



HEADLINERS FOUNDATION OF TEXAS

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HEADLINERS FOUNDATION ANNOUNCES AWARD WINNERS FOR HIGH-IMPACT TEXAS JOURNALISM

AUSTIN (April 9, 2018) —The [Headliners Foundation of Texas](http://www.headlinersfoundation.org) today announced that *The Texas Tribune*'s Jay Root is the winner of this year's Showcase Gold Award for Enterprise and Innovation in Journalism for his series, "[Wooahoo: Trouble at TABC.](#)" Root's four-month investigation uncovered scandalous behavior by staff at the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission that showed in detail the extent of a pay-for-play relationship between regulators and the state's powerful liquor industry. It also led to the exodus of six high-ranking management officials at the agency, making way for necessary reforms in agency operations.

This is the fifth year for the Showcase Awards, which pays \$2,000 for the top prize. The Foundation judged a record-breaking 64 entries, and winners and other entries can be viewed on the Foundation's website at www.headlinersfoundation.org.

"'Trouble at the TABC' embodies the mission of the Showcase Award," said Jean Marie Brown, a Showcase judge and director of student media at Texas Christian University. "Without the dogged determination and work of *The Texas Tribune*, the behaviors at TABC could still be going strong. Instead, the *Tribune* stories led to major changes that will allow for a new culture to develop."

The Foundation also announced four Showcase Silver Award winners (\$1,000 to each):

- Staff of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* for its work on "[Life on Las Vegas Trail: Drugs, Guns, Abuse - and a sliver of hope.](#)" The newspaper's project on child abuse led to discoveries of significant poverty, abuse, and drugs in a neighborhood called Las Vegas Trail in western Fort Worth. The *Star-Telegram* sounded the alarm for needed change, which quickly began coming to the area through police surveillance, donations, and community building.
- Staff of the *Houston Chronicle* for its seven-part investigative series, "[Developing Storm,](#)" which helps explain how catastrophic Hurricane Harvey wreaked havoc on the city of Houston, dumping 51 inches of rain. The series documents how government action – and inaction – magnified the hurricane's devastating effects and how Harvey was both a natural and manmade disaster due to zoning issues, construction in known floodplains, and real estate interests squashing legislative efforts to address the concerns.
- Investigative staff of KXAN-TV Austin for its investigative story, "[TxTag Troubles.](#)" Through dozens of complaints from viewers, coupled with a series of open records requests, the station found that more than 2.2 million TxTag toll accounts had been sent

to collections in less than a year – racking up a billion dollars in late fees. While the Texas Department of Transportation blamed customers for not paying their bills, investigative efforts by KXAN-TV showed the billing system had systemic problems. Additionally, TxTag customer service representatives came forward as whistleblowers, and a state legislator called for an overhaul of the billing system that involved six different entities and a total breakdown in communication and collaboration, which continues to date.

- Staff of *The Texas Tribune* for "[Predicting Hurricane Harvey's Wrath and Investigating its Aftermath.](#)" In 2016, *The Tribune* embarked on a data-driven investigative series in partnership with non-profit journalism resource *ProPublica* entitled, "[Hell and High Water.](#)" which demonstrated how the Houston area was ill-prepared for a catastrophic weather event. A year later, the investigative project was prescient in the wake of Hurricane Harvey's landfall – the most powerful storm to strike Texas since the 1960s. Through the production of slideshows, videos, interactive maps, and other visuals, along with live, in-person forums with residents, *The Texas Tribune*, partnering again with *ProPublica*, used their research and story-telling to help Harvey victims find assistance to recover and rebuild, while serving as a watchdog for elected officials and local, state and federal government agencies.

Noting two Silver Awards related to coverage of Hurricane Harvey, the judges awarded "Special Recognition" to all Harvey-related entries in Showcase, including *The Victoria Advocate*, the weekly *South Jetty News* of Port Aransas, and a combined entry of affiliates of Texas Public Radio, in addition to the *Houston Chronicle* and *The Texas Tribune*.

"This cataclysmic event and its aftermath stretched news organizations to their limits and beyond – in some cases, their headquarters filled with water or their staffs having to evacuate," said John Lumpkin, Headliners Foundation vice chair and chair of the Showcase competition. "Reporters, photographers and videographers were right behind first responders to tell this story."

Harvey-related winners in other 2017 Foundation-sponsored competitions will be added to the list of Texas news media in the Showcase judges' special citation when the results of those competitions are announced later this spring by Texas Associated Press Managing Editors and Texas Associated Press Broadcasters.

Additionally, the Foundation plans to host an anniversary symposium on Harvey coverage, calling attention to the media in its special recognition, and also develop a web portfolio of the winning entries as a digital history book of such coverage and a resource for future study by journalism students and professionals.

The Showcase Awards for Enterprise and Innovation in Journalism program is the only statewide competition for Texas-based news media that judges entries across all platforms – digital, broadcast, magazine, and newspaper – on their significant impact on government, public policy or the conduct of a business, nonprofit or other organization. All professional media were eligible to submit entries to the contest, including magazines, web-only publishers, radio outlets and even small, specialized news providers. Interviews with several of this year's winners will be posted in the coming months on the Foundation's website.

"We are extremely proud that this substantial Headliners Foundation award program puts a spotlight on the great work of Texas journalists and news organizations," said Chair Mark

Morrison. “Members of the Headliners Club in Austin started the tradition of supporting excellence in journalism more than 60 years ago. They created the Headliners Foundation in 1983 to formalize and expand their commitment.” The Foundation currently invests well over \$100,000 annually in awards, scholarships, grants, and educational programs to encourage strong, independent news media and to educate future journalists in the state, he added.

“Texas was the focus of some very unfortunate news events - most notably Hurricane Harvey, but also the Sutherland Springs mass shootings - and our news organizations overcame tremendous obstacles to tell the stories that their audiences needed desperately needed to know,” said Lumpkin, chair of the judging committee. “However, the record number of entries in the Showcase demonstrated our state’s news media maintained with exceptional focus its role as watchdog in the public interest in many other issues not related to the breaking news.”

Among the entries for the first time were local online independent news publications, a sign, according to Lumpkin, that the Foundation's unique rules allowing all news media platforms to compete, is working in the interest of Texas journalism’s progress.

A six-member judging committee of veteran editors and journalism educators made the selections: Committee Chair John Lumpkin, Jean Marie Brown, Nann Goplerud, Kathleen McElroy, Mark Morrison, and Fred Zipp. Their biographies are available on the [Foundation’s Showcase Awards page](#).

Winners of the \$6,000 in Showcase Award funds will be honored at the Foundation’s annual Mike Quinn awards luncheon in the fall of 2018 at the Headliners Club in Austin.

The Foundation is currently accepting submissions for the 2018 Showcase Award Enterprise and Innovation in Journalism. For more information about all 2017 winning entrants and how to submit an entry for consideration for the 2018 award program, please visit the Foundation’s website at www.headlinersfoundation.org.