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Three winners named for 2022 McCree Journalism Awards

Today, Journalism projects that examined, explained and exposed problems and important issues in law enforcement and the legal system were chosen as the winners of the 48th annual Wade H. McCree Advancement of Justice Awards, sponsored by the Michigan Press Association Foundation.

The winners were determined by a panel of four judges, representing law and media, who independently reviewed nine entries from across Michigan.

The winners are:

- Reporters Heather Catallo, Kimberly Craig, Videographer Johnny N. Sartin Jr. and Video Editor Randy Lundquist of WXYZ-TV for their investigation “Probate Problems: Reforming Michigan’s Guardianship Laws.” This article highlighted that guardianship abuse has become an increasing-problem across the country. It covered some disturbing cases here in Michigan and that Catallo’s work prompted the introduction of four bills in the Michigan Legislature. The legislative reforms will transform the probate court system in Michigan. Catallo has been relentless in her coverage of the proposed legislation to ensure Michigan’s leaders pay close attention to the changes that are needed to protect the rights of seniors and families. She was not able to attend one of the key announcements about the law changes, but WXYZ still dedicated tremendous resources to this important issue in her absence, and reporter Kimberly Craig helped explain the new legislation to our viewers.
- Reporters Elisha Anderson, John Wisely, Podcast Co-producers Cary Junior II, Darcie Moran and Tad Davis of Detroit Free Press for their columns “Jailhouse informants and a 15-year fight for freedom.” Free Press reporters Elisha Anderson and John Wisely investigated Deering’s case and showed how the criminal justice system relied heavily on jailhouse informants in hard-to-crack cases. They also examined the informants themselves, including their credibility issues, which were never disclosed to defense attorneys or jurors. Their reporting showed breaks the informants received in their own cases that were not disclosed or were downplayed to jurors. It also revealed the long-established relationships law enforcement had with some of the informants. The coverage brought to light an issue that is critically important in the criminal justice system but rarely understood by the public and showed the scope of the problem. In addition, Tad Davis, Cary Junior II and Darcie Moran produced an in-depth podcast on the case that incorporated several months of reporting. The ‘On the Line’ episode highlighted Deering’s 15-year fight for freedom. Last year, a judge ruled Deering was denied a fair trial and tossed out his convictions. Prosecutors determined Deering would not be retried, and he was freed.

- Reporters Benjamin Simon, Greg Chandler, Photojournalist Scott Harmsen and Publisher Fred Jacobs of Hastings Banner for their columns “Family faces crisis under insurance reforms.” Photojournalist Scott Harmsen first noticed them at a meeting with Michigan state Representative Julie Calley a year ago in Hastings. They appeared distraught; a middle-aged woman with her father, a disabled man in a wheelchair, his granddaughter and two caregivers. They were asking questions about changes to the state’s no-fault automobile insurance law. As we learned about their plight, we discovered that these victims would not be grandfathered in under the reforms. These victims were going to be left without the care that they now needed to live. They had nowhere to turn and no one to speak out for them -- until The Banner began reporting on the issue. Since then, Staff Writers Benjamin Simon and Greg Chandler, Photojournalist Scott Harmsen and Publisher Fred Jacobs have been educating readers about this law and bringing the issues that resulted from the reforms to the attention of policymakers and legislators in a continuing series of articles, features and editorials. Those articles got attention.

The McCree awards are named for Judge Wade H. McCree (1920-87) one of the most distinguished lawyers and jurists in Michigan history and a staunch advocate for equal rights and open, accountable government. McCree served as a circuit, federal and U.S. Appeals court judge and, from 1977-81, as solicitor general of the United States.

The coveted McCree awards are based on the significance and informative level of the journalism, as well as the impact on changing and improving the legal and law enforcement systems.

The awards will be presented to the winners at the 2022 Michigan Journalism Hall of Fame dinner on April 24th at the Kellogg Center.

The Michigan Press Association Foundation was created in 1980 to further the interests of 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, which also sponsors the Michigan Journalist of the Year competition, 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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