

By George Rodrigue

Editor at Large

We often say that doing great work is its own reward. True enough! But it's also nice when the rest of the world thinks we've done something wonderful.

That has happened a lot with our journalism during 2020. According to dozens of contest judges, we've done a lot of world-class work and we've punched above our weight class just about everywhere.

NATIONAL NEWS

The Oregonian's Rob Davis won Scripps-Howard's environmental reporting category for "[Polluted by Money](#)." Judges called it "Jaw-dropping investigative reporting" that "gives voice to people who had been ignored by a corrupt, yet legal," system. Rob also won a National Headliner award and a Best of the West award for the series.

The Oregonian won third place in the National Headliner contest for public service, for "[Cancer Cloud](#)." It showed how public housing authorities nationwide had for years ignored the risk that radon posed to their tenants.

Shane Dixon Kavanaugh, also of the Oregonian, was named a Goldsmith Prize finalist for "[Fleeing Justice](#)," which revealed the extraordinary measures Saudi Arabia (allegedly) took to help citizens suspected of crimes flee the U.S. before they could be tried or convicted.

AL.com's Kyle Whitmire won the national 2019 Scripps Howard Award for opinion writing. Judges [called him](#) "the linear successor of Eugene Patterson and Ida B. Wells." His entry included one of the sharpest [political obituaries](#) ever written – visible proof of the benefits of truly knowing the communities we cover.

AL.com's content team also won a second-place National Headliner award for journalistic innovation, for "[Alabama's War on Women](#)." Connor Sheets won a third-place National Headliner recognition for his work on the heartbreaking and infuriating story about [medical bonds](#) in Alabama lockups.

NJ.com's [The Force Report](#) won a fistful of awards: The James L. Knight Foundation Award for Public Service, the IRE FOI Award, the University of Florida Award for Investigative Data Journalism, and the Sigma Delta Chi Award for Informational Graphics. That range of recognition is unusual. It shows what can happen when we dig deep into a topic of great public importance, use freedom of information laws aggressively, and then tell the story through compelling visuals.

Back in America's heartland, The Plain Dealer picked up a national DART award for its "[Case Closed](#)" report on a woman who had to solve her own rape. The DART awards honor coverage of victims of trauma; this was the third win for the PD (a record for any paper) and the second for reporter Rachel Dissell.

Syracuse.com and The Post Standard won second place in the National Headliner Awards investigative reporting category for their series, "[Drunk with Power](#)." Their work exposed a rogue AA group that abused its own members, including possibly driving some of them to suicide.

MLive's Jake May, of The Flint Journal, submitted [a portfolio](#) covering his city's trials and triumphs, and was named [small-market photojournalist of the year](#) by the National Press Photographers Association. He also was named photographer of the year by the Michigan Press Photographers Association.

In Pennsylvania, PennLive's emerging markets team lead and daily podcaster, [Julia Hatmaker](#), was named one of E&P's 25 national "[Under-35 rising stars](#)."

SPORTS

Our Sports journalism also won widespread recognition.

The Plain Dealer's [Terry Pluto](#) won National Headliner recognition for best sports columnist. Judges, after suffering (one imagines) through a mountain of entries, called him "a strong voice in a sea of chatter."

PennLive scored a coveted Triple Crown in the Associated Press Sports Editors awards, finishing in the top ten nationally in the contests for Website and Daily, Sunday, and Special Sections. It was PennLive's second triple in five years.

NJ.com won five national APSE awards, with enterprise writer [Matt Stanmyre](#) either soloing or sharing four of them. (As a testimonial to Matt's versatility, check out his recent piece on how coronavirus is pushing [hungry rats](#) to invade homes. He can throw right, bat left, and type rodent.)

The Oregonian's John Canzano was named to APSE's top 10 for sports columnists.

AL.com's Alabama beat reporter, [Michael Casagrande](#), won top-10 APSE recognition for beat writing and for explanatory reporting.

Syracuse won 11 individual APSE awards, more than any other outlet in the country. [Nate Mink](#) took first place for Feature Story in the C division, for a riveting piece on former NFL player Chris Gedney and what may have led him to commit suicide.

MassLive's [Matt Vautour](#) took first place for sports columns in the New England Newspaper and Press Association contest.

VIDEO

We have been doing a lot of great video over the past few years, and the judges saw that.

Penn Studios won several international [Hermes Creative Awards](#), including a Platinum for PennLive's branding video, "[We ask the Questions](#)," and Gold awards for its 40th-anniversary documentary "[Chaos at Three Mile Island](#)" and for its "[Battleground PA](#)" podcast.

The Oregonian/Oregonian Live got eight regional Emmy nominations. Brooke Herbert got four of them. One told the story of the "world's oldest drag queen," [Darcelle](#). An episode of Peak Northwest, on [climbing Mt. Thielsen](#), was nominated in the branded content category.

"[No Mercy](#)," a shattering story of sexual abuse by a local hero, won a nomination in the topical documentary category. That feature-length presentation was created by Noelle Crombie, Dave Killen, Teresa Mahoney, and Beth Nakamura.

NJ.com won 5 New York Emmy nominations; the order of finish has not yet been announced.

Down in Alabama, Red Clay Media's brand "It's a Southern Thing" is a finalist for [Best Overall Facebook Presence for a Shorty Award](#). Red Clay Media is also an INMA finalist for Best use of Video for [People of Alabama](#).

On Staten Island, SILive.com got its third nomination for an Emmy award.

Syracuse won New York Associated Press recognition for "Drunk with Power," and for "OT Game: Inside a College Basketball Classic." It got its first Emmy nomination, too.

REGIONAL & STATE

MLive journalists may have needed a panel van to haul away their awards from the Michigan Press Association. They won [more than 80 times](#). The Grand Rapids Press won Newspaper of the Year, besting the Detroit Free Press and the Detroit News. MLive journalists also took first place in the government news and news enterprise areas, and won first place in 9 photo divisions.

At the Michigan Press Photographers Association, MLive shooters [took home 31 awards](#). That included firsts in spot news, sports action, sports picture story, portrait/personality, and news picture story.

MLive's team won [more than 60 awards](#) at the state Associated Press competition. The Ann Arbor News won a divisional award for general excellence, the Jackson Citizen Patriot won for public service, and the staff swept categories including Best Sports Story (D2), Best Feature Photo (D2) and Best Illustration or graphic (D3).

NJ.com won 57 New Jersey Press Association awards and 26 New York Press Photography Association Awards. [Aristide Economopoulos](#) was named 2020 photographer of the year.

MassLive.com was named the best website in New England by the New England Newspaper and Press Association. Judges said the site was, "chock full of info, with eye-catching visuals to lead the reader." The Republican won top awards for design and presentation, and for its Business Outlook section.

Syracuse won 15 state AP awards, more than any other news operation in its category.

The Plain Dealer won 13 awards in the Ohio APME contest, including first-place awards for its Sports section and for illustrations by the incomparable [Andrea Levy](#).

Staten Island won statewide recognition for public service and for spot news coverage in the New York Associated Press Awards.

That is only a partial list; some state contests remain undecided or unannounced. In other contests we know we've been nominated, which means we won something, but we don't know exactly what.

However you look at it, it's an inspiring collection and a reminder of the kind of journalism that drew us into the profession. Thanks to all – writers, photographers, artists and editors – who made it happen. And best of luck as we work, this year, on some of the biggest stories of our lives.