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2025 McCree Journalism Awards Announced

Again, this year, 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 50th 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 ten entries from across Michigan.

The winners are:

- Reporters Dave Boucher and Darcie Moran of the Detroit Free Press for series of stories on “Judicial Accountability.” This series in Boucher and Moran showed Michigan judges are rarely held publicly accountable for misconduct. Lawyers frequently do not report possible problems due to the fear of reprisals. Even when those in power determine a judge did something wrong, punishment often amounts to a private scolding. This work explained the impact of streaming hearings while exposing potential misconduct. Our readers learned more about their elected officials, how they are – or are not – held accountable and which changes might make the system more effective.
- Reporter Heather Catallo, Johnny N. Satrin Jr., Randy Lundquist and Tim Kochenderfer of WXYZ-TV for their reporting on “Improper conduct by a powerful probate judge.” WXYZ exposed improper conduct by a powerful probate judge who is now under investigation by the Judicial Tenure Commission. Since 2017, WXYZ’s Heather Catallo has been investigating Michigan’s probate courts, pursuing allegations of corruption and suspect relationships between judges and professional guardians. That long history of exposing the truth and building trust in the courts prompted the Probate Court Administrator in one of Michigan’s largest probate courts to come forward to WXYZ to reveal some disturbing allegations.
- Reporters Cole Waterman and Gus Burns of MLive Media Group for their series of stories on “Michigan State Police’s Secure Cities Program.” Reporter Cole Waterman began digging into the issue and filing FOIA requests after there was a surge of complaints. Waterman and fellow reporter Gus Burns combed through stacks of data from the FOIA requests, examined numerous lawsuits, annual reports and interviewed dozens of residents. The months-long investigation revealed more than 80 civilian complaints -- many racial in nature -- \$27.2 million paid to settle lawsuits involving Secure Cities troopers, including lawsuits that had gone previously unreported and revealed criticism from the people who live in Flint and Saginaw. The package not only

dissected specific cases and larger issues with Secure Cities, but addressed possible solutions as put forth by law enforcement and residents.

- Reporter Sarah Cwiek of Michigan Public for her series “A Wrongful Conviction and a Detroit Serial Rapist who stayed free.” This story is the second part of a multi-part series, but it is story that specifically reports what happened to a wrongfully convicted man and explains how his wrongful conviction shows the justice system failing at nearly every turn. Cwiek’s story details the tragedies that can occur when our criminal justice system does not work properly, and reports on the efforts now underway to address that misplaced justice.

The McCree awards named for Judge Wade H. McCree (1920-87), one of the most distinguished lawyers and jurists in Michigan history. He was 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 journalism, as well as-the impact on changing and improving the legal and law enforcement systems.

The awards were presented to the winners at the 2025 Michigan Journalism Hall of Fame dinner on April 13th 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 more than 300 scholarships to college-level journalism students.

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

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