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Detroit News team wins Michigan Journalist of the Year

Two Detroit News reporters who teamed up to expose the use of dangerously dirty surgical equipment at a major Michigan hospital were today named winners of the Richard Milliman Michigan Journalist of the Year award for 2016 in an annual competition sponsored by the Michigan Press Association Foundation.

The winners, Karen Bouffard and Joel Kurth, were chosen by a panel of five judges representing Michigan media and academia. They will share a \$1,000 prize.

In an awards ceremony at the annual convention of the Michigan Press Association in Grand Rapids, the MPA Foundation also recognized Julie Mack of MLive/The Kalamazoo Gazette and Ron Fonger of MLive/The Flint Journal who tied for second place in the judges' voting. Mack was honored for a body of work during 2016 and Fonger for his extensive coverage of the Flint water crisis.

For its series of reports on surgical equipment problems in the Detroit Medical Center system, the News team studied more than 200 pages of internal e-mails and documents about the issue, including delays during surgeries with patients kept under anesthesia while replacements were found for dirty instruments. State and federal reviews followed the News reports.

"This issue was thoroughly investigated and clearly explained," the judges said, with "eye-opening documents, as well as interviews with experts, decision makers and affected families. Graphics and supporting video made the story even more compelling."

If the five judges were unanimous about anything, it was the difficulty of their task, given the quality of the journalism entered by news organizations that worked on all of today's media platforms.

While journalism and the news business face ongoing challenges, the entries "represented outstanding work," said one of the judges, Bill Speer, publisher of the Alpena News and a past president of the Michigan Press Association. "The good news I believe we ... need to share with others is that good journalism is certainly alive and well in Michigan,

The mission of the Michigan Press Association Foundation is to promote, improve and encourage community journalism in Michigan.

"What I was pleased about was seeing that it does not matter whether you work at a small weekly newspaper or a large metro, have a lot of resources available to you or very little. Strong reporting still comes down to solid research, tough but fair questions and an objective perspective. In the end, good strong reporting can still make a difference!"

In this third year of the annual competition, the MPA Foundation board voted to rename this unique award in honor of Richard Milliman, a founder of the Foundation and longtime Michigan journalist and publisher who died in 2016. Milliman was a lifelong advocate for the value of solid journalism at the community level and inaugurated the Foundation's annual scholarship awards to journalism students at Michigan colleges and universities.

Previous winners of the MJOY Award are Curt Guyette of the American Civil Liberties Union and Jennifer Dixon of the Detroit Free Press.

Entries for the MPA Foundation's 2017 Michigan Journalist of the Year prize will be accepted after March 1, 2017.

Individual journalists or those entering on their behalf may submit a body of work or a one-time effort that was published, broadcast, posted or otherwise carried on a Michigan news outlet from Oct. 1, 2016, through Sept. 30, 2017. A "body of work" may comprise up to six examples of the journalist's work during the contest period. Each entry must include a cover letter of up to 300 words highlighting the quality and impact of the journalist's work. Entries may include supporting material to show how the journalist's work made a difference in the community or across Michigan.

The deadline for entries Monday, Nov. 6, 2017.

To enter, visit betterbnc.com after March 1, 2017 and click on "Open Call Login" to create your account.

The Michigan Press Association Foundation was created in 1980 to further the interests of community journalism in Michigan. The Foundation's mission includes serving the public interest by encouraging, fostering and aiding improvements in the quality, vigor and fairness of Michigan journalism and a free press in the State of Michigan. The Foundation has invested more than \$330,000 in Michigan journalism since 1990, including the award of nearly 300 scholarships to college-level journalism students.

Learn more about the MPA Foundation at michiganpress.org/mpafoundation.

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