

Smoke Signals receives five NAJA awards

Smoke Signals, the bimonthly newspaper of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, won five awards from the Native American Journalists Association for stories and photos published in 2016, as well as the 2017 Elias Boudinot Free Press Award.

The Boudinot Free Press Award, named after the 19th century editor of the first Native newspaper *The Cherokee Phoenix*, was awarded to the Grand Ronde Tribe because of the Independent Tribal Press Ordinance, which was approved by Tribal Council in December and became effective in mid-January.

The ordinance codifies the guarantee of a free press that is included in the Tribal Constitution. It also established a five-member Editorial Board to oversee operation of the Tribal newspaper and ensure there is no undue influence regarding editorial content from elected officials.

“Freedom of the press has always been a constitutional right that members can and should expect,” Tribal Council member Chris Mercier said. “It’s a right that they have as Americans, so why not Grand Ronde Tribal members?”

“My hope is that we can be a model for other Tribes nationally to follow and emulate. Unless Tribes start allowing greater access to their internal affairs to outside newspapers and media, Tribally owned outlets need to fulfill that watchdog role, and the one sure



Smoke Signals file photo

Tribal Cultural Outreach Coordinator Bobby Mercier carries the first salmon after he harvested it at Willamette Falls for the Tribe’s fourth annual First Salmon Ceremony that was held at the McLean House in West Linn in May 2016. This photograph won a second-place award for Best News Photo in the Associate Division of the Native American Journalists Association’s 2017 Native Media Awards.

way to do that is to promise non-interference. It can be tempting to want to maintain that control, but if we truly respect our membership then ensuring Tribal leadership is not censoring or not looking over the shoulders of Tribal news reporters is the only way to go.”

Mercier is a former employee of *Smoke Signals*.

In addition to the Free Press Award, Editor Dean Rhodes took first and second place in the Best

Coverage of Native America category in the Associate Division for his stories “On the Rocks,” which was about Grand Ronde Tribal members harvesting salmon at Willamette Falls for the first time in more than 100 years, and “General Council debates mascot issue” about the March 2016 General Council meeting, respectively.

Tribal photographer Michelle Alaimo won a second-place award

for Best News Photo in the Associate Division for her photo “Tribe honors this year’s first salmon” that appeared in the May 15, 2016, issue.

Former *Smoke Signals* staff writer Brent Merrill received a third-place award in the Best Feature Story category in the Professional Division for the “Trail of Tears accounting” story that appeared in the March 15, 2016, issue.

Associate members of NAJA are non-Tribal members who work for Tribal publications. The Professional Division is for Tribal member writers and photographers.

The annual competition recognizes excellence in reporting by Native and non-Native journalists in the United States and Canada and received more than 700 entries.

Judging was conducted by members of the Society of Professional Journalists, University of Arkansas staff and journalists who work for Indian Country news outlets. *Smoke Signals* competed amongst publications with a circulation between 5,000 and 10,000 copies.

The awards will be handed out during NAJA’s annual convention being held Saturday, Sept. 9, in Anaheim, Calif.

In July, *Smoke Signals* also received three awards from the Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association, including a first place in the Target Audience category. ■

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When: Wednesday's
Sept. 6 through Oct. 11
TIME: 10 a.m. -12 p.m. (lunch & childcare provided)

WHERE: The Community Center
9615 Grand Ronde Rd. Grand Ronde, OR

Registration Deadline: Sept. 1, 2017
RSVP: Aliea Finney 503-879-2041 or aliea.finney@grandronde.org
Facilitators: Aliea Finney & Carmen Mercier

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