

—Slug:.....COMM-0844.wc.civic_journo_awrds
—Contributor.....
—Contributor email.....
—For section.....Town and Village
—Format.....News - no byline
—Dateline.....
—Article Number:.....42705

[REDACTED]

Notes from editor (not for publication):

[REDACTED]

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

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1 Vermont Independent Media, 15 other news outlets
2 share \$100,000 through inaugural Local Civic Journalism Awards

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5 TEXT BODY:

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6 Sixteen Vermont news organizations have been honored
7 with the Local Civic Journalism Awards, a new program designed
8 to steer state and philanthropic dollars to news outlets that inform
9 Vermonters and foster civic engagement.

10 The recipients represent a broad cross-section of local
11 and regional news organizations — including both newspapers
that have served their communities for well over a century and

12 digital-only enterprises that have sprung up in recent years to fill
13 a void. They include nonprofit and for-profit entities and are
14 mostly locally controlled.

15 Each Local Civic Journalism Award-winner will receive
16 \$5,000 or \$10,000 to further their existing mission. Vermont
17 Secretary of State Sarah Copeland Hanzas, whose office
18 administers the awards, noted that a robust press corps is vital to
19 civic engagement.

20 "For Vermonters to be able to work together to shape and
21 improve their communities, it's essential to have access to
22 trustworthy, transparent local news outlets," Copeland Hanzas
23 said in a news release. "An investment in Vermont's local and
24 regional news is an investment in an informed, connected, and
25 engaged citizenry."

26 The awards were envisioned by state Sen. Andrew
27 Perchlik, who secured \$50,000 in funding for the program in the
28 state's fiscal year 2026 budget. The Vermont Community
29 Foundation, through its Press Forward Vermont chapter, then
30 matched the state funding with another \$50,000.

31 "The growing attention paid to the critical value of local,
32 fact-based journalism gives me hope for our democracy," Perchlik
33 said.

34 "These awards recognize the incredible dedication and
35 innovation found in our local newsrooms," said Holly
36 Morehouse, vice president for community impact at the Vermont
37 Community Foundation. "Local news is a public good that keeps
38 our communities connected. Vibrant communities and robust
39 local news go hand in hand."

40 The inaugural awards drew significant interest from
41 around the state. More than 30 different news outlets were
42 nominated, some by multiple people.

43 To ensure the selection process remained free of political
44 interference, the statute authorizing the Local Civic Journalism
45 Awards called for an independent panel to make all funding
46 decisions. That panel, convened by the University of Vermont's

47 Center for Community News, included current and former
48 journalists, as well as academics — none of whom are employed
49 by award nominees.

50 The panelists opted to award \$10,000 to four news
51 organizations that have particularly distinguished themselves in
52 recent years by reimagining the way they foster civic engagement
53 in their respective communities and sustain themselves for the
54 future. They include Brattleboro-based Vermont Independent
55 Media, publishers of *The Commons* and the *Deerfield Valley*
56 *News*; *The Bridge* in Montpelier, the Waterbury Roundabout, and
57 the *White River Valley Herald* in Randolph.

58 The panel also chose to award \$5,000 to a dozen news
59 organizations that provide essential coverage to their
60 communities. They include the *Addison County Independent*,
61 *Middlebury*; the *Barton Chronicle*; the *Caledonian-Record* in St.
62 *Johnsbury*, the *Chester Telegraph*; the *Hardwick Gazette*; the
63 *Hinesburg Record* (now the *Weekly Record*); the *Journal-Opinion*
64 in *Bradford*; the *North Star Monthly* in *Danville*; the *Valley News*
65 in *West Lebanon, New Hampshire*; the *Valley Reporter* in
66 *Waitsfield*; the *Stowe-based Vermont Community Newspaper*
67 *Group*; and the *Radio Vermont Group (WDEV)* of *Waterbury*.

68 In making its selections, the panel considered how
69 nominees served their audiences; contributed to civic
70 engagement; produced reliable, fact-checked journalism;
71 adhered to ethical standards; and presented a vision for a
72 sustainable future. The panel chose not to select any statewide
73 news organizations this year, opting instead to support local and
74 regional outlets.

75 Paul Heintz, a senior adviser to the Center for
76 Community News, convened the selection panel.

77 “The quality and quantity of nominations we received
78 reinforced to me how much excellent community journalism is
79 taking place throughout Vermont,” Heintz said. “But many of
80 these nominees are struggling to stay afloat in an ever-changing
81 news environment. I hope these awards inspire other Vermonters

82 to subscribe to, advertise in and donate to the essential news
83 outlets that keep us all informed."
84 Award recipients will be honored at the Statehouse this
85 winter.

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