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Virginia Press Association Outstanding Journalist, Young Journalist, and Sales Professional Awards

RICHMOND, Va. – This year's VPA Outstanding Journalist has gone to Gary Harki of the Virginia Pilot. Sara Gregory of the Roanoke Times was selected Outstanding Young Journalist and Perry Curenton of the Daily Press received Outstanding Sales Professional of the Year.

Of Harki's reporting the judges said, "His reporting served two of journalism's most sacred trusts -- giving voice to the voiceless and holding the powerful accountable. His reporting exposed the deaths of scores of indigent mentally ill people -- whether in confrontations with police or in facilities that are supposedly equipped to treat them.

The transgressions were especially alarming in Norfolk and at the Hampton Roads Regional Jail and the Fluvanna Correctional Center for Women, but Harki makes it obvious that underfunding and neglect have created a statewide epidemic of death. Because of his reporting, the Department of Justice began an inquiry, and localities began efforts to improve care.

But, Harki also shows how callous politically fueled refusals by legislators to accept more Medicaid funding have resulted in dreadful conditions and risks to the Commonwealth's most vulnerable citizens."

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This year's Outstanding Young Journalist was Sara Gregory of the Roanoke Times, for her disciplined and comprehensive service to her audiences in covering local schools and issues involving young people.

The judge commented, "Gregory's work is proof that not all great reporting has to be about failure. She chronicled the Roanoke school system's attempts to change the model for disciplining students to keep them out of the prison pipeline.

Prior to the initiative, Roanoke students were sixteen times more likely than their peers nationally to be referred to law enforcement. But Gregory's reporting also demonstrated her skill in exposing problems that aren't being adequately addressed, specifically a failed after-school program, and the lax enforcement against drivers who ignore stopped school buses and harm students as a result.”

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The Young Sales Professional of the Year, Perry Curenton, covered all the bases in his sales work.

“What impressed me was a few specific attributes that are so important in all media sales,” said the judge.

“Integrated sales strategy means to me a willingness to collaborate.

Perry Curenton looks for incremental opportunities, maybe small, maybe not tons of money, but worth the effort for the client. Curenton also shows a willingness to monitor the next generation.

In today’s media landscape, having a print sales executive that embraces these insights and qualities is worth the recognition.”

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The judging was conducted by journalists in New Jersey.

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