



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 2, 2012

IRE 2011 AWARD WINNERS

Contact:

- Mark Horvit, IRE executive director, 573-882-2042 or mhorvit@ire.org
- Lea Thompson, contest committee co-chairwoman, 202-365-9083 or Thompson.lea@gmail.com
- Manny Garcia, *The Miami Herald/El Nuevo Herald*, IRE Board president, 305-376-3445 or magarcia@elnuevoherald.com

COLUMBIA, Mo. – Investigations that exposed major abuses and wrongdoing by law enforcement agencies and the failure of government to protect society’s most vulnerable members are among the work honored in the 2011 Investigative Reporters and Editors Awards. Many winning projects involved analysis of massive troves of documents and huge collections of data. Others required fierce fights for public documents and demonstrated great courage by journalists working under dangerous conditions.

“Despite devastating cutbacks across the news business, investigative reporting is alive and well, and really making a difference in our society,” said Lea Thompson, contest committee co-chairwoman. “The judges not only saw superb digging, but also perseverance in the face of what often seemed insurmountable odds by large and small news organizations working in print, TV, radio and online.”

This year’s winners were selected from among more than 430 entries.

This year represents a major shift in the way entries were categorized to better reflect changes in the industry that have had great impact on how news is gathered and presented. Instead of basing categories on media type – newspaper, TV broadcaster, etc. – entries were grouped by the nature of the work itself. This year there were four categories: print/online text (written word); broadcast/video; radio/audio; multiplatform. Within those areas, work was divided into small, medium and large categories. Specialized categories (such as Freedom of Information Act and student) were not affected by the changes.

The awards, given by Investigative Reporters and Editors Inc. since 1979, recognize the most outstanding watchdog journalism of the year. The contest covers 15 categories across media platforms and a range of market sizes.

IRE 2011 MEDAL WINNERS:

“[Constable Corruption](#),” KTRK - TV ABC - 13 Houston. Wayne Dolcefino, Kevin Hirten and Colin McIntyre. (Category: Broadcast/Video – Medium)

See judges’ comments below.

“[On Shaky Ground](#),” California Watch and KQED San Francisco. Corey G. Johnson, Erica Perez, Kendall Taggart, Agustin Armendariz, Michael Montgomery, Anna Werner, Krissy Clark. (Category: Multiplatform – Medium)

See judges’ comments below.

TOM RENNER AWARD

“[Death in the Desert](#),” CNN. Frederik Pleitgen, Mohamed Fahmy, Sheri England, Tim Lister, Ian Lee, Simon Payne and Earl Nurse.

Judges’ Comments: CNN’s team faced great personal risk in crossing the dangerous badlands of Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula to expose a network of human trafficking and organ sales in “Death in the Desert.” The team managed to persuade the hostile, clannish Bedouin tribesmen of the region to talk about their organized kidnapping for ransom and trafficking in African immigrants trying to cross from Egypt into Israel. The team also procured photographic evidence, reviewed by coroners, that suggested some immigrants had their organs harvested before being buried in the desert. The final scene of nameless immigrants buried in unmarked graves almost within sight of their final destination in Israel provided an emotional finish to a dramatic, difficult and important story.

FOI AWARD

“[The Fed's Trillion-Dollar Secret](#),” *Bloomberg News*. Bradley Keoun, Phil Kuntz, Bob Ivry, Craig Torres, Scott Lanman, David Yanofsky, Donald Griffin, Greg Stohr and Christopher Condon.

Judges’ Comments: This is accountability reporting at its best. In the wake of the near collapse of the nation’s financial system, *Bloomberg News* sought important records from the Federal Reserve about loans made to some of the nation’s biggest banks. The Federal Reserve refused, and Bloomberg sued under the Freedom of Information Act. The case went all the way to the Supreme Court, which refused to overturn the lower court’s decision. IRE commends *Bloomberg News* for its efforts to provide a rare, behind-the-scenes look at one of the most powerful and secretive industries in American society.

AN IRE SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARD FOR “SERVICE TO THE FIRST AMENDMENT”

The Salt Lake Tribune for reporting, editorial stance and lobbying efforts help keep Utah’s open record law intact, ***The Salt Lake Tribune* staff, Salt Lake City.**

Judges’ Comments: For its superb and fair coverage and its rigorous editorial advocacy, *The Salt Lake Tribune* receives an IRE Special Recognition Award for “Service to the First Amendment.” The paper waged and won a battle over the Utah legislature’s attempt to eviscerate Utah’s open records law and citizens’ rights to know. Lawmakers introduced and passed a bill late in the legislative session without much notice. But the paper fought back in two months of coverage on the content and impact of the bill. It offered its content to other newspapers around the state, and in a rare and unusual move ran strong editorials on the front page. Despite the governor’s initial signing of the bill, the paper’s efforts and public outcry forced him to reverse his position and call the legislature back into session. For extraordinary effort by newspaper managers and staff, IRE offers it congratulations and awards special recognition.

IRE 2011 WINNERS BY CATEGORY:

PRINT/ONLINE - SMALL

[“Unfit for Duty,”](#) *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, Sarasota, Fla.

Matthew Doig, Anthony Cormier.

Judges’ Comments: In “Unfit for Duty,” the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* exposed questionable backgrounds of hundreds of Florida police officers. Backed by database analysis and on-the-ground reporting, investigations editor Matthew Doig and crime beat reporter Anthony Cormier joined forces to find nearly one in 20 active law enforcement officers had egregious cases of misconduct but still managed to keep their badges. The newspaper’s story prompted results even before the story ran. Florida’s governor ordered an inquiry into violations of law uncovered by the reporters, and two police officers became targets of an investigation. For exposing lack of police oversight that allowed a cadre of rogue cops to work in cities and towns throughout the state, IRE honors the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*.

PRINT/ONLINE - MEDIUM

[“Methadone and the Politics of Pain,”](#) *The Seattle Times*, Seattle.

Michael J. Berens, Ken Armstrong

Judges’ Comments: Scrutiny of hundreds of thousands of documents and customized databases left no doubt the decision by the state of Washington to use methadone as a narcotic pain killer was discriminatory and dangerous. Despite fierce opposition from officials, the paper was able to prove in a 10-month investigation that more than 2,000 people overdosed on the cheap but unpredictable drug the state was pushing to save money. Through exhaustive cross-referencing and shoe leather reporting, the paper showed that while 8 percent of poor adults were on Medicaid, they represented 48 percent of the methadone deaths. In swift reaction to the story, the state issued an emergency health advisory to more than 1,000 pharmacists and 17,000 licensed health care professionals, warning of methadone’s risk. For saving lives, IRE honors *The Seattle Times* and all the people who worked on that story.

PRINT/ONLINE - LARGE

[“Assault on Learning”](#) *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Philadelphia.

Susan Snyder, Dylan Purcell, John Sullivan, Kristen Graham, Jeff Gammage

Judges’ Comments: “Assault on Learning” is local reporting at its highest level. We all know anecdotally that urban schools are tough places to survive, let alone learn, but reporters at *The Philadelphia Inquirer* went so much further in quantifying the violence and personalizing it in an irrefutable way. *The Inquirer* demonstrated the school system under-reported violent incidents and routinely failed to protect teachers and students. An intervention program was unmasked as nothing more than paper-shuffling. Following the project, the district has established a new protocol for reporting serious incidents and crime. For putting five reporters on this project for more than year, for overcoming the obstacles of closed environments and sealed records, and for putting a face on a violent school system and its victims, IRE honors *The Inquirer* for exemplary investigative work.

MULTIPLATFORM - SMALL

No Award

MULTIPLATFORM - MEDIUM

[“On Shaky Ground,”](#) California Watch and *KQED*, San Francisco.

Corey G. Johnson, Erica Perez, Kendall Taggart, Agustin Armendariz, Michael Montgomery, Anna Werner and Krissy Clark.

Judges’ Comments: “On Shaky Ground” was an extraordinary effort examining seismic safeguards in place to protect California’s schoolchildren from earthquakes. Reporters dug through more than 30,000 pages of documents, created online maps and databases and visited schools throughout the state to get the story. It took 19 months, but the reporters found California officials abrogated their oversight duties and allowed more than 42,000 children to attend schools with serious safety issues. The project had astonishing breadth, depth and creativity. The stories were published in more than 150 news outlets and translated into four languages, and video segments appeared in every major California media market. California Watch created an iPhone app to show local residents their proximity to fault zones and even a coloring book explaining it all to schoolchildren. The hard work paid off: State lawmakers ordered audits and investigations, and new state standards were created to allow schools to more easily tap into a fund to repair seismic hazards. For its commitment to public service, use of documents and computer analysis, and its focus on reader engagement and interactivity, “On Shaky Ground” is awarded IRE’s highest honor, an IRE Medal.

MULTIPLATFORM - LARGE

[“Death Investigation in America,”](#) ProPublica, NPR, Frontline (PBS)

ProPublica: A.C. Thompson, Chisun Lee, Marshall Allen, Aarti Shahani, Mosi Secret, Krista Kjellman, Al Shaw, Jennifer LaFleur and Robin Fields.

NPR: Joe Shapiro, Sandra Bartlett, Coburn Dukeheart, John Poole and Susanne Reber.

Frontline: Lowell Bergman (University of California Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism), Carl Byker, Andres Cediell, Arun Rath, Raney Aronson-Rath and David Fanning.

Judges’ Comments: Most Americans believe the nation’s morgues are filled with dedicated professionals who are equipped with high-tech, state-of-the-art tools and spend whatever time it takes to solve suspicious deaths and bring criminals to justice. ProPublica, NPR and Frontline showed us death investigations are a patchwork of different systems that bear little resemblance to the work seen on television shows such as “CSI.” Through this revealing multimedia package, we learned death investigations are often flawed and innocent people go to jail or the guilty are allowed to go free. For its hard-driving investigation into this little-understood part of the criminal justice system, IRE honors “Death Investigation in America.”

BROADCAST/VIDEO - SMALL

[“Hiding Behind the Badge,”](#) WVUE-TV, New Orleans.

Lee Zurik, Donny Pearce, Mike Schaefer, Greg Phillips and Marcy Planer.

Judges’ Comments: A powerful sheriff and a businessman pleaded guilty to federal corruption charges after Lee Zurik and the WVUE-TV team exposed and detailed their intricate scheme to defraud taxpayers. Through public records requests and scrutiny of thousands of pages of documents, the team built spreadsheets that proved how a local sheriff spent hundreds of thousands of dollars from his donors on a lavish lifestyle, falsified campaign documents and profited from the BP oil spill. Congratulations to WVUE-TV for its eight-month rolling investigation and its stick-to-it attitude, which resulted in even bigger stories as the station continued to dig.

BROADCAST/VIDEO - MEDIUM

[“Constable Corruption,”](#) KTRK - TV ABC - 13, Houston.

Wayne Dolcefino, Kevin Hirten and Colin McIntyre.

Judges’ Comments: In this textbook IRE investigation done in a nontraditional style, KTRK-TV went after Houston-area law enforcement officials. Plowing through mountains of paperwork, data and sources, reporter Wayne Dolcefino and his team exposed a culture of corruption among the county’s entrenched constables that included appropriating charity and campaign funds for their own use and allowing employees to commit time sheet fraud. Dolcefino engages the viewer with his irreverent style and high production values, but beneath the entertainment is a rock-solid, water-tight, well-documented investigation. The station made extensive use of FOIA and fought back hard when denied. Its online presentation engaged the reader to follow the investigators as they pursued their targets. Several outside agencies are now investigating several constables offices. For the dogged and difficult pursuit of corruption in its own hometown, *KTRK’S* “Constable Corruption” is awarded IRE’s highest honor, an IRE Medal.

BROADCAST VIDEO - LARGE

[“20/20 Peace Corps: A Trust Betrayed,”](#) ABC News.

Brian Ross, Rhonda Schwartz, Anna Schecter, Angela M. Hill and Asa Eslocker.

Judges’ Comments: ABC News had a hard-hitting report on the 50th anniversary of the Peace Corps. After 10 months of work, it revealed a shocking story of hundreds of Peace Corps women being raped around the world. This report by Brian Ross and the ABC investigative team was in large part responsible for a new law, named after the victim in the ABC report, which is meant to protect Peace Corps volunteers and whistleblowers. Using internal Peace Corps reports ABC was able to show a systematic failure within the agency and its practice of “hushing things up” and “blaming the victim.” ABC not only found many victims but also persuaded them to go public. IRE commends Ross and Producer Anna Schecter for their on-the-ground investigation in Benin, West Africa, and honors them for their 20-plus followup stories and a very tough interview with the Peace Corps.

RADIO/AUDIO

[“Rising Violence in California Psychiatric Hospitals,”](#) NPR.

Ina Jaffe and Quinn O’Toole.

When a worker at a California psychiatric hospital was murdered by a patient last year, NPR reporter Ina Jaffe began looking into what appeared to be cases of rising violence against health care workers. The resulting reports showed that the death was not an isolated incident. In fact, NPR found widespread violence against workers by patients who were committed by the criminal justice system. But the reporting went beyond simply showing cases of assault: It linked the rise in violence to government policies and inaction by psychiatric hospitals, which rarely forwarded cases to the district attorneys for prosecution. Because of NPR’s work, the state of California has introduced two pieces of legislation to address the problem, one that would keep drug users with temporary psychosis out of the facilities and another that would make it a felony for certain patients to assault hospital staff. The judges commend NPR for covering new ground on an important subject and helping keep a spotlight on a continuing problem in the mental health system—how to treat and house patients who are dangerous and mentally ill.

STUDENT

[“Million-Dollar Bust,”](#) *The Daily Toreador*, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas.

Ioanna Makris, April Cunningham and Caroline Courtney.

Judges’ comments: Three student reporters took on powerful Texas Tech University alumni over a sweetheart deal to build and then lease back to the university a parking garage that wasn’t needed. Their investigation probably saved the university \$1 million. The student reporters got the state’s attorney general involved in forcing documents to be released under the Texas Public Information Act. They also used emails, tax records and other documents to show the cozy relationship between members of the same fraternity who built an unnecessary private parking garage and then leased it back under a contract that put the burden of renting the spaces on Texas Tech and its alumni association. The students showed great initiative and stood their ground in the face of public criticism of their reporting. For using that criticism to dig even deeper, IRE honors *The Daily Toreador* and its student journalists.

BREAKING NEWS

[“Violent Felon Went Unnoticed,”](#) *The Palm Beach Post*, Palm Beach, Fla.

Michael LaForgia, Cynthia Roldan and Adam Playford.

Judges’ Comments: *The Palm Beach Post* raced the clock and the competition to unearth compelling details in the deaths of two children whose bodies were fished out of a South Florida canal. Reporters LaForgia, Roldan and Playford were able to flesh out details about the suspect and victims within days of the crime. Playford uncovered key court documents 30 minutes before the courthouse closed and, using his iPhone, snapped pictures of hundreds of pages of documents as clerks were shoving him out the door. The records showed how officials should and could have done more to protect the children from the violent felon who was engaged to their mother. IRE chose this entry as an exemplary case of how investigative reporters can dig deeply on deadline, and in this case their rapid-fire enterprise work revealed flaws in Florida’s child welfare system.

BOOK

[“Render Unto Rome: The Secret Life of Money in the Catholic Church,”](#) Jason Berry

Judges’ comments: Author Jason Berry delves deeply into a topic few have examined – the secretive finances of the Roman Catholic Church. Using voluminous background research that takes the reader back centuries, Berry uncovers abuses of the trust of church members by influential bishops who diverted funds intended for philanthropic purposes into accounts used for plugging Vatican operating deficits or defending priests accused of pedophilia. Berry details how the modern church is systematically closing churches in poorer parishes while at the same time opening churches in affluent suburbs where the weekly “take” is greater. The author makes extensive use of public documents, leaked parish records, trial transcripts, interviews and a wide range of published reporting to paint a complete picture of a heretofore secret network of church financial dealings. For shining a bright light on the shenanigans and inner workings of the Catholic Church, IRE honors Jason Berry and “Render Unto Rome”.

Thompson said the judges were “particularly impressed with all the high-tech interactive work and with the dogged use of Freedom of Information requests that allowed all of us to find out important information those in charge did not want the public to know.”

Contest entries are screened and judged by IRE members who are working journalists. The IRE Awards program is unique among journalism contests in the extent of its efforts to avoid conflicts of interest. Work that includes any significant role by a member of the IRE Board of Directors or an IRE contest judge may not be entered in the contest.

This represents a significant sacrifice on the part of the individual — and often an entire newsroom — who may have done outstanding investigative work. For example, some work from *The Miami Herald/El Nuevo Herald*, *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, *The Toronto Star*, WTVF-TV in Nashville, Tenn., VoiceofSanDiego.com, *The Washington Post*, Reuters and the Florida Center for Investigative Reporting was ineligible for entry in this year's contest.

IRE, founded in 1975, is a nonprofit professional organization dedicated to training and supporting journalists who pursue investigative stories, and it operates the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting, a joint program of IRE and the Missouri School of Journalism. The IRE Awards will be presented at a luncheon Saturday, June 16, at the 2012 IRE Conference in Boston.

Copies of all contest entries are available to IRE members from the IRE Resource Center, which has more than 25,000 investigative stories submitted over the past 30 years. The Resource Center can be reached via email at rescntr@ire.org or by calling 573-882-3364.

See full list of winners, finalists and judges' comments at <http://ire.org/awards/ire-awards/winners/2011-ire-awards-winners/>