

South Texas Press Association 2021 Better Newspaper Contest

News Writing

Judge's Name: John Savage, University of Texas at Austin

Good news writing is lean, active and clear. The entries demonstrate these characteristics. Several reporters do a fine job judiciously using narrative to shed light on important issues. Next year I would love to see more news features — with multiple sources and thorough context — that offer a human angle and deeper perspective on community issues.

Division 1: Weeklies 3,000 circulation and below

First-Place Winner: Marc Robertson, Frio-Nueces Current

In addition to good reporting, Marc Robertson displays his writerly skills in a story outlining the death of a man in sheriff's custody.

Second-Place Winner: Terry Fitzwater, Kingsville Record

Terry Fitzwater's writing highlights the emotional valence of two unfortunate events in the Kingsville area. Fitzwater uses narrative in his news stories to excellent effect.

Third-Place Winner: Anita Miller, Hays Free Press

Anita Miller's reporting about the potential impact of the Kinder Morgan Permian Highway pipeline is a fine example of the importance of local journalism.

Division 2: Weeklies 3,001 circulation and above

First-Place Winner: Samuel Sutton, Fredericksburg Standard-Radio Post

Comments: Samuel Sutton's well-reported pieces provide context and shed light on newsworthy community happenings for Fredericksburg Standard-Radio Post readers.

Second-Place Winner: Dan Parker, Port Aransas South Jetty

Dan Parker's stories contain stylish writing, thorough reporting and important context. Parker's story about the discovery of 66 pounds of cocaine is an excellent example of his skills.

Third-Place Winner: David Money, Rockdale Reporter

David Money's story about high schoolers protesting a racist incident is important and tightly written.

Division 3: Semi-Weeklies

First-Place Winner: Andy Behlen, The Fayette County Record

Andy Behlen's story detailing abuse and neglect at a facility for special needs children is an object lesson in the importance of community journalism. Behlen's thorough reporting and ample documentation make sense of a troubling situation for readers.

Second-Place Winner: Jimmy Galvan, The Bay City Tribune

Jimmy Galvan's clean and concise writing is evident in two COVID-related stories. Galvan's story of a nurse recovering from the virus is thoroughly reported, tightly written and puts a human face on an important issue.

Third-Place Winner: Shannon Crabtree, El Campo Leader-News

Shannon Crabtree's writing is sharp, clean and to-the-point. Crabtree's thorough reporting comes through in her story about the death of a sheriff's deputy.

News Photos

Judge's Name: Michael Minasi, University of Texas at Austin

Category comments: News photography is timely, relevant, and important to viewers. It needs to reflect what's happening in our communities hopefully through local, state, and national lenses. As with all photojournalism, images should immediately communicate the gist of the subject at hand while at the same time intriguing viewers to seek more information and clarity in body of the story.

Division 1: Weeklies 3,000 circulation and below

First-Place Winner: Frank Cardenas, Kingsville Record

Frank Cardenas captures a touching, powerful embrace between two people at a George Floyd memorial rally. Cardenas' composition leaves room for protest signs and crowds in the background to give the embrace context and meaning.

Second-Place Winner: Melanie Berger, The Flatonina Argus

Melanie Berger's photo coverage is varied and captures important slices of everyday life in town. The construction image is wide enough to show some nice geometric patterns whereas the photo of the splash pad brings life and energy to the pages.

Third-Place Winner: Melissa Perner, The Ozona Stockman

Melissa Perner's photo of a student having their temperature screened is a great example of journalism's mandate to chronicle history and the times.

Division 2: Weeklies 3,001 circulation and above

First-Place Winner: Samuel Sutton, Fredericksburg Standard-Radio Post

Samuel Sutton's images combine quality technical execution with varied storytelling in everyday events — from car crashes to the first day at school.

Second-Place Winner: Lee Harrison, Port Aransas South Jetty

Lee Harrison's spring break parties are captured in a bizarre and intriguing portrait of pandemic uncertainty.

Third-Place Winner: Mike Brown, Rockdale Reporter

Mike Brown's dramatic image of a volunteer firefighter on the scene is tightly composed and engaging.

Division 3: Semi-Weeklies

First-Place Winner: Jeff Wick, Fayette County Record

Jeff Wick's photograph documents a historic moment for Fayette County in the painful economic state of the coronavirus pandemic. Wick's image is classically composed and takes advantage of a lot of visual graphic elements in the scene.

Second-Place Winner: Shannon Crabtree, El Campo Leader-News

Shannon Crabtree's image of a social justice protest captures action and emotion. The shallow depth of field declutters the image and draws us to the lead individual's expression during a moment of great news impact.

Third-Place Winner: Emily Lincke, El Campo Leader-News

Emily Lincke's socially distanced graduation coverage got some big play for its impactful color and composition. Lincke's photo captures both the main subject's bright expression and the scale of the space all in one.

Feature Writing

Judge's name: Diana Dawson, University of Texas at Austin

Division 1

First Place: The Flatonina Argus

Story: "From Grandpa to Grandson, Circle W Remains in Family After 40 Years..."

Writer: Melanie Berger

Comments: This writer's work stood out amid all Division 1 feature entries and this story showcased Melanie Berger's skills well. The tale of a feed store owned by three generations of the same family came alive through Berger's knack for collecting and using specific detail. I loved the story of how the patriarch developed the name and the logo for the store that's been a community fixture for 40 years. When she zoomed in on stories of leaving feed outside for after-hours pickups, the trust-system of payment, I felt as if I saw the soul of the store. As Berger brought the story to a close, showing the grandson loading feed and eyeing stock running low, readers could clearly see the next generation honoring the family business.

Second Place: The Ozona Stockman

Story: "On the front lines: Ozona graduate working at NYC Hospital" Writer: Melissa Perner

Comments: Melissa Perner's tale of a courageous Ozona graduate who volunteered to work in the epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak brought to hometown readers a vivid picture of what it took every day to work the frontlines. Perner must have asked strong questions in her interview with Cynthia Garcia and clearly followed up to get the traveling nurse to expand. In doing so, she brought her readers details of seeing antiquated ventilators in short supply and nurses working 12-hour shifts without a break to eat because too many people were dying.

Perner's long piece flowed beautifully and was organized well.

Third Place: Kingsville Record

Story: "Bray's Smokehouse – A new Kingsville icon" Writer: Terry Fitzwater

Comments: Terry Fitzwater helps his readers see all of the sweat and smoke it took to turn two brothers' championship barbecue reputation into a local restaurant. Two brothers who grew up in Kingsville do more than just come home to open their business. In doing so, they find the iconic 12-foot cow statue that had been in front of the restaurant on their property for decades and bring it back from a Floresville farmer's field to a place where a couple generations of Kingsville residents had their photos taken. Details that illuminate the back story of a business make it so much more interesting to readers.

Comments About Other Entries:

- **Frio-Nueces Current (writer Marc Robertson)**
"Law in a time of corona" may have some of the most beautiful writing in this category. Robertson set scenes in this piece in a way that made me think of John Steinbeck. The story would have benefitted from Robertson sharing the focus of the story – challenges law enforcement officers face during the pandemic – much earlier than deep into the jump. That would allow readers to relax, know where they were going and enjoy the beautiful ride.
"To the best, most loving homes" was an important story to tell of the CASA volunteers who make such an important difference in the lives of foster children. The story would have been strengthened by having sources provide some of the elaboration that seemed to come from the writer, such as "suffice to say that there are some young children in this town who have suffered terribly within the embrace of their very own family."
- **Goldthwaite Eagle (writer Tammarrah Pledger)**
"Local man lauded as a hero" was an extremely powerful story of a Goldthwaite man who saved the lives of a West Texas couple. The story would have realized its potential if the man had been identified before the middle of the story and if readers had learned he was surprised by the couple showing up at his church to tell the congregation about the rescue.

“New Beginnings” seems to provide an important service to women of Lampasas, but the writer needed to point out early that the Christian-based clinic does not discuss or provide referrals for terminating pregnancies.

- **The Devine News (writer Kayleen Holder)**

“BioMed Scientist” was an interesting story, but the readers needed to know early that this was a researcher from Massachusetts. The writer did a lovely job of making a complex subject easily understood by the average reader. As a local reader, I might have preferred to have the story focus on the local Dr. Neel’s treatment using melatonin and work in information about how it works from the scientist for context.

“Historic church steeple...” is an interesting, historic tale. I might suggest starting with Eddie Hutzler, whose family hauled limestone for the historic church in their wagons and then wrapping back to the historic newspaper clipping.

Division 2

First Place: The Rockdale Reporter

Story: “Thorndale marching band claims 2A state championship” Writer: David Money

Comments: David Money does a beautiful job of writing a fully dimensional feature story that takes readers to the moment of anticipation when the band rankings are announced at state competition. This story benefits from his efforts to go beyond the one-source stories that predominate this category to get the reaction and perspectives from both the director and the musicians. He masterfully weaves in challenges the band faced during the year with the director getting COVID-19 and the assistant’s wife having a baby. The story comes to a graceful close, looking ahead to next year’s competition.

Second Place: Fredericksburg Standard

Story: “Riding for Suicide Awareness” Writer: Samuel Sutton

Comments: Samuel Sutton writes a well-organized, detailed feature that weaves the story of Christina Rivera’s personal battle with and recovery from PTSD through the story of her ride for awareness as part of a national effort. Details of the woman consistently riding with her Yorkie named Riley Grace in a purple backpack makes the piece more endearing. Sutton has a strong grip on the story’s organization by early on nailing the focus and then looping back to the beginning of the chronology.

Third Place: Port Aransas South Jetty

“Vietnam tough, yet good experience for Bill Smith” Writers: Vivian Carlson and Dan Parker

Comments: The Veterans Day story of Bill Smith does an effective job of showing readers the service up close of one of their neighbors. The authors’ strong interview with Smith elicited details and anecdotes that took the reader to the battlefields with a young soldier reconciling his romantic notion of “being Audie Murphy” with the reality of life in Vietnam.

Comments About Other Entries:

Port Aransas South Jetty (Dan Parker): “Fate and Destiny” is a great tale of a Vietnamese woman’s struggle to establish life in the U.S. as Saigon fell. Parker draws great detail from Loan Herndon about her journey and organizes it well.

The Rockdale Reporter (David Money): “Carved in wood” is an interesting story of a master wood carver. The story contains interesting details, but would have benefitted from stronger organization.

Pleasanton Express (Sam Fowler): “The story of the Standley traveling chicken” is a tale any writer would want to tell about a family who vacations with their pet chicken named “Toby.” I loved the details of photographing the chicken in front of the U.S. Capitol. I’d encourage the writer to be very careful with wording that, at first, made it appear that Toby was not on the trip this year (“minus Ella, Toby and the family’s two dogs). It also was unclear exactly how Toby was lost and then found on last year’s trip, which raised an unanswered question for this concerned reader.

(Lisa Luna) “Finding ‘Peace for the Pieces’” This heartfelt tale of a family’s experience with children who have special needs resulting in them establishing a group to serve similar teens is such an important story to tell. I appreciate Lisa Luna bringing the group and its service to light in the community, but it would have benefitted from stronger organization.

Hondo Anvil Herald (Diane Cosgrove): Both “Former Hondo nurse reflects on time at NY COVID hospital” and “Old Car Guys Surprise Birthday Boy” were good feature topics that offered a lot of detail. My suggestion for helping both stories realize their potential would be to hold the leash on the interviews a bit more tightly. Alternate the best of the subject’s quotes with narrative and paraphrasing telling the story rather than allowing it to be essentially a transcript of the good interview.

Division 3

First Place: The Fayette County Record

Story: “One Day, 100 Miles” Writer: Jeff Wick

Comments: Jeff Wick writes an engaging story of one man’s commitment to run and walk 100 miles within 24 hours to assist children with cancer. He gives the story depth by showing us motivation in the back story of the pastor sleeping on the hospital floor to be with a young cancer patient years before undertaking this feat. Readers are taken along for the whole journey, seeing Troy Sikes and his wife freezing in February as he loops the track throughout the night and the fans jogging along with him as he completes that final lap. This story benefits from hearing the voices of several people, which creates a fully dimensional tale wanting for nothing.

Second Place: Taylor Press

Story: "The Path Less Traveled". Writer: Matthew Hooks

Comments: "The Path Less Traveled" is a powerful story of one high school athlete's determination to overcome adversity during 15 months that would topple most. Matthew Hooks helps this story rise to its potential by taking the interviews beyond the athlete himself to create a fully dimensional picture of the teen's struggle. The writer fluidly tells the story in a well-organized, focused manner that gracefully integrates narrative passages with well-chosen quotes. Of all stories judged, this one leaves the reader with the most memorable ending as we hear from the mother who watched one twin's commitment of carrying on in the wake of his brother's tragic death.

Third Place: El Campo Leader-News

Story: "El Campo graduate looks back on crowning moment" Writer: Quala Matocha

Comments: Quala Matocha tells a compelling tale of the first Black homecoming queen crowned 50 years ago in El Campo. The story's strength comes from the poignant memories of a homecoming queen who was celebrated by her classmates while suffering the wrath of their parents. The writer allows us to feel the family's mixed emotions and anxiety as Linda Aldridge's father sits in the stadium parking lot to hear the loudspeaker and her mother, waiting at home in a wheelchair, gets the news from a hateful phone call. The writer chose strong, specific detail to convey the importance of that historical vote by El Campo students. I especially loved hearing Linda's daughter wore her mother's homecoming tiara on her wedding day.

Honorable Mention: Uvalde Leader-News

Story: "Castillo's family donates organs" Writer: Julye Keeble

Comments: Julye Keeble tells a beautifully detailed story of a generous man who continues to give in death through the donation of his organs. The story's strength comes from the detailed account of how the family rose from the ashes of a house fire years earlier to continue service to their community. This tightly focused piece helps the reader with its strong organization that keeps us gliding through the beautifully told tale.

Comments on other feature entries:

- **Uvalde Leader-News (Julye Keeble "Reagan's Faith"):** Julye Keeble continues her ability to draw great detail from an interview in this piece, but it lacks cohesion that forces the reader to dig in and discern the focus.
- **El Campo Leader-News (Emily Lincke):** "Coming Home" Good, well-organized story that carries readers through to the end. Would have benefitted from more specifics that conveyed the emotion felt in the photos.
- **The Fayette County Record (Jeff Wick "...Race Decided by One Vote"):** Good piece that shows the importance of every single vote. It felt more like a government story than a feature and would have benefitted if readers could have heard from the woman who lost by one vote as well as the man who won by that margin.

- **Lampasas Dispatch Record (Jeff Lowe):** “The cruise that wouldn’t end”) Well-organized story that pulls readers through the chronology well and gives local insight into the pandemic. Good, detailed account would have benefitted from more than one voice. (Madeline Miller “Lumber Shortage Challenges...”) Strong, well-reported business story of high local interest that would have benefitted from more feature aspects of scene setting and additional anecdotes.
- **Taylor Press (Fernando Castro):** “Taylor doctor reopens doors for area resident”) The writer begins to tell two interesting tales here about both the patient’s struggle to recover from a serious hand injury and the local doctor’s specialty practice. Unfortunately, the focus shifts from patient to doctor, leaving the reader uncertain of the main goal here.
- **Bay City Tribune (Anthony Maenza):** “Prayers go up, Blessings come Down”) It’s nice to have a positive local pandemic story that also provides readers with the information of where to get and give assistance to their neighbors. The quick story would have benefitted if readers could have heard from some people helping and some being helped, too. (Jimmy Galvan “Houses Lighting up with spirit of hope”) Good, well-organized story of a local college freshman sharing hope with others during the pandemic through his unseasonal Christmas light display. This story would benefit from the reporter talking to people reacting to the man’s efforts. It could also be stronger if factual matter were paraphrased instead of quoted, strengthening the punch of the quotes chosen.

Feature Photos

Judge’s Name: Michael Minasi, University of Texas at Austin

Category comments: Feature photos bring life to the pages. The best images are candid, genuine expressions of emotion. In the future, it’d be great to see more independent feature work, separate from specific stories.

Division 1: Weeklies 3,000 circulation and below

First-Place Winner: James Taylor, The Goldthwaite Eagle

James Taylor’s photos of local students engaging with and performing in the community are strongly composed, tact sharp, and feature emotive expressions. They likely draw local families to pick up the paper in search of joy and recognition.

Second-Place Winner: Frank Cardenas, The Kingsville Record

Frank Cardenas’ photo of a father and son embracing is full of love and emotion — a clip of this paper is likely hanging up on a wall in their home right now. It’s also tightly composed and well-timed.

Third-Place Winner: Manuel Azocar III, Frio-Nueces Current

Manuel Azocar III’s photo of costumed children interacting with a police officer is a touching slice of life.

Division 2: Weeklies 3,001 circulation and above

First-Place Winner: Ken Esten Cooke, Fredericksburg Standard Radio-Post

Ken Esten's entries from a couple of school events showed a mix of extra attention to both capturing high emotional moments as well as intriguing design / art elements.

Second-Place Winner: Dan Parker, Port Aransas South Jetty

Dan Parker's capture of a young boy in the surf was tightly composed and timed perfectly to freeze a genuine expression of joy on the subject's face.

Third-Place Winner: Rebecca Pesqueda, Plesanton Express

Rebecca Pesqueda's tightly composed photo of young Elijah digging into a Thanksgiving meal is a simple and fun slice of life.

Division 3: Semi-Weeklies

First-Place Winner: Joshua Reese, El Campo Leader-News

Joshua Reese's photo of cheerleaders flipping is an artistic composition that uses timing to create something interesting and different.

Second-Place Winner: Quala Matocha, El Campo Leader-News

Quala Matocha captured an intimate, powerful candid portrait of a woman reacting to a show of support from the community after she survived a battle with the coronavirus.

Third-Place Winner: Emily Lincke, El Campo Leader-News

Jeff Lowe's photos are varied, well composed, and take advantage of different types of natural lighting in the scenes around him.

Editorial Writing

Judge's name: Kathleen McElroy, University of Texas at Austin

Judge's comment: There needs to be clarification over what constitutes an editorial as opposed to a column in the STPA competition. Many of the STPA publisher-editors are adept at writing both (and often appear on the same page). They are entered in the editorial and column categories with quite similar entries. As the Uvalde Viewpoint page points out, "An editorial is the newspaper's view on an issue ... meant to foster discussion and suggest a course of action." A column is "one person's opinion on any given issue. A column does not necessarily reflect the views of the newspaper."

Division 1

First: Hays Free Press (no name given)

These editorials epitomize the best of editorial writing by being clear and stressing community. “Sometimes it brings out the best” has detailed reminders that humans need to be, well, humane to each other. The editorial on the significance of the 19th Amendment is more than a remembrance; it’s a plea about today: “We don’t care if you vote Democratic or Republican; we don’t care if you pick and choose candidates on either side of the aisle ... What is most important is that you vote.”

Second: Frio-Nueces Current (Marc Robertson)

Robertson is clearly a skilled writer in many forms, including editorial writing. These seem less like editorials and more like columns – they are called “View From the Bridge” and include his photo. He uses “I” and not the royal “we.” Still, he offers community, not personal, stories. He has an engaging style and manages in the two columns – one on the census, the other on a newly opened highway loop – to be persuasive in a gentle, inclusive manner.

Third: Kingsville Record (Terry Fitzwater)

These editorials definitely have a point of view, in this case, a negative view of the Kingsville ISD. The writing is straightforward without being oversimplified, but it was difficult to get a feel for the craft of these editorials. “Time for KISD board to get its act together” seethes with contempt (substitute the word “act” with a four-letter gem). The second column might be more effective in trying to heal the community.

The Devine News (Kayleen Holder and KK Calame)

Kudos for having the guts to have a front-page editorial that makes a detailed plea for greater EMS coverage. However the second column – about criticism the News has received? -- needed more context for someone outside of the community to understand its point.

Division 2

First Place: Fredericksburg Standard RP (Ken Esten Cooke)

Ken Esten Cooke has a calm, steady hand as an editorialist. The two editorials deserve first place for taking a strong stand in an even-handed, measured style that respects opposing viewpoints while willing to call out those who deserve to be called out. They include facts and context (COVID statistics, Ralph Ellison quotes), local anecdotes (a friend who runs a store in “OK to share” and a friendly police officer in “We continue to look backward”). These are editorials that don’t aim to amuse but to enlighten while taking positions that many in the community might disagree with. That’s leadership.

Second place: Port Aransas South Jetty (Mary Henkel Judson)

Mary Henkel Judson is a gifted writer who knows how to turn a phrase or two or three. In “Choose to use, not lose,” she begins by making witty comparisons about a dead-serious subject: the importance of buying local. Soon those expired canned goods she references

transform into a profound lost quality of life. By the end of the column/editorial (she's using first person, but it's not a personal column), readers have received a detailed picture of her argument. "Red Flags Fly" puts one of her favorite motifs, repetition, to good use. Red flags abound in the column, but she's clever enough to use something different for her kicker: "You might not like I because it's not public comment-friendly." Her restraint from using "red flag" one last time is the sign of a confident writer.

Pleasanton Express (Noel Wilkerson Holms and Rebecca Pesqueda)

Third place: Both entries wrap narratives around crucial messages: the importance of youth vote and the local newspaper. These do seem to be closer to columns than editorials, with both writers pictured. In fact, the piece "Only the young" begins in such a personal way that it might have alienated some readers. Even the headline, based on the Taylor Swift song, might not attract the full audience the column deserves (and given the average age of newspaper readers). I believe Pesqueda could write a similar column tweaked to engage older readers, too.

The Rockdale Reporter

These are straightforward, community-building editorials, which is a public service. One supports a local charity run, a worthy cause, and another is a thank-you for the volunteer fire department. The lead on "Call of duty" is especially inviting.

Division 3

First place: Uvalde Leader-News (Craig Garnett)

These editorials represent the best of editorial writing: crisp writing, clear points, detailed reporting and context. Clever writing in the best way. The strong conclusions especially reinforce the editorials' main point. In "Dragon getting bad rap," the piece ends with this delightful sentence: "Perhaps in these dog days of a dry August that is the only legitimate criticism that can be leveled at Uvalde's bespoke dragon." That piece maintains a playful vibe while making a point about the community. The piece "Statue brings dishonor" appropriately strikes a more somber tone, demonstrating the writer's versatility.

Second: Lampasas Dispatch Record (Jeff Lowe)

Clear writing with well-constructed narratives and rich details. "Longer sentence needed to bring justice in murder case" presents its case point by point, addressing the counterarguments calmly and methodically. "Trump's overall record backs up his MAGA promise" has lots of good details, including comments by Tim Scott and Hershel Walker. But it misses the mark by referring to "several high-profile incidents" without being as straightforward as the rest of the piece.

Third Place: Bay City Tribune (no name given)

These are clearly written editorials, easily understood, strong messages. They have engaging leads and compelling conclusions. These are not just opinions but ideas supported by accompanying interviews and facts. Unfortunately, these strong columns are undermined by typos and other mistakes. For instance, in “Matagorda County moves closer to mandatory status,” the math is off in the third paragraph: “Of the 27 cases, only four of them are believed to be due to travel while the other 16 are by community transmission.” In “Now is not the time to be gaining political points,” words are missing from the fourth paragraph: “The order also allows for hunting and fishing allows for jogging or bicycling ...”

Taylor Press (Jason Hennington)

The “On My Soapbox” pieces might have been submitted to an incorrect category. “Back by some kind of demand” even includes a disclaimer: “This column represents the thoughts and opinion of Jason Hennington. This is NOT the opinion of the Taylor Press.” That disclaimer alone seems to disqualify this entry. The pieces are written well but comprise an unsuitable entry.

Serious Column Writing

Judge’s Name: John Savage, University of Texas at Austin

The best serious columns are timely and significant. Several columnists carefully handled difficult subjects with empathy for people with opposing viewpoints. Next year I would love to see more columns that tackle local issues and offer a very specific and clear call to action.

Division 1: Weeklies 3,000 circulation and below

First-Place Winner: Tamarrah Pledger, The Goldthwaite Eagle

Tamarrah Pledger’s poignant column about police brutality against Black people and her own developing understanding of white privilege was outstanding. She carefully and honestly handled a topic that may be difficult for some readers of The Goldthwaite Eagle.

Second-Place Winner: Marc Robertson, Frio-Nueces Current

Marc Robertson’s witty column about remembering those who have fought for the United States is a compelling mixture of mirth and seriousness and a call to be thankful.

Third-Place Winner: Cyndy Slovak-Barton, Hays Free Press

Cyndy Slovak-Barton’s column calling for the expansion of mail-in voting during the pandemic outlines local political races that are relevant to the paper’s readers. It’s a useful column for readers who may not be plugged into area politics.

Division 2: Weeklies 3,001 circulation and above

First-Place Winner: Ken Esten Cooke, Fredericksburg Standard-Radio Post

Ken Esten Cooke's powerful defense of local journalism and poignant column about wanting to hug his mother on Mother's Day are touching, timely and significant.

Second-Place Winner: Mary Henkel Judson, Port Aransas South Jetty

Mary Henkel Judson's column about the potential dangers of a crude oil terminal on Harbor Island is well-reasoned and shines a light on an important community issue.

Third-Place Winner: Noel Wilkerson Holmes, Pleasanton Express

Noel Wilkerson Holmes uses poignant personal detail in a column about the devastating effects of COVID. At end of the column, Holmes adds her personal phone number and offers to lend an ear to any readers who may be struggling.

Division 3: Semi-Weeklies

First-Place Winner: Craig Garnett, Uvalde Leader-News

Craig Garnett's moving historical column tells the important story of two WWII veterans from Uvalde. Garnett's column on the challenges Black fathers face when discussing policing inequity with their sons is powerful.

Second-Place Winner: Jason Hennington, Taylor Press

In a heartfelt column, Jason Hennington implores readers to engage in honest and sometimes uncomfortable discussions about race and racism.

Third-Place Winner: Jeff Wick, The Fayette County Record

Jeff Wick's moving column about his personal experience contracting COVID is timely and an example of good writing.

Humorous Column Writing

Judge's Name: John Savage, University of Texas at Austin

Making readers laugh is not easy, and the best columns used well told anecdotes, comedic metaphors and creative misdirection to do just that.

Division 1: Weeklies 3,000 circulation and below

First-Place Winner: Marc Robertson, Frio-Nueces Current

Marc Robertson's unique voice and ability to point out the absurdities in commonplace occurrences give his columns a powerful comedic punch.

Second-Place Winner: Kayleen Holder, The Devine News

Kayleen Holder's well-told stories about her young children are funny and relatable to any parent.

Third-Place Winner: Melissa Perner, The Ozona Stockman

Beyond their humor, Melissa Perner's columns about allowing her children to wear Halloween costumes on Easter and the challenges many mothers face in holiday planning are moving.

Division 2: Weeklies 3,001 circulation and above

First-Place Winner: Christine Granados, Fredericksburg Standard-Radio Post

Christine Granados does an excellent job of finding humor in our pandemic-ravaged times in her column, "The toilet paper apocalypse." She takes something many of us have experienced — running out of toilet paper — and makes excellent use of quirky historical detail to make the reader laugh.

Second-Place Winner: Mary Henkel Judson, Port Aransas South Jetty

Mary Henkel Judson's humorous voice comes through loud and clear in her well-crafted columns. Her use of writerly tools — varying sentence length to influence the reader's speed, for example — give her columns a wonderful, breezy quality.

Third-Place Winner: Paul Michael Jones, Pleasanton Express

Paul Michael Jones adroitly uses humorous family stories to encourage readers to slow down and appreciate sometimes-overlooked joys of life.

Division 3: Semi-Weeklies

First-Place Winner: Shannon Crabtree, El Campo Leader-Times

Shannon Crabtree's columns are peppered with colorful detail — her description of being chased by turkeys with "dead black eyes" made this reader laugh out loud. Crabtree skillfully employs short, peppy sentences and is not afraid to make fun of herself.

Second-Place Winner: Craig Garnett, Uvalde Leader-News

Craig Garnett's ability to find humor in his daughter's hearing condition and a mistakenly filed application for unemployment benefits in his name are admirable.

Third-Place Winner: Jeff Wick, The Fayette County Record

Jeff Wick does a fine job using narrative and varying sentence length in his well-crafted, humorous familial stories.

Sports Coverage

Judge's Name: John Savage, University of Texas at Austin

Fine work all around in this category. I appreciate the sports-related profiles, news features and coverage of sports such as cross country and volleyball.

Division 1: Weeklies 3,000 circulation and below

First-Place Winner: Frio-Nueces Current

The Frio-Nueces Current does an excellent job offering readers in-depth coverage of high school sports that expands beyond football. I was Impressed by stories about cross country and volleyball.

Second-Place Winner: Kingsville Record

In addition to the Kingsville Record's thorough coverage of high school football, the paper's feature on a Special Olympics athlete is compelling.

Third-Place Winner: Schulenburg Sticker

The Schulenburg Sticker offers in-depth coverage of the Schulenberg High School girls basketball team's record-setting season.

Division 2: Weeklies 3,001 circulation and above

First-Place Winner: Pleasanton Express

The Pleasanton Express has prep sports in the area covered like a blanket. The paper's story about a Pleasanton High School basketball star is a fine example of compelling profile writing.

Second-Place Winner: Fredericksburg Standard-Radio Post

The Fredericksburg Standard-Radio Post thoroughly covers the area's prep sports. The paper's coverage of the high school cross country scene and the 2020 Fall Sports Extra section are excellent.

Third-Place Winner: Hondo Anvil Herald

The Hondo Anvil Herald does a fine job covering prep sports in the coverage area. I appreciate the thorough track and field coverage.

Division 3: Semi-Weeklies

First-Place Winner: Uvalde Leader News

The Uvalde Leader News offers readers thorough coverage of prep sports in the area and fine photography.

Second-Place Winner: Lampasas Dispatch Record

I particularly like the Lampasas Dispatch Record's feature on Lampasas High School athletic Hall of Fame inductees.

Third-Place Winner: El Campo Leader-News

The El Campo Leader-News profile of a El Campo High School senior athlete who worked through a knee injury is well-written and compelling.

Sports Photos

Judge's Name: Michael Minasi, University of Texas at Austin

Category comments: There were lots of incredible sports photos in this category that captured the highlights of their games. In the future I'd love to see more varied work: tight, expressive celebration or loss images, moments of exhaustion on the sidelines, atmospheric photos of the game, etc.

Division 1: Weeklies 3,000 circulation and below

First-Place Winner: James Taylor, The Goldthwaite Eagle

James Taylor's basketball photos are tightly composed, expressive, and climactic — the type of immersive imagery one hopes to see in sports.

Second-Place Winner: Manuel Azocar III, Frio-Nueces Current

Manuel Azocar III's baseball and basketball entries both captured moments of conflict in the games — depicting the tenacity and struggle of players with one another is a key element of sports photography.

Third-Place Winner: Lillie Weyel, The Devine News

Lillie Weyel's unconventional panoramic image of a player navigating through offensive and defensive lines is visually busy but interesting to explore.

Division 2: Weeklies 3,001 circulation and above

First-Place Winner: Michelle Parker, Port Aransas South Jetty

Michelle Parker transported me straight to the middle of the game with an immersive action shot that captured the struggle and emotion of the moment.

Second-Place Winner: Sam Fowler, Pleasanton Express

Sam Fowler's sideline celebration shot is engaging and tack sharp.

Third-Place Winner: J Garcia, Pleasanton Express

J. Garcia's football reception is a visual delight with the players captured in a great design during a high energy moment.

Division 3: Semi-Weeklies

First-Place Winner: Jeff Lowe, Lampasas Dispatch Record

Jeff Lowe's timely sports images combine emotion, exaggerated body language and clean compositions to stand out.

Second-Place Winner: Larry Pelchat, Taylor Press

Larry Pelchat's sports coverage is razor sharp and documents players in iconic moments.

Third-Place Winner: Pete Luna, Uvalde Leader-News

Pete Luna's photos are full of energy and struggle. Though one touchdown appeared to have a little bit of shutter speed blur, it worked to exaggerate the clash between receiver and defender in the end zone.

Display Ads

Judged by Kathleen McElroy

Division I

First -- Hays Free Press: These ads shine in all the key criteria. The Austin Cancer Center puts the spotlight on the three doctors and the three office locations -- not one extra word in the copy, clean typography, inviting photos. The Wildland conservation ad has a different feel but works for that concept. The Sage Spring ad has a well-thought-out photo layout with a subtle typography that fits the targeted audience.

Second -- Kingsville Record: The Thanksgiving ad is executed simply and perfectly, with the pilgrim hat on the iconic Bray's cow. The handwriting on the Christmas house ad is a personal touch. The Kingsville CofC ad might have too many competing typefaces.

Third -- Frio-Nueces Current: These ads are engaging. The pizza ad is perfect for the seniors pictured above it. "To Mother With Love" is informative, with all the information that might entice someone to buy an ad. But it's not too busy. "Happy Holidays" is another clean, inviting ad.

Flatonia Argus – The FSB ad has a lot going on in a small space. Perhaps squaring off the copy – six lines instead of seven – might tidy the ad. The political ad is wordy but informative. The diner ad is sweet.

The Devine News – The "Cow patties happen" ad works, and is sharper than the wordy but clever air conditioning ad. The W.O.G. ad is marred by misspelled words.

Display Ads: Division 2

First -- Pleasanton Express: the Merry on Main ad is typography at its best – using color and an inviting font. The Little Miss M.O.M ad is a great use of photography and type; it's clever that the girl is pulling back the curtain to reveal the ad copy. The Cowboy Fellowship ad is elegant, and its flourishes fit the spirit of the ad.

Second -- Hondo Anvil Herald: The CNB ad is sophisticated and graphically impactful, with the green dollar bill in the cow's mouth. The right type face, design and number of words. The high school graduates page is wordy, of course; it's wonderful to see high schoolers and their educators get their due (but no masks?). The aerial applications ad might be more impactful if the photo were less fuzzy.

Third -- Port Aransas South Jetty: The "Protect Port Aransas!" ad is impactful. The photo draws you in, then the ad copy brings it home. The images in the Casa A Mano ad give you an idea of the wares even though the photos are small. The cruise ad has off notes: the (seemingly) stock photos that could represent anywhere and not necessarily the boat.

Fredericksburg Standard – The spring athletes ad is positive in that it plays UP the students and DOWN the fact they can't compete. The hearing center ad has competing ideas battling for our attention. The real estate ad seems effective enough but not that different from similar ads (though the rocking chair photo is a nice touch).

Rockdale Reporter – The RFCU ads have a lot of ad copy, but they are providing important information to customers, especially during COVID. The flower shop ad either needed larger photos or less type (perhaps eliminate "Fred and I appreciate our loyal customers!")

Display Ads: Division 3

First -- Fayette County Record: The plumbing ad is brilliant – its copy and its intentional use of white space. The Oviedo ad is graphic and impactful, with effective copy. The copy and images for the beer and wine ad is perfect for ... a beer and wine drive-thru. It's not trying to be clever, nor should it be.

Second -- Taylor Press: The Salvation Army ad is informative. It's a little wordy but the copy doesn't deter from the impact of the effective ornaments. The Breast Cancer Awareness package does a good job of giving each ad its due, and the pink is not too much. But the rodeo display seems as much editorial copy as advertising, but it is well designed and not too busy, which is difficult to pull off.

Third -- El Campo Leader News: The retirement planning ad is a winner – clean and effective for a football preview section. The development ad is a great idea but falls a little short in execution. The bananas could have been more in focus and the dollar bills are also fuzzy. The banquet ad tries a playful type face to match its 50's theme.

Lampasas Dispatch Record – The image in the furniture ad suggests a roomy, comfy, elegant bedroom, while the copy and typography don't overwhelm it. The first responders ad strikes the right tone with images (which I hope are all local). The RSV ad is rightly dominated by a large photo of a smiling baby but the "RSV in Infants" typeface might be too whimsical. In fact, the four typefaces in the ad might be competing against each other.

STPA Special Sections

Judged by Kathleen McElroy

Division 1

First -- Goldthwaite Eagle: This hunting guide has an engaging photo and an eye-catching cover, not too crowded with refers. The inside pages are cleanly designed, many with well-played art. The headline and quote on page 6 are probably one innuendo too many. But kudos for having so many bylined, informative features and interesting photos.

Second -- Kingsville Record: An engaging cover for this livestock section. It's also well organized, like the schedule on page 2. Engaging art and page layout throughout the section. The cover story is given nice play inside, along with the student essay.

Third -- Frio-Nueces Current: The hunting guide cover is remarkably clean, allowing the image to shine. Kudos to Breyana Segura for her many contributions to this section, which also uses typography to add a spark to its pages.

Ozona Stockman – This hunting guide features an unblemished cover with sharp image. Consistent layout, lots of guidelines, recipes, though not sure how much is staff produced. Might suggest bigger headlines throughout, especially on pages 18-19.

The Devine News Hunting Guide – Engaging, cool cover featuring young people, which made this hunting guide feel fresh. The headline style and pullout quotes might benefit from consistency.

Special Section: Division 2

First -- Rockdale Reporter: A graphically driven section that is well designed and informative. Solid Q&A's anchor the section. The sharp photos of the athletes, cheerleaders and even the band (with their complicated captions) give this section the edge. Maybe it's the higher grade of paper.

Second – Hondo Anvil: The Highway 90 football guide is clean, well-designed and informative. Jeff Berger has a clever publisher's note and an amusing lead on the Cowboys' preview on page 20X. Tons of photos and captions – what an effort.

Third – Port Aransas South Jetty: This fall guide is action-packed and full of listings, tidbits and stories. Oddly, the stories – especially one on the history of Port Aransas -- don't have bylines (the writers are listed in a publishers' box). The Fall events calendar, pages 18-19, has room to breathe, but other pages seem a bit crammed. But that's because there's a photo with almost every piece.

Pleasanton Express – This is an annual section. Sadly, the 2020 edition honors David Prasifka, a retired firefighter and community leader who died of leukemia and COVID (though that's not clear from the section). A lovely tribute and a timely focus. The inside pages are graced with photos of area fire departments – and they are more interesting and lively than these images usually are.

Fredericksburg Standard – “Think Pink: Breast Cancer Awareness Week” is well written and smartly designed. Understandably, some stories had to rely on submitted photos (as to not compromise families), which meant some layouts are less dynamic than others). Compared with other submissions in this division, this section seems light, with only five staff-written pieces of moderate length.

Special Section: Division 3

First -- The Taylor Press

A striking cover with football players from different teams – it's in your face with their masks on. The stories are compelling and go beyond what's usual found in these section (though the Dicky Maegle lead photo is marred by glare). The photos within the football preview have attitude – and social distancing. The color-coded sections for each local team is clever and user-friendly, and Taylor deserves extra credit (extra points) for directly addressing COVID in a couple of its features. It's a service – not a disservice – for readers.

Second -- El Campo Leader News

The Kids' Eye View is adorable, from its cover (which generates its own reader engagement by being a coloring contest) to the letters from the students to the wonderfully drawn ads. Credit to all those who ensured the names were correct in the letters and the ads.

Third -- Uvalde Leader-News

Outstanding cover because of photo, layout and topography. The inside design is also clean, easy to read, with expected useful information. The Lutz articles are fine, but one question is how much of this copy was produced in house.

Honorable Mention -- Fayette County Record

The photography in Vine & Stein is impactful, crisp (though the cover has too many Kooper Family graphics). The inside pages are nicely designed and the stories are useful, but it would

have been nice to have bylines on some of the stories, like the quarantine bartending and the coffee guide).

Lampasas Dispatch Record

It's understandable that much of the art would be file photos – even in normal times. But it seems odd that this guide to the region makes no obvious references to how COVID has changed these events or attractions. The story on a local golf course makes a reference to the “very tentative” dates of scheduled tournaments. Until quite recently, much of this guide would not be helpful.

Lifestyle Pages

Judged by Kathleen McElroy, University of Texas at Austin

Division 1

First -- Schulenburg Sticker

The Jan. 9 and March 5 Society News and Education-Youth pages are well designed; the youth images are more engaging than the usual photos of lined-up students. The copy reads well. The March 12 page is dominated by these wide-angle shots of students, but that's OK. It would have been nice to have students quoted in the astronomy piece: Instead of writing, “The students enjoyed having his insight on the stars,” let's hear that in their own words.

Second -- Frio-Nueces Current

Standing lifestyle columns – Tessie's Two Cents, As Good as Granny's, On My Shelf -- are hallmark of its Living pages and possibly are must-reads each week. A couple of layout concerns: the Sept. 17 Crafter's Corner probably should have been on one page as opposed to having a one-paragraph jump with small art. The Dec 24 Farm & Ranch page could have used art, but that edition's School page is well designed and informative.

Third -- The Devine News

An excellent mix of local art, stories and briefs. Glimpse is an interesting local feature but not sure about its subhead, A Look at What They've Become, works every time. The March 11 feature seemed to be more about the Marines in general than the local Marine. The Jan. 29 feature, which remembers a local athlete, works better. The Feb. 19 Lifestyles front is packed full of information; one suggestion is a bigger headline on the home feature, which is the longest story on the page. Overall, the section and the pages would greatly benefit from varying headline sizes, which can help readers navigate the page. If it's a policy to allow ads at the top of pages, as done on page 7 in the Feb. 19 edition, then perhaps move the Reading Club story to the top left of the page and square off the career day package.

Kingsville Record

It was a little confusing figuring out what was to be judged because the Oct. 1 entry was marked as 1 of 3, and earlier dates followed. The Oct. 1 entry was mostly a jump. The second Lifestyle entry is actually marked “News.” The Community pages do offer community engagement through a calendar and short items with courtesy photos.

Division 2

First Place -- Fredericksburg Standard

Because of its reporting, design and variety, this is a first-class Life & Arts section that in many ways is superior to many daily lifestyle sections. The section front is strongest when one piece of large art dominates, like the Sept. 23 edition. Of course, these pages benefit from having movie critics, food writers and the such, but it’s important that these features are among extension and livestock stories, too.

Second -- Pleasanton Express

Strong community stories anchor the Living section, with staff photos and some of best courtesy art seen in the competition. The stories and design make for aesthetically pleasing local pages (kudos on the dancer layout on the front and jump on April 29). Overall, these pages are fine storytelling, breathing life into the community.

Third -- Port Aransas South Jetty

Clearly all the action has been happening in Port Aransas because the South Jetty is packed fill of events, features, local photos and calendars. For all of its tourist information, the South Jetty has plenty of community engagement with its local photos, Church pages, Island Life/Focus features. The presentation can appear a little cramped. The Dec. 10 page might have benefited from having narrower type and a headline for the “Dog Party” brief while bumping up the headline for the story next to it: “Christmas Films, Drive-In Style.” Thanksgiving recipes provide a local touch even though the broccoli casserole recipe had a typo: “1 ½ Panko bread crumbs” – now that’s carb friendly! Excellent pages for locals and tourists, alike. All three entries in this division are worthy of distinction.

Division 3

First -- Fayette County Record

Wow – imaginative projects executed to a T and make the most of lifestyle coverage during an pandemic. “Guess who” is the epitome of community engagement. The Facebook submissions made for another compelling page; this is the rare instance in which a layout benefits from NOT

having dominate art. The church photos were probably a smart way of using existing archives to visually tell a story that locals probably never tire of seeing.

Second -- Uvalde Leader-News

Inventive stories with exceptional layouts and typographical designs. Kudos for the story idea and layout for “Listen Up, Mt. Volz!” How wonderful it is to have a story five years in the making. Another strong layout for the restaurant piece, but top marks for the rodeo layout – it actually worked to put the graphic headline above the strong photo. The design is so good that the fine stories might get overlooked. Also, kudos for the elegantly designed Obituaries package.

Tie Third -- El Campo Leader-News

Interesting local stories accompanied by excellent layouts, especially about the 1971 homecoming queen. The lead stories would benefit from having more voices; you want to hear from others who went to El Campo High in 1971 or from the fellow students or the parents of the high school graduate going on a mission year. This paper deserve recognition in this category.

Tie Third -- Lampasas Dispatch Record

Commendable mix of local features, briefs and photos. Layout is reader-friendly and makes good use of photos, even during a pandemic (including the skateboarding art on July 10). The front-page run of the “Pregnancy resource center” seems rather short, and the jump was not included in the entry. Two of the three entries led with retirement pieces, which often are not compelling even though the reporter did a fine job; if this is a regular feature, then maybe different approaches should be taken with the lead. The third entry was composed of good ol’ fashion local community news and events – which is the point of these pages. This paper deserve recognition in this category.

STPA Headlines

Kathleen McElroy, judge

Division 1

First -- Hays Free Press: In two headlines, the perfect use of puns, which work on all levels and draw you into the story. “Put a fork in Fajita Drive” is the best headline among all divisions. “CBD is A-OK” has the right rhythm to make it work.

Second -- Schulenberg Sticker – These headlines have nice the right touch of clever, which is appropriate for their stories. “Shattered Dreams” headline is borderline deceiving, but it is saved by the word “dreams” and banks of subheads.

Third -- The Flatonia Argus: These headlines are simple but draw in readers. By the way, “face-lift” is usually one word, but the story and headline are consistent.

Frio-Nueces Current – “The gift of our lives” headline hits the right tone for the vaccine story. But the other entries might strike some as being off tone because they are on crime stories – especially “Barbecue and Bullets,” in which someone was shot.

The Devine News – Solid headlines. The paper might want to create a policy on headline word capitalization and spacing.

Kingsville Record – “Paws-itive” might be a bit of a stretch, but it doesn’t offend. On the other hand, one would hate to read “HEADS UP!” on a story about a seriously injured loved one. “Crappy” is an unusual word for a headline, but one trusts the editors have a feel for their community standards.

Division 2

First -- Port Aransas South Jetty: Clever headlines draw readers into stories. “Smoke Alarm” for vaping? Yes. “Finger-lickin’ bad” captures the column perfectly with just three words. “To mask or not to mask” is effective because it suggests what readers were thinking.

Second -- Hondo Anvil Herald: “The Waiting/Is the Hardest Part” works for sports readers even if they aren’t big Tom Petty fans. “7 votes” is a compelling headline that freshens a story the readers might already know. “Navy & White Night” didn’t seem as compelling as the two other headlines but might mean more to a local reader.

Third -- Fredericksburg Standard: You can’t go wrong with “Oktoberfest *ist kaput.*” *Das ist sehr gut.* “A light in dark times” appropriately strikes a different tone, and works on all levels. Not quite sure of appeal of “Outlaws band for a cause” – a rhyme? Most people read headlines in their heads; there’s has to be a special cognitive touch (like rhythm or a visually obvious rhyme) for this type of headline to work.

Honorable mention: The Rockdale Reporter – Lovely headlines that don’t try too hard. “Carved in Wood” is a little obvious but still works. “Big Leaks” is a bit of a stretch, but the “Slow starter” headline was compelling.

Pleasanton Express – “2020: Year of the Weird” works, but “pies it forward” misses the mark. The two phrases in “Sewing hope: Behind the Masks” compete against each other. It might have been better to stick to one idea.

Division 3:

First -- Taylor Press: All three headlines strike the right tone for their respective stories. “Ropes County Fair” is the appropriate pun for this piece. “Taylor Loses Its Voice” elegantly tells the story for this obituary. “Behind the Horror” is the perfect headline (and typeface) with the photo. Well done.

Second -- Fayette County Record: "Grinning from Beer to Beer" is a groaner that makes one smile. "Resale Therapy" does, too, but be careful not to overdo these kinds of puns. On the other hand, "Hand Sanitizer-Soaked Ballots Locally" is a once-in-lifetime headline (we hope).

Third -- Lampasas Dispatch Record: The strongest of these is "Splinters in the bench" – it says it all. "Polar Bears go cold" (though it's on a very short story) gets the nod over "looks to orchestrate successful school year." The longer the headline, the less likely the pun will work.

Uvalde Leader-News – "Don't bury it yet" does work for the landfill article, but "Mini" headline is a bit of stretch. "Police unamused by funny money" has two issues: the phrase "unamused" is trying too hard, and the tone of the headline does not match the seriousness of the story.

El Campo Leader-News – The Mr. Spreadsheet" headline would be stronger if the front-page portion of the story had emphasized that was his nickname. "Sewing/Up Safety" loses its impact because the words "Sewing" and "Up" were separated. Someone probably didn't want to end a line with a preposition, but in this case, "Sewing Up" is the verb phrase. Didn't quite get "Firemen offer fishy thanks – fries too."

STPA Page Design

Kathleen McElroy, Judge

Division 1

First: Hays Free Press

The modular layout gives these pages a clean design throughout the edition. Readable typefaces on the front page and inside pages. The March 11 front page could have used one strong piece of artwork. The jump page design is clean but strong – making it easy to find stories.

Second -- Frio-Nueces Current

Lively layout on front pages, with lots of art, typefaces and colors. Sometimes they compete against each other rather than complement. That's the case on the Living page on Oct. 1. The Sept. 24 front page is stronger because it has one fewer story – the police chief story appears crammed in. Good inside pages but might benefit from one strong headline (like the arrests on page 5 in the Oct. 1 issue). "Lessons from COVID-19" would have made a stronger impact with the photo anchored in the third and fourth columns. Great use of photos on sports pages.

Third -- The Kingsville Record

Solid, modular layout, but the front pages could benefit from bigger artwork (not sure of benefit of the coronavirus art with the Dec. 10 lead story). Pages 2 and 3 in the Dec. 10 edition benefit from their strong artwork and design. And good job getting in all the photos with page 3 in the Dec. 17 edition.

Honorable Mention -- The Flatonia Argus

Kudos for displaying so many photos throughout its front and inside pages, thus connecting with communities. However, there are competing typefaces on the front pages.

The Schulenburg Sticker

Nice use of art but front pages might benefit from stronger headlines to differentiate story importance. Strong inside layouts because of photos.

The Devine News

Lots of photos on front page, but having a main photo would strengthen overall layout and still keep community feel to page. The headline sizes could also benefit from a systematic style. For instance, the multi-line, large headlines on the bottom of the Oct. 7 seem a bit haphazard. The inside pages, which are strongly anchored by local art, could also use a firmer headline style that makes it easier for readers. In the Oct. 7 issue, one wonders why the sports banner appears two pages after the sport package begins.

Page Design, Division 2

First – Fredericksburg Standard Radio Post

The paper does a great job of pairing stories that are reader friendly. It does so on March 11 and again on March 18, with three COVID stories. The March 11 front has strong art, while March 18 A1 relies on a smaller photo that understandably didn't deserve being much bigger but faced competition from the refer photos at the top. It seems odd that on March 18 edition has theater news on page 2, a theater photo on page 3 and more theater coverage on C1. Otherwise most of the inside pages, including the Opinion pages, and section fronts are easy to read and cleanly designed, with dominant art. White space is used judiciously to give the pages room to breathe.

Second -- The Rockdale Reporter

The Nov. 12 page 1 design is strong with well-placed photos (though the Quick Look is actually more than a quick look). Also a well-designed front page on Nov. 19, but the Covid-19 cases story was missing a jump line to page 8A. Inside pages are nicely organized (but might benefit from larger headlines). The top half of Sports front has a tiered effect: the column sig is small but lines up with the Sports header, which is also higher than "Section B." But the

Third -- Port Aransas South Jetty

The front pages are chock full of information, but sometimes the images, graphics and typographies are competing with each other. Do the captions accompanying stories need to have a kicker or headline? Kickers are necessary for stand-alone photos but seem to add to the typeface "busy-ness" of these pages. The inside pages of the May 21 issue seem to breathe more than the front page, and the visitors' guide is a welcomed design addition. The Island Life

package on the ferries is pleasing – though it is also rule-heavy, as in any page with a jump. Love the emphasis on the high school seniors throughout the May 28 issue, including the 2007 photo on the cover of Island Life (with a link to an updated image). The front page that day does suffer from a lack of dominant art, and even the images in the left column compete with the graduate mug shots directly to the right.

Pleasanton Express

Many photos, which is good, but front page might be strengthened by having one piece of dominant art. In that same vein, the headlines sizes and fonts seem to be competing with each other rather than helping the reader navigate the page. It was a little confusing that the intro with Poteet water tower story was NOT written by the staff reporter, which a reader wouldn't learn until the jump page. The inside pages, on the other hand, are clearly designed.

Hondo Anvil Herald

The Aug. 27 edition could have used more front-page art and a clear signal which was the lead story that day. There seemed to be some inside layout issues, with extra white space throughout, but the football and hunting sections were a delight.

Page Design, Division 3

First -- Fayette County Record

From top to bottom, a well-designed paper with an elegant banner. Inside box is consistent, and all of its headlines are sized appropriately. Clean typeface. Inside pages are a delight, and the junior livestock package on March 27 is neat and impactful. A leader for page design. Fayette gets the top nod for submitting pages during the early throes of the pandemic lockdown.

Second -- Lampasas Dispatch Record

Such a clean front page (graced by the colorful Dispatch Record banner). The March 6 page shines by using graphics – which can be difficult to use as lead art. The presentation at the bottom of the front page -- weather and “Briefly” is a model for newspapers 10 times its size. The inside pages are also smartly designed, especially Opinion and Sports. The obituary design is elegant.

Third -- Uvalde Leader-News

A modular layout that is pleasing yet retains a strong community feel. A decision has been made to go with equal-size art rather than one large dominating photo. It works for this paper. Very clean inside pages, especially the Public Records. The Lifestyles pages are engaging while sustaining a certain grace, and the Obituaries layout is among the best in the competition.

Honorable Mention -- El Campo Leader-News

The actual front-page design is clean, with clear lead stories. The above-banner “refers” seem to float a bit, especially because the one on the left is borderless. Inside pages are fine, with much art, but the dashes with both jump headlines and some captions are distracting. Also remember to consistent: “After-School” is accurately hyphenated on the front page of Aug. 5, but not on the inside story and jump headlines. Kudos for using typography for “Mystery via mail” headline – it makes it clear that this is a different kind of news story.

Taylor Press

Clever graphic for Feb. 5 front page – outlining the Ducks’ new UIL realignment. The snow photo package on Feb. 9 and rightly dominated the front page – but in a way that still seemed fresh days later. Plus these were reader submissions – talk about engagement! That said, the front-page runs for three other stories seemed too short to gather steam. Given that the jump page (page 3) had but one piece of art, the census photo, which is way too small to be meaningful on the front, might been moved to page 3 and be given bigger display. Overall, nicely designed inside pages. On a small note that was not taken into account in judging page design: “Remember to thank a Veteran and Serviceman every day!” is a worthwhile sentiment – might it include our servicewomen, too?

Joyce and Fred Latcham Community Service (ALL Divisions)

Judged by Kathleen McElroy

I’m calling this a tie because the Hays Free Press and The Devine News took the same approaches to these very local stories, decided to shift editorial resources to them and served their communities in very specific ways involving community and public service.

Hays Free Press/News Dispatch (Division 1)

TIE -- In the midst of a pandemic that inexplicably divided the country came a racial reckoning that touched communities across the country and the state. Thus this past summer, the Hays High School’s nickname, the Rebels and its associated Rebel Drive came under fire. In fact, the Free Press help light that match, which community newspaper are supposed to do -- be leaders in the community. The editors walked a very fine line – the news stories, while remaining neutral, presented voices that previously had not been heard. There were news features providing context and history. They reported on the \$800,000 expense to change the nickname (though interestingly, it wasn’t on the front page that day – there might have have been bigger news that day). Guest writers wrote opinion pieces. Importantly, Free Press involved the readers in the discussion, especially through social media. The Free Press was committed to this coverage even while reporting on the pandemic. And, yes, in 2021, the students changed the name to the Hawks.

TIE -- The Devine News (Division 1)

The News, in the middle of story of the century, found itself with a subplot in its own backyard: a local doctor called the editors to say his use of melatonin was helping COVID patients. After investigating, The News ran stories on Dr. Neel, then reported on how his treatment was gaining international attention and being used globally. Its readers appreciated the coverage from their own local newspaper and learned more about virus, its symptoms and treatment than most news consumers in similar communities. This is not a judgment on the merits of the treatment but recognizing the resources The News expended to stay with this story.

Fayette County Record (Division 3): Student Mental Health

The Record's response to the La Grange High School student's suicide is commendable and the essence of community service. First, it ran an editorial listing resources on the day Kyla Drodz's obituary ran. It rightly made the mother's appearance at a school board meeting the top story of the Feb. 21 edition, rather than other items on the agenda (and explaining to its readers why the board didn't act immediately on Ms. Tillery's recommendations).

The five school districts in its circulation needed to answer The Record's questions (the first respondents probably wished their answers had also warranted jump space). Kudos for devoting front page (and some jump space) for this information, but there are more questions that need answers: what do the district responses have in common? How would mental health and education experts weigh in? And, most important, what do your parents, teachers and students think? The Record's supporting letter mentions that one benefit of its series that school boards can be held accountable for their what they have said.

Kudos for continuing the series once schools reopened, but please follow up. The COVID-19 lockdown has disrupted everything -- from schools to government meetings to the livestock shows Kyla enjoyed being a part of. Go back to the school districts, conduct your own survey of parents and students to gauge if they feel supported -- especially because of the isolation brought by the pandemic. Please complete the circle and let your readers know if changes have indeed been made. This story is bigger than an annual TSPA award.

Pleasanton Express (Division 2)

The Express is right to be proud of its public service devoted to COVID -- not just in the news stories but also with Q&A's, front-page restaurant listings and a county resource guide. The Express, along with many other STPA newspapers, deserve a special thanks for serving their communities during this unprecedented crisis -- and putting their hometowns before revenue concerns.

Griff Singer General Excellence Award

Judged by Kathleen McElroy

The criteria for this award are **quality** of local copy, local Pictures and general appearance – not just the amount of local copy, pictures and general appearance. This is a particularly difficult division to judge because these newspapers take different approaches to covering their communities. Many editors and publishers emphasize community comings-and-goings and photos, with this engagement their most important commitment. All these entries are serving their communities well.

Division 1

First -- Hays Free Press – Clean and creative layout, solid reporting, on front and inside. Kudos to the front-page designer for figuring out how to display the cruise death story with a submitted photo. Editors have decided that front-page runs can be short to ensure more stories get prominent display; it's a policy that works here because the page design has enough space between columns. Even without art, the jump pages are appealing because of the modular design. There's still plenty of community reporting, especially in sports and education pages.

Second -- Frio-Nueces Current – Very strong art in pre-COVID editions that were submitted. Solid reporting throughout, including strong sports and community coverage.

Third -- The Ozona Stockman. This paper is noteworthy for its detailed reporting and clear writing. Kudos to Melissa Perner, whose byline appears on every front-page story in these two editions, published in the early days of the pandemic. The layout is clean on the front page and inside pages. Outstanding best black-and-white entry.

Division 2

First -- Fredericksburg Standard RP. This publication excels at many levels: overall design, reporting and writing, variety. It is big enough to have cultural reporters while still honoring its local roots with agricultural and community news. The magazine included in these editions, Rock & Vine, rivals any found in a big city – and that is especially impressive during a pandemic. In the submitted editions, the one area that could use improvement was photo design. Possibly because of the pandemic, many of the pages lacked dominant, thus, impactful, art.

Second -- Port Aransas South Jetty – The sheer volume of news, listings and images is impressive, Interestingly, the reporting and writing is actually stronger than the visual presentation, which emphasizes art of any size rather than being dictated by “cleaner” layout. The South Jetty also shines in having both community and tourist information (including strong pullout guides).

Third -- Hondo Anvil Herald – Strong paper with an excellent football preview. Could make its layout stronger with more emphasis on headlines (and fewer dueling typefaces). More front-page stories could use bylines.

Category: General Excellence Division 3

Judge's Name: John Savage, University of Texas at Austin

This was a tough category to judge because of the quality of the papers. The South Texas Press Association has excellent newspapers that clearly serve their communities well.

Division 3: Semi-Weeklies

First-Place Winner: The Fayette County Record

The Fayette County Record has a good-looking layout. Page design is classic and classy. The writing is clean and the paper is replete with easy-to-read and important stories about the pandemic. Photography is excellent.

Second-Place Winner: The Bay City Tribune

The Bay City Tribune did some great pandemic-related news features. I especially like that the paper tells readers how to contact politicians on the opinion page.

Third-Place Winner: Uvalde Leader-News

The Uvalde Leader-News has a clean layout, nice photography and well-rounded coverage.

Category: STPA Photographer of the Year

Judge's Name: Michael Minasi, University of Texas at Austin

Division 1: Weeklies 3,000 circulation and below

Winner: Manuel Azocar III, Frio-Nueces Current

Manuel Azocar III is a busy photographer in the Frio and La Salle counties. Each of his entries were sharp and cleanly composed. I particularly enjoyed his sports photos, which each presented vivid moments of struggle in their respective games.

Division 2: Weeklies 3,001 circulation and above

Winner: Sam Fowler, Pleasanton Express

The entries for this division of Photographer of the Year were competitive — with many of the candidates displaying high levels of technical and creative expertise in the photo coverage of their communities. Sam Fowler broke from the pack by presenting a varied and newsworthy range of visuals during 2020— I particularly appreciated his efforts to depict the pandemic and the struggles and changes his town faced along the way. It's difficult but important work.

Division 3: Semi-Weeklies

Winner: Jeff Lowe, Lampasas Dispatch Record

Jeff Lowe is a skilled photographer who appears to be equally comfortable no matter where he is — whether at a COVID-19 testing site, a Black Lives Matter march, or a baseball game. His images are consistently tack sharp, tightly composed, and are full of life. His images are an excellent visual diary of 2020.

Category: STPA Willis Webb Journalist of the Year

Judge's Name: John Savage, University of Texas at Austin

Division 1: Weeklies 3,000 circulation and below

Winner: Marc Robertson, Frio-Nueces Current

Marc Robertson is a smart and stylish writer and a reporter who takes on important stories. His journalistic body of work this year included creative editorials, accountability stories, compelling profiles and tightly written hard news. The lead to Robertson's story about a county jail inmate's death reflects his writerly chops: "In the final hours of his life, a Cotulla man cried for medical attention that never came, and his anguished death may have been observed by county jailers who mocked him from the other side of a window."

Division 2: Weeklies 3,001 circulation and above

Winner: Sam Fowler, Pleasanton Express

Sam Fowler tackled a range of stories this year and did so with flare. From a heartfelt column about Black Americans' struggle for equality and a compelling profile of a high school basketball star, to an amusing story about a pet chicken, Fowler showed skill and creativity.

Division 3: Semi-Weeklies

Winner: Andy Behlen, The Fayette County Record

Andy Behlen has a way with words. He also has an eye for important stories chock full of conflict. His investigation into abuse and neglect at a childcare facility in Fayette County is an excellent example of thorough reporting.

JUDY AND BILL WILKERSON SWEEPSTAKES AWARD

DIVISION 1

3RD PLACE 600 POINTS – HAYS FREE PRESS

2ND PLACE 650 POINTS – KINGSVILLE RECORD

1ST PLACE 900 POINTS – FRIO NUECES-CURRENT

DIVISION 2

3RD 600 POINTS – PLEASANTON EXPRESS

2ND 975 POINTS – PORT ARANSAS SOUTH JETTY

1ST 1,100 POINTS – FREDERICKSBURG STANDARD-RADIO POST

DIVISION 3

3RD 650 POINTS – UVALDE LEADER-NEWS

2ND 800 POINTS – EL CAMPO LEADER NEWS

1ST 875 POINTS – FAYETTE COUNTY RECORD