

Free Press Reporter Tresa Baldas chosen 2019 Richard Milliman Journalist of the Year

Tresa Baldas has been chosen as the winner of the 2019 Richard Milliman Journalist of the Year award.

Baldas, who in the words of her editor at Detroit Free press “is the definition of someone deeply committed to journalism, who relentlessly works sources, and who develops important story after important story. The Jamaica stories are a perfect example.”

The Journalist of the Year is awarded annually by the Michigan Press Association Foundation.

Tresa was chosen by a panel of four judges representing Michigan media and academia. Her work was selected out of a field of 15 finalists. She will receive a \$1,000 prize.

Her body of work encompassed a 9-month investigation that revealed that Jamaican island officials and the world’s largest online vacation website covered up a pattern of abuse. Her work found that at least one American woman a month is raped at Jamaican resorts and exposed the conspiracy and cover up surrounding that fact.

In an awards ceremony at the annual convention of the Michigan Press Association in Dearborn, the MPA Foundation also recognized Phoebe Wall-Howard of the Detroit Free Press as runner up for her coverage of an auto industry coverup. Her reporting showed Ford Motor Company knew the Focus and Fiesta Models had flawed transmissions and sold them anyway.

“Without question, many powerful people now fear the name Tresa Baldas: Jamaican tourism officials and resort owners. The U.S. State Department. Leadership at Trip Advisor. Without question, many once-voiceless people now honor the name Tresa Baldas for her incredible, tireless work telling the stories of rape victims who had been silenced by the beneficiaries of a massively profitable industry. This work is journalism near perfection,” said contest judge Justin Hinkley, managing editor of the Alpena News.

“This is a great example of fastidious reporting, powerful storytelling and dogged determination. The results are significant. This kind of journalism is worth celebrating,” said MPA Foundation Board Member and contest judge Margaret Trimmer.

Previous winners of the MJOY Award include Paula Gardner of MLive, Garret Ellison of MLive, Karen Bouffard and Joel Kurth of the Detroit News, Curt Guyette of the American Civil Liberties Union and Jennifer Dixon of the Detroit Free Press.

The Journalist of the Year contest is named for Richard Milliman, founder of the MPA Foundation and Michigan Journalism Hall of Fame inductee.

Entries for the MPA Foundation's 2020 Michigan Journalist of the Year contest will be accepted after August 1, 2020

The MPA Foundation congratulates Baldas on being named 2019 Journalist of the Year and on her outstanding work.

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