Southern California News Group journalists earn 39 OC Press Club Excellence in Journalism Awards


The awards were announced on Thursday, June 30 at an awards gala at the Clubhouse in Anaheim Hills.

SCNG journalists earned awards in categories including Best News Story (First place: Erika I. Ritchie), Best Education Story (First place: Roxana Kopetman) and Best Breaking News Coverage (First place: Laylan Connelly, Eric Licas, Martin Wisckol, Erika Ritchie and Ryan Carter for coverage of the oil spill off the coast of Orange County.)

New to the 2022 Excellence In Journalism contest was the category Journalist of the Year. Longtime Orange County Register business and real estate reporter Jeff Collins took top honors in the category followed by sports and investigative reporter Scott M. Reid.

The full list of Southern California News Group's honorees follows.

**Best News Story**
- First place: Erika I. Ritchie, "9 deaths in July’s Marine AAV training off San Clemente Island were preventable, investigation finds"
- Second place: Scott Schwebke, "Firefighter plagued by guilt after captain orders him to drive away from crash that injured 2"

**Best News Feature Story**
- Second place: Susan Christian Goulding, "Witness in George Floyd trial gets vacation, and new friendship, from Seal Beach man"

**Best Breaking News Coverage**
- First place: Laylan Connelly, Eric Licas, Martin Wisckol, Erika Ritchie and Ryan Carter, Coverage of the oil spill off the coast of Orange County
- Second place: Brian Rokos, breaking news on the slaying of two teens

**Best Investigative Story or Series**
- Second place: Scott Schwebke, LA Commissioner used influence to win COVID-19 contract

**Best Beat Reporting**
- Third place: Jeff Collins, Housing and Real Estate
**Best Public Affairs Story**
- First place: Beau Yarbrough and Allyson Vergara, "Southern California suicides down during coronavirus pandemic — but not among young people"
- Second place: Brooke Staggs, Roxana Kopetman and Ian Wheeler, "Why did Vietnamese voters in Orange County swing toward Trump in 2020?"

**Best Feature Story**
- First place: Susan Christian Goulding, "Noise? Grime? Dog tranquilizers? Living next to freeway work is no picnic"

**Best Pandemic News Story**
- Third place: Roxana Kopetman, "Masks are (mostly) off and people in Orange County are (mostly) happy"

**Best Coverage of Extremism**
- Second place: Joe Nelson and Scott Schwebke, "Riverside County Sheriff acknowledges he was dues-paying member of Oath Keepers"

**Best Round-Up or Best Of**
- Second place: Brad A. Johnson, "The 50 Best Places to Eat Tacos in Orange County"
- Third place: Anne Valdespino, "Looking for a special spot for drinks? Here are 6 with a vibe"

**Best Business Story**
- First place: Jeff Collins, "Rent aid in California plagued by complaints over slowness, bureaucracy"
- Third place: Jeff Collins and Teri Sforza, "Surfside tower collapse reverberates through Southern California’s HOAs"

**Best Sports Story**
- Second place: Jim Alexander, "Angels’ Shohei Ohtani is must-see TV"

**Best Health/Wellness Story**
- Third place: Susan Christian Goulding, "Christmas mourning? A tree in Tustin reminds grieving parents they aren’t alone"

**Best Environmental News Story**
- Third place: Erika I. Ritchie, "Navy to reexamine ocean training after fin whales were likely struck by a visiting destroyer"

**Best Education Story**
- First place: Roxana Kopetman, "Pandemic once closed schools; now it’s financing them"

**Best Food/Restaurant Story**
- First place: Anne Valdespino, "Pandemic year schooled O.C. restaurateurs and diners in hard lessons"
- Third place: Todd Harmonson, "How do you become a foodie? Eat your vegetables – and everything else"

**Best Food/Restaurant Review**
- Third place: Brad A. Johnson, "Review: Chiang An, Tustin"
Best Travel Story
● First place: Brad A. Johnson, "Hotel Review: San Ysidro Ranch, Montecito"
● Third place: Brad A. Johnson, "Where to Eat in Los Cabos: The Restaurants Redefining Baja Cuisine"

Best Profile
● Honorable Mention: Anne Valdespino, "Why Chef Alan Sanz’s culinary journey winds through Spain, Latin America"

Marjorie Freeman Award for Best Humorous Story
● Honorable Mention: Brad A. Johnson, "When readers critique the critic, 2021 edition"

Best Video
● Honorable Mention: Jeff Gritchen, "See breathtaking overhead views of Christmas lights across Orange County"

Best Audience Engagement/Use of Social Media
● Third place: Samantha Dunn, "Troubleshooting Common Problems"

Best News Photo
● First place: Richard Koehler, "Fatal Crash in Newport"
● Second place: Richard Koehler, "Costa Mesa fire"
● Third place: Jeff Gritchen, "firefighters investigate home fire in Anaheim"

Best Sports Photo
● First place: Paul Rodriguez, "Pacific Christian’s Moony Warfield"

Best Feature Photo
● First place: Brad A. Johnson, "Gin & Tonic at Blu SkyBar"
● Third place: Jeff Gritchen, "Old Orange County Courthouse wedding"

Best Portrait
● First place: Jeff Gritchen, "Disneyland vice president Kris Theiler on the Mad Tea Party ride"

The Real O.C. Award
● First place: Susan Christian Goulding, "Witness in George Floyd trial gets vacation, and new friendship, from Seal Beach man"

Journalist of the Year
● First place: Jeff Collins
● Second place: Scott M. Reid

About the Southern California News Group