

Michael Wilkinson is the 2020 recipient of the Richard Milliman Journalist of the Year Award. The “JOY” award is sponsored by the Michigan Press Association Foundation.

Michael was chosen by a panel of five judges representing Michigan media and academia. He will receive a \$1000 prize.

Michael was the first reporter in Michigan to spot that Detroit was a national hotspot for the virus and that COVID-19, in the early days of the pandemic, disproportionately sickened and killed African Americans. He came to the latter conclusion before state epidemiologists did.

In a quote from his managing editor at Bridge Magazine: “Unlike many data reporters, Michael uses data as a starting point — rather than a destination — to shed light on how policies impact everyday lives.”

“Wilkinson made the numbers tell stories and hold public officials accountable on the biggest story of 2020,” says judge Chuck Strokes from WXYZ.

“Mike’s body of work with Bridge Michigan is a shining example of how data can generate news impact, tell compelling stories, add insight, and find connections that matter and can drive meaningful action,” said Michigan Press Association Foundation Board member and contest judge Sara Wurfel, vice president at Truscott Rossman. “This is what strong community journalism can do.”

“Telling complicated, data-driven stories is difficult. Michael uses well done info graphics that help readers have a better understanding of the complete story. He does an excellent job of combining graphic information with the story to give readers an easy understanding of complex topics,” said contest judge and MPA Foundation Trustee Jim Wojcik.

Wilkinson grew up in Macomb County and earned a degree at the University of Michigan. He was also part of a team at The Blade of Toledo that won national honors, including the National Headliner and Gerald Loeb awards, for exposing widespread political corruption in a scandal that came to be known as Coingate. The stories led to political reform in Ohio state government.

At the Detroit News he won numerous state awards for projects, including series that examined the impending housing crash, and segregation in schools and neighborhoods in Metro Detroit.

In 2013, Wilkinson joined Bridge Michigan as the publication’s computer-assisted reporting specialist. His work has been indispensable to readers, never more so than during the pandemic, where he created a coronavirus dashboard of more than a dozen interactive charts and graphs that he has updated daily for more than a year, including weekends.

Mike lives in Toledo with his family and his guitar.

In a virtual awards ceremony via Zoom on March 25, the MPA Foundation also recognized Kristen Jordan Shamus of the Detroit Free Press as runner up for her Covid-19 coverage and Robin Erb from Bridge Magazine for her Covid-19 Coverage. They were chosen from a field of entries from broadcast, print and electronic journalists for work from October 2019 thru September 2020.

Previous winners of the JOY Award are Tresa Baldas of the Detroit Free Press, 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 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 MPA Foundation has invested more than \$300,000 in Michigan journalism since 1990, including the awarding of nearly 300 scholarships to college-level journalism students and has awarded the Richard Milliman Journalist of the Year to one Michigan journalist each year since 2014.

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