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**Press Association presents awards during annual convention,
eight newspapers receive top honors in annual contest**

The Oklahoma Press Association presented its Better Newspaper Contest Awards during the OPA Annual Convention, June 6-7, at the Grand Casino Hotel and Resort in Shawnee, OK.

Also announced during the two-day convention were the recipients of the OPA H. Milt Phillips Award and the Oklahoma Newspaper Foundation's Beachy Musselman Award.

Receiving the H. Milt Phillips Award was Russell M. Perry, publisher of The Black Chronicle in Oklahoma City. The OPA Board of Directors selects the recipient of the Milt Phillips Award.

Russell M. Perry is an American businessman, banker, publisher and broadcaster. He started The Black Chronicle, which focuses on the state's African community, in 1979. At the same time he founded the Perry Publishing and Broadcasting Company.

Today The Black Chronicle continues as a leader in the Black community and the company owns 16 radio stations in Oklahoma, Arkansas, South Carolina and Georgia.

In April 2025 Perry was formally recognized by the Oklahoma Senate as having served as the Oklahoma's Secretary of Commerce after his nomination by Gov. Frank Keating in 1999 was never officially confirmed by the Senate.

Perry was inducted into the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame in 2009, into the Oklahoma Association of Broadcasters Hall of Fame in 2006, and into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 2013.

Receiving the ONF Beachy Musselman Award was Corey Jones, public service journalism reporter at Tulsa World. His investigative series reporting on fatal pursuits involving Oklahoma law enforcement, particularly the Oklahoma Highway Patrol, over several years continues to receive national attention.

Jones' investigation revealed that about one in four people killed in Oklahoma car chases are innocent motorists not involved in the pursuits. It also showed that the vast majority of fatal chases were prompted by traffic violations or property crimes. Only two deadly pursuits began because of violent offenses. Jones continues to report on OHP's fatal pursuits as all other area law enforcement agencies do not allow this tactic.

The recipient of the Musselman Award is selected by the Oklahoma Newspaper Foundation Board of Trustees.

Sequoyah Award winners in the OPA Better Newspaper Contest also were announced at the OPA Convention. In the divisions for multi-day and online-only publications, winners were Enid News & Eagle, McAlester News-Capital and Choctaw Times. Sequoyah winners in the weekly divisions were the Midwest City Beacon, The Purcell Register, McIntosh County Democrat, and Minco-Union City Times. The Cameron University Collegian was the winner in the college news media division.

The Sequoyah Award, which is the highest honor in the Better Newspaper Contest, is determined by the number of points accumulated in eight of the contest's categories: news content, layout & design, advertising, editorial writing, photography, sports coverage, sales promotion and community leadership. The eight divisions are based on publication frequency and city/town

population.

Individuals were able to receive awards in 16 categories – news story, feature story, sports story, business story, education story, in-depth reporting, column writing, small space ad, large space ad, news photograph, feature photograph, sports photograph, photo essay/picture page, front page design, video journalism or marketing, and online project.

The contest also included a digital media category, awarded to the publication.

Members of the Mississippi Press Association judged almost 1,400 entries from 71 Oklahoma news publications.

In addition to the eight Sequoyah Award winners, 173 first place plaques were presented during the awards banquet. News publications and individuals placing second and third in the contest received certificates.

A complete list of winners in the 2024 OPA Better Newspaper Contest is available on the OPA website at okpress.com/contest-winners-2024.

The Oklahoma Press Association's Half Century Club inducted four new members: Bruce Campbell, sports reporter at Enid News & Eagle; C. Ross Coyle, former owner and publisher of The Blanchard News; Jerry Fink, editor of The Eufaula Indian Journal and McIntosh County Democrat; and John Lewis, press foreman, production manager and circulation manager at The Seminole Producer.

The Quarter Century Club also inducted four new members: Shauna Belyeu, general manager of The Eufaula Indian Journal and McIntosh County Democrat; Denise Frost, office manager for Okmulgee Times and Henryetta Free-Lance; Eric Hunter, production and IT manager at Clinton Daily News; Sean Stephens, publisher of Clinton Daily News; and Calvin Stone, assistant pressman with Clinton Daily News.

This was the first year awards were presented for the A-Mark Prize for Investigative Reporting. The contest, administered by the Oklahoma Newspaper Foundation, awarded a total of \$15,000 in cash awards to reporters and news outlets in Oklahoma for content produced in 2024. It was judged by members of the Mississippi Press Association. Awards were presented to:

- First Place: Garrett Yalch and Clifton Adcock, The Frontier
- Second Place: Andy Dossett, Bartlesville Examiner-Enterprise
- Third Place: Ruby Topalian, Oklahoma Watch

The A-Mark Foundation is dedicated to supporting and encouraging journalism and investigative reporting through grants to organizations that offer awards recognizing journalistic excellence.

Several additional awards were presented during the OPA Convention including:

- Stillwater News Press received first place in the OPA Magazine Contest.
- Ray Lokey Memorial Award for Excellence in Reporting, presented to Lynn Adams, Sequoyah County Times.
- Editorial Sweepstakes Award, sponsored by ONG, presented to James Beaty, McAlester News-Capital. Beaty died in summer 2024.
- Column Sweepstakes Award, sponsored by ONG, presented to Connie Burcham, Watonga Republican.
- Daily, Semi- or Tri-Weekly Photo of the Year, sponsored by OGE Energy Corp., presented to Andy Dossett, Bartlesville Examiner-Enterprise.
- Weekly Photo of the Year, sponsored by OGE Energy Corp., presented to Sherry Loudermilk, Coalgate Record-Register.
- ONF Joseph H. Edwards Outdoor Writer of the Year presented to Jake Sermersheim, Tahlequah Daily Press.

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