

TEXAS PRESS MESSENGER

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Award nominations deadline set Oct. 15

Nominations must be submitted by Oct. 15 for all awards to be presented at the 2019 Midwinter Conference and Trade Show Jan. 24-26 in Denton.

Awards include:

- The TPA Golden 50 Award, honoring men and women who have displayed exemplary service and selfless contributions to journalism for 50 or more years;
- The Frank W. Mayborn Award for Community Leadership, which is awarded annually to a publisher or newspaper executive who contributed most significantly to the industry and his or her community over the past year; and
- The Fred Hartman Award for Excellence in Sports Writing, which will be presented this year in the less than 10,000 circulation category.

Information about the awards and instructions for submitting nominations are available online at www.texaspress.com.

The Texas Newspaper Foundation Hall of Fame honors men and women who have made outstanding contributions to Texas newspaper journalism and their communities, advanced the legacy of a free and responsible press and inspired others to improve the quality of the journalism profession.

A nomination form and more information are available on the foundation's website, [www.tnf.net](http://tnf.net).



Midwinter Conference to stress importance of local journalism

The 2019 Texas Press Midwinter Conference and Trade Show will focus on the critical importance of community newspapers with the theme "Subscribe to Democracy: Community Journalism Matters."

The conference theme dovetails with a Texas Press Service campaign with promotional materials available to member newspapers free of charge.

The Embassy Suites by Hilton Denton Convention Center is headquarters for the three-day conference featuring outstanding speakers; group sessions on current topics confronting community newspapers, including a legislative update as the 86th Texas Legislature opens; the annual TNF Hall of Fame induction ceremonies and banquet as well as other award recognitions; the annual trade show with

top industry vendors; and a silent auction featuring items donated by member newspapers, associate members and friends of TPA. Proceeds go to the Texas Newspaper Foundation's work supporting the Texas Center for Community Journalism at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth. To donate auction items, contact Mike Hodges at mhodges@texaspress.com or 512-477-6755.

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Open government advocate Prather honored with FOIFT Madison Award

First Amendment attorney Laura Prather was awarded the 2018 James Madison Award by the Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas at the group's annual conference in September.

The award honoring commitment to upholding the principles of the First Amendment and open government was presented during the John Henry Faulk Award Luncheon.

Prather, a board member and past president of the FOI Foundation, is a partner in the litigation section at Haynes and Boone, LLP in Austin. Her practice includes First Amendment,

intellectual property and media/entertainment litigation and appeals. Texas Press Association is among her clients.

Fellow advocates for free speech and press rights have described Prather as "a fierce and effective defender" of the First Amendment and government transparency.

As an advocate at the Texas Legislature for free speech and open government, Prather was instrumental in the passage of the three most significant pieces of First Amendment legislation in recent history: the reporter's privilege (shield law) the Texas

Citizens Participation Act (anti-SLAPP act) and the Defamation Mitigation Act (outlining a process for corrections that, if followed, can greatly reduce liability).

She was also instrumental in drafting proposed legislation for the 2017 Texas Legislative Session that would have mitigated the effects of two Texas Supreme Court rulings that weakened Texas' Public Information Act. In the 2015 Boeing case, the court ruled that businesses and governmental entities may withhold information about their contracts on

► FOIFT, Page 9



First Amendment attorney Laura Prather received the 2018 James Madison Award from the Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas. 2015 Madison Award winner Don Adams made the presentation at the recent FOIFT annual conference.



President's Message

Time to rally the troops: The same sinister forces that have nibbled away at public notice laws and government transparency for years are already circling the State Capitol...and that's no cheap chum they're tossing in the waters for bait.

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Upcoming events

- Oct. 7-13, National Newspaper Week. Materials available at www.nationalnewspaperweek.com
- Oct. 15, Deadline for TPA award nominations, www.texaspress.com
- Jan. 24-26, 2019: TPA Midwinter Conference & Trade Show, Denton

Texas Bar Association presents annual Gavel Awards

State Bar of Texas President Joe K. Longley and SBOT Public Affairs Committee Chair Rudy England welcomed journalists from around the state as winners of Texas Gavel Awards, presented at the John Henry Faulk Award Luncheon during the Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas annual conference.

The State Bar of Texas Public Affairs Committee presents the Texas Gavel Awards for journalism that deepens public understanding of the legal system.

The 2018 award winners are:
Print, Major Metro

Anita Hassan, formerly of the Houston Chronicle, for "Serial Indifference," for a four-part series that began when the community and country learned that a rape victim was jailed to compel her testimony against her attacker. Hassan's months of reporting uncovered failings in the criminal justice system that allowed the woman's attacker—a convicted sex offender accused of raping several homeless women—to walk free for years. Hassan was an investigative reporter at the Houston Chronicle when she wrote the series and is now on the investigative team at the Las Vegas

Review-Journal. Print, Non-Metro

Eleanor Dearman and Krista M. Torralva of the Corpus Christi Caller-Times for using public records and interviews to reveal that a sitting judge, accused in a road rage incident of pointing a gun at a vehicle's occupants, also had been involved in earlier road rage cases. They continued their coverage in 2017. Dearman covers courts, crime and politics at the Caller-Times. Torralva is now a reporter for the San Antonio Express-News. (After the submission period for the Texas Gavel Awards concluded, the judge was found not guilty of an initial felony charge and prosecutors later agreed to dismiss a second count. The judge sought inpatient treatment for a decades-long struggle with PTSD in August.)

Broadcast, Major Metro (tie)

Tanya Eiserer and Jason Wheeler of WFAA-TV in Dallas each received a Texas Gavel Award. Eiserer's special report "A North Texas Rape Victim Fights for a Voice" highlighted a woman's fight for justice after she was sexually assaulted and felt re-victimized by authorities. She says officials failed to notify her about grand jury



Texas Gavel Award winners were honored at the Freedom of Information Foundation annual conference in Austin. Shown following the presentations are (from left) State Bar of Texas President Joe K. Longley, Jason Wheeler of WFAA-TV, Eleanor Dearman of the Corpus Christi Caller-Times, Anita Hassan, formerly of the Houston Chronicle, Jessica Savage and Veronica Flores of KRIS-TV, and Rudy England, chair of the State Bar of Texas Public Affairs Committee.

proceedings, leading her to file open records requests to obtain information. Wheeler's report "Miss Manners' Goes to Texas Prisons to Teach Etiquette to Inmates" examined the Texas Department of Criminal Justice's prison entrepreneurship program, designed to reduce recidivism. The report featured an

unexpected mentor who teaches etiquette to prisoners.

Broadcast, Non-Metro

Jessica Savage, Michael Salazar, Cameron Gorman and Veronica Flores of KRIS-TV in Corpus Christi for their four-part coverage exposing a loophole in the law that allowed a candidate in a city runoff election to help

19 people cast their ballots and for coverage of a subsequent voter fraud investigation.

(After the submission period for the Texas Gavel Awards concluded, two women pleaded guilty to voter fraud-related charges. The case against the candidate, where the story began, is still pending.)

FOIFT Madison Award

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grounds that releasing the information might put them at a competitive disadvantage in the future. In the Greater Houston Partnership case, also in 2015, the court ruled that a non-profit, which was paid by the City of Houston to perform economic development work, was not subject to the public information act. In the final days of the 2017 session, the legislation died without a vote.

Many of the topics covered in panel discussions at the FOIFT conference concerned instances when these two rulings were used by cities, counties, school districts and other government agencies to avoid releasing information about contracts and hiring of administrative personnel – keeping citizens from knowing how their tax dollars were spent.

As she accepted the Madison Award, Prather outlined the four issues FOIFT

and its fellow Sunshine Coalition members will focus on in the 2019 session:

- Access to information about how taxpayer money is spent in the context of government contracts with private entities (the Boeing case);
- Access to information about non-profit or quasi-public organizations that receive public money and perform traditional government functions (the Greater Houston Partnership case);
- Access to information regarding individuals' dates of birth (Paxton V. City of Dallas, a court ruling that public citizens' dates of birth are protected by common-law privacy); and
- Access to public information about government businesses that officials hold on private devices or channels, such as cell phones or personal email addresses.

"Madison was a deal maker who worked with all sides, and that's what

we will do to repair the Texas Public Information Act," Prather said.

Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar, the luncheon's keynote speaker, discussed the Comptroller's Office's Texas Transparency Stars Program that recognizes local governments for their transparency efforts. Governmental entities are recognized for opening their books not only in their traditional finances but also in the areas of contracts and procurement, economic development, public pensions and debt obligations, and by providing clear and meaningful financial information by posting financial documents with summaries, visualizations, downloadable data and other information.

Hegar said he has supported transparency in government as comptroller and previously as a legislator. "Information is the most basic requirement for any free nation," he said. "Democracy can't

survive and thrive unless citizens have the information they need to make informed decisions at the voting booth, and to hold those they elect accountable for their actions."

The Comptroller's website, www.comptroller.texas.gov, includes a transparency section where taxpayers may access information about state revenue, biennial revenue estimates, state spending, the state budget, sources of revenue, tax allocations, the state's financial report and cash report. Also available in the transparency section are key economic indicators, data visualization, expenditures by county, sales tax allocations of cities and counties, local government links and information about local bond issues.

The FOIFT's 2018 Bernard and Audre Rapoport State Conference also included panel discussions and programs featuring professionals in news media, academics and law.