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JOURNALISTS FROM *HOUSTON CHRONICLE* AND TEXAS STANDARD WIN HIGHEST HONORS IN HEADLINERS FOUNDATION'S ANNUAL SHOWCASE AWARD CONTEST

AUSTIN, TX (June 1, 2022) — Alex Stuckey of the *Houston Chronicle* and the staff of Texas Standard have won Gold prizes in the 2021 Showcase Awards for Enterprise and Innovation contest from the [Headliners Foundation of Texas](https://www.headlinersfoundation.org).

Stuckey won in the Investigative category for "In Crisis," a series that revealed how the mentally ill languish for years in jail waiting for help from Texas' mental health system; how deaths are rarely investigated by the federal government; and how families receive no answers. After the stories were published, Texas lawmakers filed multiple bills to fix the system and allocated \$400 million to new psychiatric beds.

Reporters from Texas Standard won the Gold award in the Foundation's new Storytelling category for "The Long Haul: Texas And The Pandemic," a special show that marked one year of the coronavirus pandemic. "The Long Haul" is a poignant look at the cost of COVID-19 and a rich example of multimedia storytelling. The memories of family members were stark reminders of the lives lost.

Four Showcase entries won Silver awards, two in the Investigative category and two in Storytelling.

Silver Awards - Investigative

- David Barer, Jody Barr, Ben Friberg, Josh Hinkle and Rachel Gale from KXAN-TV in Austin for "Racial Profiling: A Failure to Report." KXAN's investigative team found that more than 250 Texas law enforcement agencies were not following the law in reporting racial profiling data on their traffic stops as required by a state law on the books for 20 years. According to KXAN, the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) failed to mandate and collect the information and did not use its enforcement authority when police agencies failed to report. After the KXAN finding, TCOLE took action to get full compliance from Texas' 2,700 law enforcement agencies. In addition to the multi-part, multi-platform series, KXAN created a special landing page for its continuing coverage of the issue.
- Emilie Eaton, Melissa Fletcher Stoeltje, Angela Alcalá-Bach, Ryan Serpico and Monte Bach of the San Antonio Express-News for "Nowhere to Hide," an exhaustive and chilling examination of domestic violence. This multifaceted report looked at a complex topic from all of the relevant vantage points and never stripped survivors of their humanity and agency.

Silver Awards - Storytelling

- Columnist Sharon Grigsby and photojournalists Lynda M. Gonzalez and Juan Figueroa of *The Dallas*

Morning News for "Parkland's long COVID struggle," a series highlighting the experiences of Parkland Memorial Hospital health care workers and patients. These intimate portraits of the people and places at the epicenter of the pandemic focused on one Texas hospital but brought to life what so many Texans endured and will stand as an important historical account of these unprecedented times in our state.

- Reporters Lauren Caruba, Lisa Krantz and Monte Bach of the *San Antonio Express-News* for "John's New Lungs," the story of a 34-year-old father's journey from San Antonio to a Florida hospital to become one of the first coronavirus patients in the country to undergo a double lung transplant. John Vargas Jr.'s odyssey reads like a medical mystery: Will his oxygen supply last during the flight from Texas to Florida? Can he overcome depression and anxiety to prepare physically and emotionally for the operation? What will his life be like if he survives the eight-hour procedure? Lauren Caruba impressed the judges with detailed reporting, extensive sourcing, and the ability to gain not only John's trust, but also access to his family and physicians to craft a story that stands out among the many compelling tales from the pandemic. One particularly nice touch: The program coordinator who surprises John by playing his favorite song, Metallica's "Enter Sandman," as the patient is prepped for surgery.

Certificates of Merit were awarded to journalists in the Investigative category as follows:

- John Tedesco, Mike Morris, and Stephanie Lamm from the *Houston Chronicle* for "Unfair Burden," a yearlong *Chronicle* investigation that revealed how big companies and churches used the state's tax system to reap billions in tax breaks while shifting the burden to average homeowners. Because of the investigation, which used multimedia to enliven complicated issues, many appraisal districts announced they would make changes to their processes.
- Nichole Manna from the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* for "Killed in crisis: How North Texas cities have failed people in mental distress." After reviewing thousands of pages of police reports spanning several years and viewing more than three hours of police body camera video, Manna noted that mental illness was a factor in one-third of the 150 police killings reviewed. The piece stands out for its solutions-journalism approach, including reporting on cities that had reduced such deaths.
- Arezow Doost, Andrew Choat, Josh Hinkle and Rachel Gale from KXAN-TV, the Austin NBC affiliate, for their series "Missing in Texas," which put a spotlight on the state's failure to participate in a national database that uses DNA and dental records to solve missing and unidentified persons cases. The coverage helped spark action as Texas passed a law effective September 2021 requiring the use of the national database.
- Josh Hinkle, David Barer, Ben Friberg, Eric Henrikson, and Robert Sims from KXAN-TV for "Mental Competency Consequences: The Hidden and Unreliable Data Texas Tracks...or Doesn't." The project, made possible through a partnership with the USC Annenberg Center for Health Journalism, exposed that state data on people found mentally incompetent to stand trial and waiting in Texas jails for restoration treatment was often missing key information including cases of people who die waiting. As a result of the coverage, a committee of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission will begin tracking race and ethnicity of individuals on the waitlist and will consider how to track people experiencing homelessness who end up on the waitlist, steps that could reduce the number of waitlisted individuals.

Certificates of Merit were awarded to journalists in the Storytelling category as follows:

- *El Paso Times* reporter Lauren Villagran and photojournalist Omar Ornales for "Never Did I Face a Struggle Like That," the tale of one Haitian migrant's escape from the Del Rio border crisis. Villagran, along with spectacular visuals from Ornales, used the story of John Lafontant to illustrate the larger

crisis. Villagran’s storytelling gave context for why Lafontant would take the risks he took, and the visuals provided vivid description of what he found trying to come to what he called “the greatest country in the world.”

- Brian Chasnoff, Daniel Simmons-Ritchie, William Luther, Kin Man Hui and Jerry Lara of the *San Antonio Express-News* for "Digging Up the Hill Country," which explored the environmental and human toll of rampant development and explained that state regulators rarely impose penalties for pollution violations. Team members employed innovative storytelling techniques including an interactive feature using Google Earth and descriptions gleaned from reporting by canoe along the Colorado River.
- Mose Buchele, Matt Largey, Claire McInerney, Jimmy Maas, and Andrew Weber of KUT Radio in Austin for “The Disconnect: Power, Politics and the Texas Blackout.” With compelling narrative and exhaustive reporting, KUT told the complicated story of the failure of the Texas power grid that caused tragic blackouts during the record cold of February 2021. The conclusion: Power and politics mixed in a deadly way.
- Sandra Sanchez of the Border Report/Nexstar Media Group for "Life after 'Remain in Mexico.' " The digital and television piece, compiled over the course of two years, tells the story of a Honduran migrant family making its way through the U.S. immigration process, starting at a camp in northern Mexico and then on to Houston.
- Tanya Eiserer, Jason Trahan, and Chris Paxton of WFAA-TV in Dallas for “7/7: The Heroes' Perspective.” Based on open-record requests that had been previously denied, WFAA-TV recreated the evening of July 7, 2016, when five Dallas police officers were gunned down during a social justice protest. The exceptional reporting combined with innovative multimedia produced lucid yet compelling storytelling from the perspective of the officers involved..

The Showcase Awards are the only statewide competition for Texas-based news media that judges entries across all platforms – digital, broadcast, magazine, and newspaper. Interviews with several of this year’s winners will be posted in the coming months on the Foundation’s website.

Fred Zipp, vice chair of the Foundation and chair of the Professional Excellence Committee that oversees the awards process, was impressed by the diversity and creativity of work being produced by Texas journalists. “The addition of the Storytelling category allows the Foundation to recognize outstanding work that not only impacts our society as a whole, but also honors the struggles and triumphs of everyday Texans,” Zipp said.

“The Foundation is proud to provide a platform where Texas journalists can be recognized for their exceptional work,” said Patti Ohlendorf, chair of the Foundation’s Board of Governors. “I continue to be impressed by the scope of work being produced by journalists across the state.”

Since 2013, the Showcase Awards have honored the best journalists in Texas, annually awarding \$2,000 for the Gold prize and \$1,000 to journalists winning a Silver. This year, a nine-member committee judged entries from media outlets throughout the state, some of which are posted on the Foundation’s website at <https://www.headlinersfoundation.org/showcase-awards-2021>.

Winners of the 2021 Showcase Awards will be honored at the Foundation’s Mike Quinn awards luncheon on Oct. 29 at the Headliners Club in Austin.

The Headliners Foundation of Texas’ mission is to promote excellence in journalism by providing scholarships to student journalists; recognizing and rewarding outstanding work by professional journalists; and supporting special projects that promote journalistic excellence and preserve history.