

Bridge Michigan Reporters Mike Wilkinson and Jonathon Oosting chosen 2023 Richard Milliman Journalist of the Year

Mike Wilkinson and Jonathon Oosting are the 2023 recipients of the Richard Milliman Journalist of the Year Award. The “JOY” award is sponsored by the Michigan Press Association Foundation.

Wilkinson and Oosting were chosen by a panel of three judges representing Michigan media and academia. They will each receive a \$500 prize.

They reported on Jonathan Oosting and Mike Wilkinson did so in 2023 during a jaw-dropping run of reporting on Michigan’s grant-making process, which has little oversight and allows lawmakers each year to dole out \$1 billion in pet projects. One such project was \$25 million for a health campus in mid-Michigan. Pushed by former House Speaker Jason Wentworth, the grant went to a nonprofit started by a former aide and involved the sale of land to his successor in the Legislature. The project manager for the development served time in prison for fraud.

“Neither investigation was easy to produce, relying heavily on documents and sources and revealing truths that are messy and uncomfortable for those in power. But through diligence, precision and tenacity, Jonathan and Mike produced a body of work that did a true public service to both a grieving campus and Michigan taxpayers.” Said Joel Kurth their executive editor.

Jonathan Oosting has been at Bridge since 2019 and was the MPA’s Journalist of the Year for 2021 for his coverage about the presidential election and extremism. A reporter since 2007, he’s covered the Capitol and politics for more than a decade, including stints at The Detroit News and MLive.

Mike Wilkinson has been at Bridge since 2013 and was MPA’s Journalist of the Year for 2020 for his coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic, school finances and the collapse of mid-Michigan dams. A computer-assisted reporter, he has also worked as a journalist in Detroit, Ohio, Tennessee and Illinois.

“Strong watchdog report detailing self-dealing, cronyism and poor government oversight of a \$25 million healthcare facility planned in Claire County. Raising issues and asking questions about the project prompted the state to halt the project. The reporting illustrated finger pointing and professed ignorance of the award, land sales and assorted businesses feeding on the contract.” says judge Mickey Hirten.

At the Salute to Journalism event on March 14, the MPA Foundation also recognized Craig Mauger of the Detroit News as runner up for his reporting on Michigan politics, public policy and money that fuels politics, and Sarah Leach of Holland Sentinel for her coverage of Ottawa County. They were chosen from a field of entries from broadcast, print and electronic journalists for work from October 2022 thru September 2023. Previous winners of the JOY Award are Jonathon Oosting of Bridge Michigan, Michael Wilkinson of Bridge Michigan, 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.

