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Virginia Press Association D. Lathan Mims Award for Editorial Leadership in the Community

RICHMOND, Va. – John B. Edwards, editor and publisher of The Smithfield Times, has won the Virginia Press Association’s D. Lathan Mims Award for Editorial Leadership for the seventh time.

The award was announced Saturday at the association’s annual meeting at the Richmond/Short Pump Hilton.

Presented for work published during the 2016 calendar year, the award is named for the late D. Lathan Mims, a former editor and general manager of the Daily News-Record in Harrisonburg and a former president of the press association. The award was first presented in 1988 for the 1986-87 contest year. Edwards previously won the award in 1998-99, 2002, 2007, 2011, 2014 and 2016.

The New Jersey Press Association judged the Mims competition entries. Of Edward’s package of work, the judges wrote:

“John Edwards is a writer. It’s clear after reading just a few of his words. He loves language, and he loves writing. But more than that, he loves his hometown of Smithfield, his home state of Virginia, and his country. It appears to have started in those “short rows” on the peanut farm, and stayed with him throughout his time away, and his return home.

That love of home runs through every piece John Edwards submitted for this award. Whether he is writing about open-carry permits or extending county sewage service, that care and concern for home, and a sincere desire to do the right thing by it, comes through loud and clear.

There is another quality in Edwards’ writing, one that is increasingly rare in the vitriolic political world we inhabit, and that is restraint. Edwards avoids dropping the hammer, condemning opposing points of

view, even when they reach the absurdity of carrying “long guns” down city streets. He chooses a softer tone, one often tinged with humor, to present a different view of things.

It’s refreshing to read an editorial that says, ‘Here’s what I saw. Here’s what I’m thinking about it. What do you think?’

I don’t know John Edwards. But I’ll bet if I had the opportunity to sit and have a cup of coffee with him in his favorite diner in Smithfield, we’d soon be talking about his home town, the people who live there, and newspapers, and we’d be smiling.

That’s what people used to do when they read the musing of the editor in their morning paper. I think John Edwards would agree, there’s nothing wrong with that. Nothing at all.”

The Mims competition is for individual writers of editorials, signed commentaries, or editorial page columns at non-daily or specialty publications of any size, or a daily publication with a circulation of 40,000 or less.

The award was established to memorialize Mims’ conviction that newspapers and their editors should be active, caring parts of the communities they serve. He believed that a newspaper should support those things which would make a community a better place in which to live and oppose those things which detract from the quality of life.

Entries are judged on skill in writing, clarity of position, fairness in handling of issues, appropriate use of pertinent facts, and vision of the community’s needs, both present and future

[The judging was conducted by journalists in New Jersey.](#)

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