

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 8, 2011

IRE 2010 AWARD WINNERS

Contact:

- Mark Horvit, IRE Executive Director, 573-882-2042 or mhorvit@ire.org
- Cheryl Phillips, *The Seattle Times*, IRE Board chairman and Contest Committee co-chairwoman, 206-464-2411 or cphillips@seattletimes.com
- Lea Thompson, LT Productions, Contest Committee co-chairwoman, 202-365-9083 or thompson.lea@gmail.com
- Alison Young, *USA Today*, IRE Board president, 703-854-6466 or ayoung@usatoday.com

COLUMBIA, MO. – Investigations that found financial mismanagement and fraud in business and industry, cover-ups of lethal products, and failure of government to protect the public are among the works honored in the 2010 Investigative Reporters and Editors Awards.

This year, there were two recipients of the top prize: the IRE Medal. *The Los Angeles Times* uncovered a story of incredible greed in one of California's poorest towns, Bell, in "Breach of Faith." The *Times* revealed how residents' tax money was going toward outlandish salaries for some city employees, while others were getting laid off and services were being cut. The series resulted in resignations, arrests, and the refunding of nearly of \$2.9 million in overpaid taxes and fees.

In the inaugural year of the "Partnership/Collaboration" category, an IRE Medal was awarded to the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists and the BBC International News Services for "Dangers in the Dust: Inside the Global Asbestos Trade." This project exposed an extensive network that has spent more than \$100 million since the 1980s to keep asbestos on the market despite its known health risks.

This year's winners were selected from among 430 entries. International entries won two of the awards: the Medal for Partnership/Collaboration and the Renner Award.

The Partnership/Collaboration category was introduced to the IRE Awards this year, and the judges were impressed by the variety and scope of these projects. "Particularly heartening were the partnerships among traditional competitors who banded together to do important work that otherwise could not have been done, said Lea Thompson, contest committee co-chairwoman.

"Judging the IRE awards leaves me with a sense of excitement for our industry. I was bowled over by the depth and breadth of all the entries, and by the change that resulted from fantastic investigative journalism by both small shops and large, in this country and around the world," said Cheryl Phillips, co-chairwoman of the contest committee.

The awards, given by Investigative Reporters and Editors Inc. since 1979, recognize the most outstanding watchdog journalism of the year. The contest covers 18 categories across media platforms and a range of market sizes.

Largest Newspapers (Over 500,000 or wire service) – IRE Medal winner: Jeff Gottlieb, Ruben Vives, Kim Christensen, Hector Becerra, Corina Knoll, Robert J. Lopez, Paloma Esquivel, Paul Pringle, Jessica Garrison, Richard Winton, Shelby Grad, Steve Marble, Kimi Yoshino, Megan Garvey and Maloy Moore of the *Los Angeles Times* for “Breach of Faith.” At a time when many news organizations are pulling back and reducing coverage of outlying cities, *The Los Angeles Times* uncovered a story of incredible greed in one of the state’s poorest towns, Bell. Fighting hard for the records to prove it, the *Times* put 11 reporters on the story and found that the Bell town government had bilked its 39,000 residents of millions of dollars in outlandishly high salaries and property taxes, even as the town cut services and laid off workers. Taxpayers were unknowingly forking over \$800,000 for the city manager, \$376,000 for an assistant city manager, \$457,000 for the police chief and \$100,000 for part-time council members. The impact of the series has been far-flung, including resignations, arrests and the refund of \$2.9 million in overpaid taxes and fees.

Partnership/Collaboration – IRE Medal winner: Jim Morris, Steve Bradshaw, Ana Avila, Murali Krishnan, Roman Shleynov, Scilla Alecci, Te-Ping Chen, Dan Ettinger, Carlos Eduardo Huertas, Shantanu Guha Ray, Marcelo Soares, Abhishek Upadhyay, David E. Kaplan, Marina Walker Guevara, and Anne Koch of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists and the BBC International News Services for “Dangers in the Dust: Inside the Global Asbestos Trade.” This project took an eight-country team of reporters nine months to complete. It discovered that a global network of industry groups has spent nearly \$100 million since the 1980s to keep asbestos – a known killer banned or restricted in 52 countries – on the market. This investigation was done in countries where public records are hard to get, including China and India. Legal and corporate documents, scientific papers and budgets had to be translated and the numbers crunched. The statistics are more than impressive: 200 people interviewed in eight countries, a BBC documentary released in multiple languages, and 150 countries that received coverage from 250 outlets, blogs and websites in 20 languages. The project’s impact has been far-reaching. The Leader of the Opposition in the Canadian House of Commons has called for an end to Canada’s exports, and an Internet campaign resulted in 7,000 letters, many calling on Quebec to cut off loan guarantees to its only remaining asbestos mine.

Tom Renner Award (tie): Marina Walker Guevara, Kate Willson, David Donald, Marcos Garcia Rey, Jean-Pierre Canet, Scilla Alecci, Brigitte Alfter, Martin Foster, Fred Laurin, Miranda Patrucic, Traver Riggins, Leo Sisti, Gul Tuysuz, David E. Kaplan, Steve Bradshaw, Bruno Sorrentino, Jenny Richards and Davina Rodrigues of The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists for “Looting the Seas.” From Tokyo’s Tsukiji fish market to the tuna boats working the waters off the coast of Montpellier, France, this sweeping report involved 18 reporters working in nine countries chronicling the \$4 billion black-market bluefin tuna business. Reporters found a system working under the radar to harvest fish against international practices, doctoring numbers to appease regulators, and trading tuna off the books in the countries where it brings the highest value. The reports employed records from 10 countries, including legal briefs, corporate reports and databases used by regulators to track the trade. Using print, online and

broadcast distribution, the series pointed to one of the largest illegal empires in the world, tying together evidence across the globe that might not have been connected otherwise. The series attracted attention worldwide, initiating reforms in both the international body that regulates Atlantic tuna fishing and in individual countries that fish for tuna.

Tom Renner Award (tie): Ken Armstrong and Jonathan Martin of *The Seattle Times* for “The Other Side of Mercy.” This follow-up on *The Seattle Times*’ original Pulitzer Prize Breaking News coverage of the killing of four police officers in a Seattle suburb is a darkly fascinating tale of the man behind the killings and the system that failed to keep him behind bars. Reporters traced Maurice Clemmons’ criminal history to his teen incarceration in Arkansas and the many years he spent in and out of prison, growing more angry and resentful of society. Using more than 100 hours of recorded phone calls, records from the prison systems citing Clemmons’ inability to improve himself, and documents showing a series of officials who repeatedly arrested and released Clemmons without regard for what he might do while free, the reporting slowly brought the reader back to the Washington state crimes with a much better understanding of how they could have happened. In the end, the multipart account is as riveting as any crime novel, leaving the reader wishing it were just a piece of fiction instead of being a terrifying, real-life story of madness and mayhem.

FOI Award: David S. Fallis, James V. Grimaldi, Sari Horwitz and Cheryl W. Thompson of *The Washington Post* for “The Hidden Life of Guns.” For the extensive use of FOIA but also for finding a way around its exemptions, *The Washington Post* is awarded the 2010 IRE FOIA Medal. In 2003, Congress created an exemption to the Freedom of Information Act. It cut off the release of data tying a gun used in a crime to the store or dealer who first sold it. That didn’t stop the *Post* from doing it the hard way, with public-record requests to state governments which gathered data on more than 35,000 guns traced to crimes, which were then assembled into lists of top gun dealers. The *Post* also put together the first comprehensive database showing 511 police officers killed by firearms. The facts were chilling – for instance, just one gun store sold more than 2,500 guns recovered in crimes in the Washington area. This well-written story detailed the very real consequences of inattentiveness and political influence peddling. The reaction to the story was immediate. The Obama Administration announced an emergency implementation of a rule that would require reporting bulk sales of assault weapons at the Mexican border, and a grand jury was convened in Texas to investigate one of the retailers highlighted by the *Post*.

Large newspapers (250,000-500,000) (tie): Jeff Testerman, John Martin and Richard Bockman of the *St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times* for “Under the Radar.” Jeff Testerman and John Martin uncovered an exceptionally brazen fake charity scheme that had collected millions of dollars in the name of veterans and funneled money to conservative politicians across the nation. They found the U.S. Navy Veterans Association was far less than it seemed. The association claimed offices in 41 states and nearly 67,000 members. But despite an elaborate website and what appeared to be a national board of directors, the newspaper could find no evidence of anybody – except the group’s founder, who called himself Lt. Commander Bobby Thompson. Even his name was phony. He’s now on the lam. As a result of the series, federal authorities are

investigating, and an Ohio grand jury has returned indictments against “Thompson,” alleging theft, racketeering and money laundering.

Large newspapers (250,000-500,000) (tie): Michael J. Berens of *The Seattle Times* for “Seniors for Sale.” *The Seattle Times* revealed the tragic problems that evolved from an effort to give frail Washington residents an alternative to nursing homes – and save the state money. As Michael J. Berens discovered, it has resulted in thousands of elderly people being exploited and abused in a booming “adult home” industry. In this series of well-focused stories, Berens uncovered 236 previously unknown deaths from causes indicating neglect or abuse. He profiled elderly residents drugged and suffering excruciating injuries at the hands of amateur caregivers. He noted business owners went so far as to list frail residents as commodities for sale. The series led to the demotion of a state official who oversaw the facilities and reforms, including a requirement that home operators publicly post inspections.

Medium newspapers (100,000-250,000): Marshall Allen and Alex Richards of *The Las Vegas Sun* for “Do No Harm: Hospital Care in Las Vegas.” In a three-year investigation, *The Las Vegas Sun* did what the government could not achieve in eight years: Identify and publicly report preventable injuries and infection in Las Vegas hospitals. Using computer-assisted reporting, statistical analysis and new media, Marshall Allen and Alex Richards analyzed 2.9 million records finding 396 deaths, over 2000 infections from superbugs, and over 700 injuries due to surgical accidents. Before this report, Nevadans could learn more about the odds of a slot machine than the quality of care from a local hospital. Within weeks of publication, some hospitals began revealing their own information publicly. Then lawmakers proposed three new laws and regulators began investigating under-reporting by hospitals.

Small newspapers (Circulation under 100,000): Paige St. John of the *Sarasota (Fla.) Herald-Tribune* for “Florida’s Insurance Nightmare.” Florida residents have the highest property insurance rates in the world – souring the state economy, killing real estate sales and forcing families from their homes. Paige St. John showed the entire industry has been based on lies – about why there is a crisis, where the money is going and whether homeowners are even protected against catastrophe. Pushing back against an industry that hired PR firms to attack the story, St. John revealed how it created a bogus computer model to predict catastrophic hurricane strikes so insurers could hike premiums and how more than 100,000 homes are insured by companies so financially unstable they likely couldn’t cover a house fire, let alone a hurricane. As a result of these stories, insurance companies have been ordered to rewrite contracts and return millions of dollars to policyholders. Eight competing newspapers cited St. John’s stories in calling for changes in state legislation. Some already passed, with promises of more on the way.

Local-circulation weeklies: Aram Roston, Reid Pillifant and Azi Paybarah, *New York Observer* for “Bloomberg’s Offshore Millions.” Showing it never hurts to tell a story with humor, even in a financial investigation, this informative piece by freelancer Aram Roston and *Observer* reporters Reid Pillifant and Azi Paybarah details how New York City’s mayor is encouraging city residents to invest and pay taxes, but has millions of his own dollars tucked away in off-shore tax shelters. The judges commend the reporters for finding and obtaining the documentation about

the mayor's investments. The project was funded by the Investigative Fund of The Nation Institute.

Network/Syndicated: Scott Cohn, Jeff Pohlman, Emily Bodenbergh, Steve Banton and Mitch Weitzner of CNBC for “Remington Under Fire.” Uncovering memos from the 1940s, CNBC showed that Remington knew its most popular bolt-action rifle could go off without pulling the trigger but rejected a fix because it would cost 5.5 cents more per gun. CNBC tracked down the writer of that memo, now 98 years old. This is a story of a massive cover-up – not only of the problem but the dozens of lives lost because of it. As a result of the story, the police chief in Portland, Maine, pulled all Remington 700s from the police department, and the U.S. Border Patrol is retrofitting all of its 700s. Remington’s parent, Freedom Group, says every case was user error.

Top 20 Markets: Brett Shipp, Mark Smith, Billy Bryant and Michael Valentine of WFAA-Dallas for “Grounds for Removal.” Hundreds of thousands of Americans go to sleep each night with a hidden time bomb ticking under their beds: faulty gas lines. Sometimes those lines explode, killing or injuring the unsuspecting victims above. Such was the case time and time again in Texas where faulty gas lines running under residential neighborhoods exploded with no warning. Reporter Brett Shipp, producer Mark Smith, editor/photographer Billy Bryant and news director Michael Valentine spent four years finding and documenting a lack of regulatory oversight of gas lines across the state, even interviewing officials who couldn’t say where the pipes were buried. The multipart series forced state officials to order the oil and gas industry to spend \$1 billion to dig up and replace aging lines and couplings.

Below Top 20 Markets: Bob Segall, Bill Ditton and Cyndee Hebert of WTHR-Indianapolis for “Reality Check: Where are the Jobs?” Superbly executed, this project holds government accountable for grossly inflated claims of job growth in Indiana. Reporter Bob Segall, producer Cyndee Hebert and photojournalist Bill Ditton spent 18 months and logged 8,000 miles traversing Indiana in search of these jobs. With great editing and clear, precise writing, they disclosed their findings – not scores of new workers, but cornfields and abandoned factories. This is shoe-leather reporting at its best, terrific mapping and use of graphics, great building of databases, and terrific use of sound and standups. Following the series, officials acknowledged the inflated job claims and promised greater transparency and disclosure of public documents.

Magazine/Specialty Publication: David Evans of *Bloomberg Markets* for “Profiting from Fallen Soldiers.” This story revealed a little-known insurance tactic that deprived death benefits to the families of dead soldiers. Insurance companies provided “checkbooks” to family members instead of a lump-sum death benefit. The companies did not reveal that they were actually keeping that money to earn hundreds of millions of dollars. Even state regulators didn’t realize these “checkbooks” provided no federal protection as is commonly available through a regular bank account. The project includes stunning work with fully original reporting and immediate impact. Within 24 hours of publication, the VA opened a probe of its own insurance practices, and New York’s attorney general launched a major fraud investigation. Six weeks after the story, the VA changed its policy, requiring one company to pay lump-sum benefits. Congress passed a bill in October requiring full disclosure by the VA and insurers of how death benefits are invested. More Congressional investigations are under way.

Book: Robert Whitaker for “Anatomy of an Epidemic: Magic Bullets, Psychiatric Drugs, and the Astonishing Rise of Mental Illness in America.” This eye-opening investigation of the pharmaceutical industry and its relationship with the medical system lays out troubling evidence that the very medications prescribed for mental illness may, in increasing measure, be part of the problem. Whitaker marshals evidence to suggest medications “increase the risk that a person will become disabled” permanently by disorders such as depression, bipolar illness and schizophrenia. This book provides an in-depth exploration of medical studies and science and intersperses compelling anecdotal examples. In the end, Whitaker punches holes in the conventional wisdom of treatment of mental illness with drugs.

Radio: Laura Sullivan, Anne Hawke, Barbara Van Woerkom, Susanne Reber and Steve Drummond of National Public Radio for “Prison Profiting: Behind Arizona's Immigration Law.” Laura Sullivan pushed way beyond the headlines to reveal who and what is behind the controversial Arizona immigration law. While most news outlets focused on the consequences of the bill that allowed police to lock up anyone they stop who cannot show proof of legal residency, NPR's investigation went behind the scenes. It shows how the private prison industry, which has much to gain, and the American Legislative Exchange Council, a conservative organization, actually drafted model legislation and lobbied for the law. The judges thought NPR's decision to look at the law as a new business model made this entry the overwhelming winner in the category.

Online: Robin Fields, Jennifer LaFleur and Al Shaw of ProPublica for “Dialysis: High Costs and Hidden Perils.” Fields did a masterful job, explaining why there is a widely disparate dialysis treatment system in our country, one that costs taxpayers billions and yet too often, provides inferior, damaging care. She was able to explain complicated medical issues and put numbers into context. She battled for the data and documents against government and corporate interference. After 27 months of persistent public records requests, ProPublica was able to put together a geographically searchable database that any of the 400,000 patients in this country on dialysis can use to compare care. One U.S. senator is demanding answers from Medicare and Medicare Services about clinic conditions and the lack of effective regulatory oversight. This story is a great public service.

Student (All Media): Chelsea Boozer of *The Daily Helmsman* (The University of Memphis) for “Inside the RSOs.” A student reporter at the University of Memphis’ *Daily Helmsman*, Chelsea Boozer did what journalists do: Question authority, scrap for refused public records and then stand up for the defenseless. Boozer tapped into a difficult and under-covered topic on campus: how student fees were spent. She shined a light on the perks of student government leaders, including their paid tuition, parking and stipends, all funded by a mandatory student activity fee. Her digging found budgets tapped for student travel and T-shirts for the student senate. Her efforts forced a student senator to be dismissed. Student leaders now post their budget publicly.

Breaking News Investigations (All Media): Jeremy Finley of WSMV-Nashville for “A Failure to Warn.” With considerable difficulty as the flood waters swamped Nashville last year, Jeremy Finley and WSMV moved fast to gain access to phone records, emails and other documents before government agencies could cut them off. This story chronicles a systematic breakdown,

bureaucratic mismanagement, and questionable decisions between the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers and the local weather service that worsened the problems. The judges commended Finley for being able to work under extreme conditions. Others picked up the story, and resulting Congressional hearings and internal investigations are bringing about changes that will hopefully produce better communications and warnings the next time around.

Gannett Award for Innovation in Watchdog Journalism (All Media): Charles Ornstein, Tracy Weber and Dan Nguyen of ProPublica for “Dollars for Docs.” ProPublica’s extraordinary efforts to obtain previously obfuscated data and then transform it into a dataset the public can use represents an outstanding investigation and public service. Each drug company had its own way of making it difficult to track doctor payments. ProPublica cracked each and carefully melded the mix so that patients anywhere in the country can see whether their doctor is collecting money from a pharmaceutical company, and for which drug. ProPublica went the extra step to teach journalists around the country how to use the embeddable searchable interface to do their own stories. Truly innovative, the work represents the best media can do for the public good.

“A key theme in this year’s award winners is public service,” said IRE Executive Director Mark Horvit. “Time and again, these IRE Award winners exposed threats to public safety and health, and then kept pushing until they got results. This year’s winners exemplify the profound difference journalism can make locally, nationally and internationally.”

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*, *The Seattle Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, the *Houston Chronicle*, *The Toronto Star*, *USA Today*, WTVF-TV in Nashville, Tenn., and voiceofsandiego.org was ineligible for entry in this year’s contest.

IRE would like to thank the screeners and contest judges who worked diligently to make these awards possible. This year’s contest committee, which met for three days in Columbia, Mo., to determine the winners, is:

- Cheryl Phillips, *The Seattle Times*, co-chair
- Lea Thompson, LT Productions and former Dateline correspondent, co-chair
- Laura Frank, I-News Network
- Ron Nixon, *The New York Times*
- Jim Schaefer, *Detroit Free Press*
- Stacey Woelfel, KOMU-TV and the Missouri School of Journalism

IRE, founded in 1975, is a nonprofit professional organization dedicated to training and supporting journalists who pursue investigative stories. IRE 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 on Saturday, June 11, at the 2011 IRE Conference in Orlando, Fla.

Copies of all contest entries are available to IRE members from the IRE Resource Center, which has more than 24,900 investigative stories submitted during the past 30 years. The Resource Center can be reached via e-mail at rescntr@ire.org or by calling 573-882-3364.

See the full list of winners, finalists and judges' comments at www.ire.org/resourcecenter/contest/