

# **San Diego's best communicators in media honored at San Diego Press Club's 47th annual Excellence in Journalism Awards**

San Diego's finest reporters, writers, artists, photographers, videographers and public relations professionals were honored Tuesday, Oct. 27, with the region's top awards in journalism and public relations communications at the San Diego Press Club's 47th annual Excellence in Journalism Awards. More than 500 awards in 130 categories and 10 divisions were announced. The online awards program streamed live from the San Diego Automotive Museum in Balboa Park on Facebook and Twitter.

"The San Diego Press Club Excellence in Journalism Awards celebrates professionals whose research, writing, reporting and visual skills shed light on newsworthy topics that matter to us all," said Albert Fulcher, 2020 Press Club president. "At a time when many Americans distrust the news media, I am proud of our organization's 400 members and their commitment to truth and fairness with integrity, high standards and ethical reporting. I am also proud of our success at uniting journalism and public relations professionals, while providing career-enhancing programs and networking opportunities for our members."

This year's Press Club awards program drew more than 1,100 entries, making it one of the largest journalism competitions in the nation. Judges for the Press Club's entries included members of 15 journalism professional organizations from around the country, including press clubs in San Francisco, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Rochester, Florida, Cleveland, Orange County, Milwaukee, Tulsa and Alaska.

Several news media outlets received multiple awards. They included:

- The San Diego Union-Tribune, 60 awards in online and daily newspapers, photography, TV-online, public relations and website categories;
- Ranch and Coast Magazine, 29 awards in magazines, photography and website categories;
- iNewsSource, 21 awards in online and daily newspapers, photography, and radio-podcast categories;
- Times of San Diego, 19 awards in online and daily newspapers, photography and website categories;
- Valley Roadrunner newspaper in Valley Center, 13 awards in non-daily newspaper, online and photography categories;
- San Diego Business Journal, 12 awards in non-daily newspapers and public relations categories;

-- Edible San Diego, 10 awards in magazine categories;

-- The Salk Institute, 10 awards in public relations, radio-podcast and website categories, the most of any non-media organization entered.

In the college news media division, the names of schools and the student-operated newspaper, as well as the number of awards received include: the San Diego City College, City Times, 14; Southwestern College, Sun, 13; San Diego State University, The Daily Aztec, 6; University of San Diego California, The Guardian, 6.

Several individuals received multiple awards. Top winners include (number of awards follows a name): Gayle Lynn Falkenthal, 13; David Ross, 12, including five first-place awards; Bob Stefanko, 10; Jamie Reno, 8; and Chris Stone, 8, including five first-place awards.

Several individuals swept categories winning all available award placements. They include: Bill Abrams, military writing, magazine division; Ray Huard, real estate, non-daily print-online division; Nathalie Taylor, live performance reviews; Michael Gardiner, restaurant reviews; ; Angela McLaughlin, wildlife and nature reporting, non-daily print/online division; Gayle Lynn Falkenthal, TV-online video, sports category; Rick Griffin, in-house or employee publications, PR, PIO and Trade Publications.

Best of Show awards include:

-- Maya Trabulsi, KPBS-TV, "A Portrait of People in Motion," Best Television/Online Video Entry;

-- David Ross, Valley Roadrunner, "Miller Fire: A Catastrophe That Was Avoided," Best Non-Daily Newspaper Entry;

-- Jared Whitlock, Wired Magazine, "Covid-19 Stalls Clinical Trials for Everything but Covid-19," Best Magazine Entry;

-- Drew Duglan, Scripps Research, "PreSCRIPPSion Sound Podcast: Mice in Outer Space," Best Radio/Podcast Entry;

-- Roxana Popescu, inewsource.org., "Pandemic takes a toll on San Diego County refugees, sheltering in place with abusive partners," Best Online-Daily Newspaper Entry;

-- Andrew Dyer, Gary Robbins, Lauryn Schroeder, Kristen Taketa, Jeff McDonald, The San Diego Union-Tribune, Wildcard Category, 2019 theme was racial inequality;

-- Paul Sisson, The San Diego Union-Tribune, Body of Work award.

San Diego State University students Katy Stegal and Amber Salas each were presented with \$2,500 scholarships as part of the Press Club event. Stegal and Salas both work for The Daily Aztec, the university's student news organization.

The Press Club also presented three special career achievement awards. Recipients are: Linda Rosas Townson, publisher, San Diego Neighborhood Newspapers (SDNN), Jim Reiman Award for Excellence in Media Management; Alison St. John, retired reporter for KPBS, Harold Keen Award for Outstanding Contributions in Journalism; Maria Velasquez, former Director of Communication, San Diego City Attorney's Office; and former Chief Communications Officer, Senior VP of of Communication and Government Relations, San Diego Housing Commission, Andy Mace Award for Career Achievement in Public Relations.

Townson serves as publisher of SDNN, publisher of three local community weekly newspapers, including the Star-News in Chula Vista, East County Californian in El Cajon and Alpine Sun. Also, for the past decade, she has served as senior VP of community media overseeing business operations for 18 Southern California community newspapers published by Cypress, Calif.-based Community Media Corp., owned by brothers Daniel and Edward Verdugo.

"I'm honored to receive this award, it's very flattering and I'm grateful," said Townson, who recently began her 32nd year of working in the community newspaper industry. The San Diego native began her career selling print ads in the summer of 1989.

"Don't tell me that print community journalism is dead," she said. "Where else can you read about Little League scores, or a fireman rescuing a cat from a tree, or school news that is important to working families? My career is living proof that community journalism still matters and we will survive because we're providing a local voice to local residents in their hometown."

Over the years, Townson has survived through economic downturns, ownership changes and losing big advertisers. But, the Covid-19 lockdown presented a new set of hardships. While some freelancers lost assignments and part-timers had their hours reduced, no full-time employees lost their jobs. In addition, in the early months of Covid, Townson initiated a new program that was counter to her business acumen: She gave away free advertising to local businesses.

According to Albert Fulcher, managing editor, SDNN, "During the early weeks of the lockdown, Linda sent everyone scouring the neighborhoods to find out who was still open and then we published their listing for free," said Fulcher. "This was astounding when you consider that all these newspapers are distributed free of charge and they survive for every print cycle based on revenue from advertisers to cover expenses."

"It was the right thing to do at the time," said Townson, referring to her free advertising offer. "As a member of the local community, we had to do whatever we could do to support our local community, especially small, locally owned businesses. Alerting our readers to which businesses had their doors open was our way to help."

Townson is unsure of how much free advertising was provided to local businesses during the spring lockdown, but she estimates the dollar value was in the tens of thousands of dollars.

St. John retired in January 2019, after working in news roles at KPBS since 1991. During her reporting career at KPBS, she worked in various roles, including as Morning Edition anchor, North County reporter, news editor and Midday co-host. She won awards from the San Diego Press Club, Society of Professional Journalists, Associated Press TV and Radio Association and California Golden Mike Awards. As an Oceanside resident, she also served as KPBS' North County bureau chief. She covered such stories as nuclear waste issues at San Onofre, North

County politics and homeless veterans. Currently, she continues to fill-in as host of KPBS shows “Roundtable” and “Midday Edition.”

“I am honored to receive this award from the San Diego Press Club, particularly since it is for fairness and truth,” said St. John. “Fairness is one of the things that has motivated my reporting most strongly throughout the years, so I’m touched to be recognized for that. And, of course, truth is something we all strive for, however elusive.”

Velasquez spent 27 years working in TV news, starting in 1974, producing public affairs programming and then reporting on-air for three local stations, KNSD-TV, KGTV and KFMB-TV, as well as anchoring and reporting in San Luis Obispo, Calif. and Phoenix. She was one of the San Diego market’s first Latina journalists, an Emmy award-winning producer and journalist who covered the Tijuana region. She also produced morning and magazine shows about San Diego’s diverse communities and the Latino culture. In 1984, she also was a founding board member of the California Chicano News Media Association, San Diego chapter. Then, in 2001, she began a 16-year stint working in spokesperson roles with the San Diego City Attorney’s Office (2001-2008) and the San Diego Housing Commission (2009-2017). She continues her public relations and community work through Maria Velasquez Communications.

“I am very grateful for this award. All my life I have been devoted to storytelling,” said Velasquez. “When I was 8 years old, I wished for a typewriter for Christmas, and my parents saved their money to buy me one. I credit my television journalism career for giving me a solid background in how to better serve the public in my public relations roles.”

Townson’s award is named after Jim Reiman, who served for many years as assistant news director at KGTV-TV/Channel 10. Reiman was considered an unsung hero of the profession, similar to many behind-the-scenes journalists who do not have a byline nor appear on camera. When Reinman retired, the Press Club created the award to honor enlightened media managers and the first recipient was KGTV assignment editor Jack Moorhead in 1997.

St. John’s award is named after Harold Keen, who anchored San Diego’s first television news broadcast in 1949 and was described by colleagues as the dean of San Diego journalists. Keen arrived in San Diego in 1936 as a reporter for The San Diego Sun. He later worked for the San Diego Union, San Diego Magazine and KFMB-TV/Channel 8. He passed away in 1981.

Velasquez’s award is named after Andy Mace, former public relations manager at Pacific Telephone in San Diego. In 1971, Mace is credited with the idea of starting the San Diego Press Club. He later started his own company, Andy Mace & Associates, with an office at the Mission Valley’s Stardust Hotel & Country Club, now the Handlery Hotel. He passed away in 2009 at age 88.

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