

## **News Awards – winners announced**

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**Wednesday, November 16, 2005.**

*The Courier-Mail*'s associate editor, Hedley Thomas, last night took out the major prize of the inaugural News Awards, the Sir Keith Murdoch Award for Journalism, for his reporting of Queensland's Dr Death scandal involving rogue surgeon Jayant Patel.

*The Australian* was named Newspaper of the Year, the Young Journalist of the Year award went to the *Herald Sun*'s Liam Houlihan and Photographer of the Year was David Caird, also of the *Herald Sun*.

They were among the 13 winners of the News Awards announced at a black-tie dinner in Adelaide last night (Tuesday) attended by the Premier of South Australia, Mr Mike Rann, News Corporation chairman and chief executive, Mr Rupert Murdoch, Dame Elisabeth Murdoch, and a number of News Corporation directors and senior managers.

News Limited chairman and chief executive, Mr John Hartigan, News Limited editors, finalists and partners were among the 250 guests at the event held at Keith Murdoch House, the new home of Advertiser Newspapers.

Mr Hartigan congratulated the winners and all finalists.

"The quality of the finalists reflected the tough competition among all our newspapers, magazines and websites with entries from cadets and our most senior writers and reporters. To win from a field of the best in the country represents the peak of editorial excellence and demonstrates why our newspapers continue to be the best-read and most relevant," said Mr Hartigan.

The awards are supported by prize money of \$65,000 with the winner of the Sir Keith Murdoch Award winning \$15,000 and other category winners receiving \$5000 each. The Young Journalist of the Year will be seconded to one of our newspapers in either London or New York.

Artist of the Year was *The Daily Telegraph*'s Eric Lobbeke; Jos Valdman, also of *The Daily Telegraph*, was named Designer of the Year and *The Daily Telegraph*'s online team of Claire Gould, Jenny Dillon, Drew Gibson and Stephen Birch, jointly took the award for Online Journalist of the Year.

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The award for Editorial Innovation of the Year went to Michael Carroll, editor of the *Townsville Bulletin*, and a special commendation for editorial innovation was awarded to Bob Gordon, editor of *The Gold Coast Bulletin*, and the newspaper's staff.

Marshall Hall, also of *The Gold Coast Bulletin*, won Business Journalist of the Year.

The *Herald Sun*'s Mike Sheahan was named Sports Journalist of the Year.

*The Australian*'s Matt Price took Specialist Writer of the Year while Ian Gunn, also of *The Australian*, was named Sub-Editor of the Year and Mike Safe, of *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, was named Features Journalist of the Year.

The judges said Hedley Thomas's work in exposing Dr Patel and other serious defects in Queensland's health system was outstanding. It began with a Google search that discovered what Queensland Health had not – that the surgeon had been struck off in the US for gross misconduct before moving to Australia.

It led to a royal commission, the sacking of state health minister Gordon Nuttall and the uncovering of other medical imposters, including a convicted Russian child molester with no medical experience working as a psychiatrist at a Townsville Hospital.

"It began with what was almost instinctive questioning by Hedley who then kept *The Courier-Mail* at the forefront of the reporting through his contacts and hard work. His work shows what great journalism is all about," said Mr Hartigan.

"Hedley Thomas is a young man who is already one of the outstanding journalists of his generation. This award is the latest of many that Hedley is amassing and I am sure it will not be his last," Mr Hartigan said.

The Newspaper of the Year was decided between *The Cairns Post*, the *Herald Sun*, *The Australian* and *The Courier-Mail*. The award was for the most improved newspaper of the past year.

The judges said that for *The Australian*, life began at 40 and the newspaper was hitting its peak in the prime of its life.

"*The Australian* stood out because over the past year, it has recommitted to the traditional values of newspapers in its news breaking, layout and design. It has stamped its authority as the nation's best broadsheet and been rewarded with record weekday circulation," said Mr Hartigan.

"*The Australian* is a bold and intelligent alternative to its broadsheet and broadcast competitors, a newspaper now regarded as leading the coverage of major domestic and international affairs with a reputation for outstanding analysis and insight," he said.

"*The Australian* regularly sets the national agenda on important public policy debates, has become the leading voice for tax reform, revealed the bottleneck at Australian ports and has led the reporting of terror on Australia's doorstep," said Mr Hartigan.

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The News Awards were open to all editorial staff – journalists, photographers, artists and designers – on all of our newspapers, magazines and news websites in Australia and the South Pacific.

The full list of winners:

## **Young Journalist of the Year**

Liam Houlihan, *Herald Sun*, who spent three days living on the streets of Melbourne to investigate the issue of begging, in the course of which he was charged by police under the Vagrancy Act. He also made the link between a name on the guest list for the Danish royal wedding and a man charged with serial rapes, breaking the story of the court case involving Princess Mary's cousin.

## **Artist of the Year**

Eric Lobbecke, *The Daily Telegraph*, for a wide portfolio from a boiler-suited Peter Costello clocking on for the front page of *The Daily Telegraph's* budget special to the fossilised skeleton of a Sea King helicopter.

## **Designer of the Year**

Jos Valdman, *The Daily Telegraph*, who retouched a photograph of Sydney Harbour to create an amazing image of what might happen if a tsunami were to hit Sydney. His work was reproduced in newspapers all over Australia.

**Online Journalist of the Year** *The Daily Telegraph's* online team of Claire Gould, Jenny Dillon, Drew Gibson and Stephen Birch, who used the newspaper's site to launch the only Tsunami Information Exchange in Australia to collate information from readers and official sources on the missing and the dead, and broke the story of the resignation of Bob Carr more than an hour before his announcement.

## **Editorial Innovation of the Year**

Michael Carroll, editor of *Townsville Bulletin*, for TXT the Editor, an initiative that has made text messaging the primary form of contact between his paper and its community.

The judges of this category awarded a special commendation to Bob Gordon, editor of the *Gold Coast Bulletin*, and his staff. The newspaper was the first to capitalise on the potential of mobile phone texting to deliver instant feedback from readers and to connect with them on the issues they most cared about. When a Gold Coast woman was voted off Australian Idol, The Bulletin asked its readers what they thought. One day and 820 text messages later, no one was in any doubt that SMS was a powerful barometer of community feeling, particularly among younger readers.

## **Sub-Editor of the Year**

Ian Gunn, *The Australian*, who headlined the story of the farcical attempts by two Greek athletes to avoid a drugs test before finally withdrawing from the Olympics with "Greek heroes exit stage, wearing scandals".

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## **Sports Journalist of the Year**

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Mike Sheahan, *Herald Sun*, whose annual review of the AFL's top players took two months of research and helped maintain the paper's reputation for outstanding coverage of the game. He also revealed the rift between AFL officials and the Sydney Swans that threatened to compromise the growth of the game.

## **Business Journalist of the Year**

Marshall Hall, *The Gold Coast Bulletin*, who has extended the newspaper's coverage of business and finance, consistently pushing it on to Page 1 and into other sections of the newspaper. His reports on the search for a local couple missing in a plane crash underlined the wide-ranging impact of personal tragedy on communities and businesses.

## **Photographer of the Year**

David Caird, *Herald Sun*, who set up the memorable photo of treasurer Peter Costello under a pile of newborn babies to illustrate Victoria's baby boom. He also shot Miss Universe Jennifer Hawkins stumbling down a flight of steps near the Yarra, just days after her G-string incident at a fashion show.

## **Specialist Writer of the Year**

Matt Price, *The Australian*, for his The Sketch column, written from his Canberra base, which is an often whimsical, occasionally serious, look at politics which nevertheless still manages to break stories. When Matt questioned the WA Opposition Leader about a \$200 million hole he'd spotted in the Liberals' election costings, The Sketch was able to chronicle the politician's excruciating reaction in front of rolling television cameras as he saw his party's election hopes fade.

## **Features Journalist of the Year**

Mike Safe, *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, for a range of work that included a feature on the trauma felt by the families of hit-and-run victims, and "Analysis of a Murder", the reconstruction of the execution-style killing of a psychiatrist.

## **Newspaper of the Year**

*The Australian*, which the judges said was a newspaper hitting peak form in the prime of its life that vigorously prosecutes its role as the nation's newspaper. It looked at the attempted populism of its confused broadsheet competitors and left them in its wake to establish itself as the prime source of national newsbreaking, analysis and comment delivered with dignity, wit and credibility.

## **Sir Keith Murdoch Award for Journalism**

Hedley Thomas *The Courier-Mail*, who led the reporting of Queensland's Dr Death, the rogue surgeon, Jayant Patel, and revealed the authorities had hired him without knowing he had been struck off the medical register in the US for gross negligence.

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