special Awards

First Amendment Award

“COVID Year Two: After the vaccine”

Jesse Marx and Will Huntsberry (Voice of San Diego)

Excellent example of persistence, tenacity, data visualization, accountability, and humanity, all rolled into one story.

Herbert Lockwood “Woody” Award (Humor Writing)

“Sharing San Diego’s infinite treasures”

Irv Erdos (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

In a media-scape clogged with emoji and 10-second reels, Irv Erdos makes us LOL with print on page. He's done it for decades. Every community needs a humorist and we've got a good one with Irv. His column, Ham on Wry, is a rich grab-bag of quips that will never go out of style.

James Julian Memorial Award (Community Service Story)

“Holocaust remembrance” and “Area anti-Semitic incidents on the rise”

Nicolette Monique Luna (The Southwestern College Sun)

What can we say about Nicolette Monique Luna except we are so impressed? Her stories on anti-Semitism expose hatred at school campuses and a public library, with news reporting set on a canvas of conversations with 80- and 90-year-old Holocaust survivors. An intelligent reporter and sensitive writer, Nicolette also is the paper’s news editor. If that weren’t enough, Nicolette was 16 when she filed these stories in 2022. We can’t wait to see the places this outstanding young journalist will go.

Neil Morgan Community Impact Award

“One family’s homelessness nightmare”

Lisa Halverstadt and Peggy Peattie (Voice of San Diego)

Strong story telling - Great impact as a result of the series of stories which allowed people to understand homelessness in a different way.

Sol Price Award for Responsible Journalism

“Veterans Village: An investigation”

Jill Castellano (inewssource)

Taking on the Veterans Village in a military town is not easy, but it is necessary. This series shows how agencies can take action once they are held accountable.

Top Awards

2023 Distinguished Coverage Award

“San Diego’s cost-of-living crisis”

Andrea Lopez-Villafaña, Andrew Keatts, MacKenzie Elmer, Lisa Halverstadt and
Will Huntsberry (Voice of San Diego)

This was the most difficult category to judge. Voice of San Diego's series addressed the questions everyone is asking, and they provided excellent explanations. The Union-Tribune's series shined a spotlight on the consequences of high prices. Both were compelling.

2023 Excellence in Journalism Award

“‘She was on top of the world’: The rise and fall of San Diego’s largest Ponzi schemer”

Lori Weisberg, Greg Moran and Adriana Heldiz (The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Wow! The Breadth and depth of Lori Weisberg and the SDUT team's reporting was outstanding. The story was gripping, and as readers, we were taken along for the wild ride that was Champion-Cain's decade-long Ponzi scheme. The rise and fall of one of San Diego's most visible business figures, how she orchestrated the scheme, and the revelation that Champion-Cain herself was once a victim of fraud herself, were all detailed so thoroughly that despite the complexity of the case, we came away with a greater understanding of how she pulled off such a monumental heist. We also appreciated the various media platforms utilized to explain and deconstruct the myth built up by Champion-Cain — truly a multi-sensory masterpiece.