

MPA PHOTO OF THE YEAR ★ 2023



"THE DROUGHT IS OVER"
BY JESSE JOHNSON/THE PINE BELT NEWS

MISSISSIPPI
PRESS

★ 2024
**BETTER
NEWSPAPER
& MEDIA
CONTEST**

Criteria and Entry Packet
Deadline for Entries Thursday, Feb. 6, 2025

OUR ASSOCIATION CODE IS **MSPRESS**

Step 1 – Register on the contest website using your email address. Read the Important Items; our Association Code is **MSPRESS**. You will receive a confirmation email, which you will need to complete registration. YOU MUST register as a user for each contest, even if you have uploaded entries in a previous cycle of the advertising or editorial divisions.

Step 2 – Log in using your account information. You will see a page showing any entries you have already submitted. Complete rules for the contest are available on the home page. **PLEASE READ THEM FOR MORE DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS.** Some browsers, such as Safari, will open the rules in a new window; others will require you to download the PDF file to your computer.

Step 3 – Click on the “Add New Entry” link.

Step 4 – On this page, select your organization’s name. A lot of information will autofill. If that information is incorrect, please call Monica Gilmer at 601-981-3060 ext. 2. Your Competition Class will be selected for you based on your frequency (or average pageviews for Digital Affiliates) and market population. Fill in the preparer’s name. **If any information is wrong, please STOP and do not proceed before contacting Monica.**

Step 5 – Select the contest type. These are in the drop-down menus for your convenience. Your choices are “Editorial,” “Advertising,” or “Combined,” depending on which contest cycle we are in. This field will clear each time you save an entry, so you must select a type for each new entry. Next select your category. Special Instructions will autofill. PLEASE READ as each category has different instructions. **NOTE: If you do not see the category you are trying to enter listed under the contest cycle type “Editorial” or “Advertising” select “COMBINED.”** This indicates competition classes are combined for this category.

Step 6 – If necessary, provide an explanation of your entry. The explanation/cutline box is limited to 3,000 characters. It’s a good idea to write your explanation in another program, such as Word or TextEdit, and copy/paste into the explanation box. If a URL is required, fill in the URL box; there is no need to type “http://.”

Step 7 – Include the name of the entry. If uploading full-page PDF files, it will be helpful if the entry name matches the headline on the page so the judges can find it easily. If the judges cannot tell what is to be judged, the entry will be discarded without refund.

Step 8 – Include the name of the person or people who should be credited for any award. This is generally a reporter, photographer, etc. It is not necessarily the name of the person submitting the entry, nor the person picking up the award at the awards presentation.

Step 9 – Add your file or files. You can drag and drop files or use the “Add files” button to navigate. Generally, files should be in PDF format except photos, which should be in high-resolution JPG format. Other files and URLs may be acceptable as noted in the special instructions. Upload as many files as are necessary to complete your entry but refer to the special instructions for any limitations.

Step 10 – When you have completed your submission, click the “Save” button. If you click the “Back to list” button, you will lose the entry you just completed. After clicking “Save,” you will be directed back to the list of your entries.

Step 11 – To submit another entry, click “Add New Entry.” As long as you have not logged out of the system, your newspaper name will still be in place and you can simply start at Step 6 again. You may log out and log back in later to continue adding entries. You will need to select your newspaper name each time you log in.

Step 12 – If you are done submitting entries, please review the list. Your changes are limited on an entry; if needed, you may delete and resubmit. When you have finished reviewing uploads click the “Billing” button. Your entry fee is automatically generated. You may pay by PayPal, credit card or mail a check to Mississippi Press, 371 Edgewood Terrace, Jackson, MS 39206.

ENTER ONLINE @ MSPRESSCONTEST.ORG

ELIGIBILITY

The MPA Better Newspaper Media Contest is open to any weekly or multi-day newspaper or Digital Affiliate publication that is an active member of the Mississippi Press Association and whose 2025 dues have been paid.

Entries submitted in the contest must have been published in the period between January 1, 2024, and December 31, 2024. Random dates specified in some categories are selected by the association staff and not made known to the contest committee or association members until the rules are released.

Generally, individual stories, photographs or special sections may not be entered in more than one category or competition class. See individual category criteria for exceptions.

All entries must be conceived, written, photographed and/or designed by regularly employed, full-or-part-time staff members of the newsroom entering the contest. This means staff members who regularly work for the entering newspaper or Digital Affiliate. Exceptions include non-syndicated columnists or freelance contributors who provide exclusive content.

An individual's work may not be entered in more than one competition class unless there is a change of employment during the contest period. **Members sharing staff members may submit an entry only once and in the largest competition class in which it is eligible.**

No materials may be entered which are prepared completely by mat services, agencies, wire services, or syndicates. Entries must originate from the entering newsroom.

DEADLINE

Deadline for receipt of entries is 11:59 PM, **THURSDAY, FEB. 6, 2025.** All entries must be entered online at www.mspresscontest.org by this date.

FEES

The fee for each individual entry in each category is \$8. If paying by mail, make checks payable to Mississippi Press. Credit card payments (Visa, MC, AMEX) are accepted. **LATE FEES:** Submissions after the deadline of Thursday, Feb. 6, can still be entered for a LATE FEE of \$65 if received (and/or postmarked) by Monday, Feb. 17, 2025.

COMPETITION CLASSES

The competition class in which your newsroom competes is determined by a combination of the population size of the city in which your organization is located combined with the frequency of your publication in print on a weekly basis. For Digital Affiliate Members, average unique monthly pageviews are considered in lieu of print frequency where appropriate.

CLASS DIVISION

- A. Multi-Day above 30,000 population
- B. Multi-Day below 30,000 population
- C. Weekly above 5,000 population
- D. Weekly below 5,000 population

Population counts are determined by the most recent data available from the U.S. Census Bureau.

ENTRY PREP

Full-page electronic tearsheets or URLs must be furnished for each entry. **Entries should be marked in BOLD or highlighted on each PDF.** (For URLs, please make certain to provide necessary credentials if entries are behind a paywall.) Please assign each PDF a name that corresponds to the category in which it is being entered.

Go to www.mspresscontest.org and follow the instructions for registering with a username and password and for submitting your entries online. **YOU MUST** register as a user for each contest, even if you have uploaded entries in a previous cycle of the advertising or editorial divisions.

A publisher's or general manager's Statement of Validity must accompany the contest entries from each newsroom entering. A tearsheet or copy of the 2024 Statement of Ownership and Circulation should be provided if not already on file with MPA (This does not have to be a tearsheet, a copy of the 2024 form will do). Entries will not be placed into judging until all Statements of Validity are received. The conditions of the statement are binding. You can mail or email your Statement of Validity and Statement of Ownership to mgilmer@mspress.org.

Incomplete entries (entries missing a required element), or entries submitted that were published outside the contest dates will be disqualified.

JUDGING

Contestants agree to accept the judges' decisions as final. Judging will be held this spring with a panel of volunteers from the Oklahoma Press Association. Judges reserve the right to disqualify entries submitted in an inappropriate category or which otherwise do not follow the stated criteria.

AWARDS PRESENTATION

Plaques will be presented to first-place winners. Certificates will be awarded to second, third, and honorable mention winners. Additional plaques or certificates may be ordered after the presentation of the awards at the Tri-State Press Association at the Hilton Memphis, June 28, 2025. First, second, and third-place winners will be named in each category. One honorable mention per category is allowed at the judges' discretion.

QUESTIONS?

Contact

Monica Gilmer

Member Services Director

mgilmer@mspress.org

601-981-3060 ext. 2



Trusted Local Journalism

STATEMENT OF VALIDITY

I hereby certify that all entries submitted by this organization in the 2024 Better Newspaper Media Contest meet the prescribed requirements and qualifications as related to frequency and, when required, online pageviews, membership, publication dates, and all other aspects spelled out and implied by the rules of the competition.

I understand that any violation brought to the attention of the Board of Directors of Mississippi Press may restrict this newsroom from entering the future Editorial and Advertising Divisions of the Better Newspaper & Media Contest, and that violations may make the member organization subject to other action by the Board.

Signature of Publisher/GM: _____

Newspaper or Digital Affiliate: _____

Avg. Monthly Pageviews Dec. 2024 (req. for Digital Affiliates): _____

Date: _____

Please list any staff members willing to serve as reciprocal judges for upcoming contests:

Please email this form to mgilmer@mspress.org.

PLEASE NOTE

- * An individual entry may be entered in only one category, unless noted.
- * Only locally prepared material is allowed.
- * ENTRIES MUST BE UPLOADED NO LATER THAN 11:59 PM, THURSDAY, FEB. 6, 2025
- * Go to www.mspresscontest.org for complete entry directions.

1. GENERAL NEWS STORY

Defined as the coverage of a single news event, planned and anticipated. Judged on quality of writing, thoroughness of fact, and continuity of thought. Limit 4 entries per newsroom. **TO ENTER:** Upload a full-page PDF file, which should be named the same as the story title or reporter's name.

2. SPOT NEWS STORY

This category is defined as the coverage of a single news event, unplanned and unanticipated. The entry may include sidebars in the same edition as the spot news story. Entries will be judged on quality of writing and thoroughness of fact reporting under deadline. Limit 4 entries per newsroom. **TO ENTER:** Upload a full-page PDF file, which should be named the same as the story title or reporter's name.

3. IN-DEPTH/INVESTIGATIVE COVERAGE

Entries in this category may be a single investigative story/series of stories or in-depth coverage of a particular issue or event. Stories must demonstrate the reporter's or reporters' initiative in research and investigation or in-depth reporting that may include supporting material such as photos, editorials, cartoons, columns. In-depth entries will be judged on the scope and depth of coverage. If a series, it must be published within the contest period. Entries will be judged on quality of writing, thoroughness of research and continuity. Limit 4 entries per newsroom. **TO ENTER:** Upload a full-page PDF file, which should be named the same as the story title or reporter's name. An explanatory note may be provided in the comment box or uploaded with entries.

4. PLANNED SERIES

Defined as a planned series or package of stories (minimum of 3, maximum of 8) on the same subject which combines the elements of news and/or feature writing. The series can be published in a single issue or a sequence of issues. Publication of the series must begin and end within the contest period. Judged on quality of writing, ability to hold reader interest, and thoroughness. Limit 4 entries per newsroom. **TO ENTER:** Upload a full-page PDF file, which should be named the same as the story title or reporter's name.

5. BUSINESS STORY

This category is defined as coverage of business and economic issues. An entry consists of a single story of a business news-related event or issue. May include sidebars. Limit 4 entries per newsroom. **TO ENTER:** Upload a full-page PDF file, which should be named the same as the story title or reporter's name.

6. SPORTS NEWS STORY

Confined to news stories dealing with a sports subject or personality. Entries will be judged on quality of writing. Limit 4 entries per newsroom. **TO ENTER:** Upload a full-page PDF file, which should be named the same as the story title or reporter's name.

7. SPORTS COLUMN

Defined as any column that regularly appears in the sports section of the newspaper. An entry consists of three columns by the same person. Judged on both the quality and style of writing. Entries will be judged as All Multi-Day and All Weekly. Limit 4 entries per newsroom. **TO ENTER:** Upload full-page PDF files, which should be named the same as the column title or columnist's name.

8. SPORTS FEATURE

Defined as any feature story dealing with a sports subject or sports personality. Entries will be judged on quality of writing and attention to the elements of feature writing. Limit 4 entries per newsroom. **TO ENTER:** Upload a full-page PDF file, which should be named the same as the story title or reporter's name.

9. GAME STORY

Defined as a principal account of a game or sports event, written on a deadline. Sidebars are not included. Judged on quality of and style of writing. Limit of 4 entries per newsroom. **TO ENTER:** Upload a full-page PDF file, which should be named the same as the story title or reporter's name.

10. GENERAL INTEREST COLUMN

Any general interest bylined column which appears as a regular feature of the newspaper. An entry consists of three columns by the same person. Entries will be judged on quality of writing and style of writing. Limit 4 entries per newsroom. **TO ENTER:** Upload full-page PDF files, which should be named the same as the column title or columnist's name.

11. COMMENTARY COLUMN

Includes any bylined, serious, issue-oriented commentary column appearing as a regular feature of the newspaper. An entry consists of three columns by the same person. Judged on quality and style of writing, timeliness of issue, persuasiveness of writer. Limit 4 entries per newsroom. **TO ENTER:** Upload full-page PDF files, which should be named the same as the column title or columnists's name.

12. FEATURE STORY

Defined as a single story in which the writer concentrates on the elements of feature writing. Judged on quality of writing and ability of the author to hold the reader's interest. Limit 4 entries per newsroom. **TO ENTER:** Upload a full-page PDF file, which should be named the same as the story title or reporter's name.

13. GENERAL NEWS PHOTOGRAPH

Includes photographs of general news value which are planned and anticipated. Judged on quality of photograph, composition, emotional impact and completeness. Limit 4 entries per photographer and total of 8 entries per newsroom. **TO ENTER:** Upload a full-page PDF file, which should be named the same as the photo caption.

14. SPOT NEWS PHOTOGRAPH

Defined as any photograph of news value that is unplanned or unanticipated. Judged on timing, quality of photograph, composition, emotional impact and completeness. Limit 4 entries per photographer and total of 8 entries per newsroom. **TO ENTER:** Upload a full-page PDF file, which should be named the same as the photo caption.

15. SPORTS FEATURE PHOTOGRAPH

Defined as any photograph related to a sports subject, but not an action shot. Judged on quality of photograph, composition, and emotional impact. Limit 4 entries per photographer and total of 8 entries per newsroom. **TO ENTER:** Upload a full-page PDF file, which should be named the same as the photo caption.

16. SPORTS ACTION PHOTOGRAPH

Defined as any photo related to sports action on-field, court, etc. during gameplay or competition. Judged on quality of photo, composition and impact. Limit four entries per photographer and eight entries per newsroom. **TO ENTER:** Upload a full-page PDF file, which should be named the same as the photo caption.

17. FEATURE PHOTOGRAPH

Includes any photograph that demonstrates elements of feature photography. Judged on quality of photograph, composition, and emotional impact. Limit 4 entries per photographer and total of 8 entries per newsroom. **TO ENTER:** Upload a full-page PDF file, which should be named the same as the photo caption.

18. PHOTO SERIES

Defined as any series of photographs in any one issue on any subject. Judged on quality and effectiveness of the photographs and text in telling a story. Limit 4 entries per photographer and total of 8 entries per newsroom. **TO ENTER:** Upload a full-page PDF file, which should be named the same as the series headline or caption.

19. NEWS PACKAGE

Defined as best presentation of a news story with accompanying photos, graphics and illustrations to complement reporting. This may be entered as the combined work of reporters, photographers and/or designers. Limit four entries per newsroom. **TO ENTER:** Upload a full-page PDF file, which should be named the same as the series headline or caption.

20. PERSONALITY PORTRAIT

Entries should be confined to photographs capturing the essence of an individual personality or one representing a portrait study. Judged on elements listed above and on quality of photograph. Limit 4 entries per photographer and total of 8 entries per newsroom. **TO ENTER:** Upload a full-page PDF file, which should be named the same as the photo caption.

21. FRONT PAGE

An entry shall consist of three tearsheets. Submit one tearsheet from the week of March 17-23, July 21-27, or November 3-9, PLUS two tearsheets from any other issues published in the contest period. Judged on front page design and content. Limit 1 entry per newspaper. **TO ENTER** upload three full page PDF files, which should be named as the category and month entered.

22. EDITORIAL PAGE

Submit three tearsheets of editorial page(s), defined as any page(s) containing articles of opinion including op-ed and/or letters to the editor. Submit one tearsheet from the week of Jan. 21-27, Aug. 7-13, or Dec. 1-7, PLUS two tearsheets from any other issues published in the contest period. Judged on content and design. Judged as All Multi-Day and All Weekly. Limit 1 entry per newspaper. **TO ENTER** upload three full page PDF files, which should be named as the category and month entered.

23. EDITORIALS

Consists of editorial opinions which appear on a bona fide editorial page or articles clearly marked as an editorial. Entries reflect the editorial position of the publication and/or its editorial board and not a single writer (such as in a personal column). Judged on ability to express opinions and quality of writing. Limit 3 entries per writer and 6 entries per newsroom. **TO ENTER** upload full page PDF files, which should be named the same as the editorial writer's name.

24. SPORTS PAGE OR SECTION

Defined as any page or section devoted to the coverage of sports. Submit one page or section from the week of March 24-30, June 16-22, or Oct. 20-26, PLUS two tearsheets from any other issues published in the contest period. Judged on content and design. Judged as All Multi-Day and All Weekly. Limit 1 entry per newspaper. **TO ENTER** upload three full page PDF files, which should be named as the category and month entered.

25. LIFESTYLES PAGE OR SECTION

This category is defined as a page or section devoted to lifestyle news and features. Submit one page or section from the week of either Feb. 11-17, July 14-20, or Nov. 10-16, PLUS two others from the contest period. This can also include regular sections such as food, fashion, entertainment, etc. Judged on design, writing, and general interest of contents. Judged as All Multi-Day and All Weekly. Limit 1 entry per newspaper. **TO ENTER** upload three full page PDF files, which should be named as the category and month entered.

26. SPECIAL SECTION

This category is defined as a section or issue which is dedicated editorially to a special event, occasion, purpose or idea. The quality of writing will be considered, along with the use of photographs and graphics. The overall design of the product will also be considered. Limit 4 entries per newspaper. **TO ENTER** upload a single PDF file of entire special edition, which should be named the same as title of the section.

27. MAGAZINE PERIODICAL

This category recognizes regularly issued magazines. Magazine should be distributed independently of the newspaper, but a publication is not excluded if it is also inserted into the parent newspaper. Judges will consider quality of editorial content and design and effectiveness of theme or purpose. Magazine must be published at least twice per year for weekly publications; at least quarterly for multi-day publications. An entry consists of two consecutive issues in contest period for weeklies; three consecutive issues in contest period for multi-day members. Limit 2 entries per member Judged as All Multi-Day and All Weekly. **TO ENTER** upload a single PDF file of entire magazine.

28. MAGAZINE STORY

This category is defined as the single best general news or feature article appearing in a magazine edition published by the member newspaper. Judged on quality of writing, thoroughness, and continuity. Limit four entries per newspaper. **TO ENTER** Upload a full-page PDF file, which should be named the same as the story title or reporter's name.

29. DESIGN

An entry consists of three issues. Submit any three consecutive issues of the newspaper, one of which should be from the week April 7-13, Sept. 29-Oct. 6, or Dec. 8-14. This category will be judged on the newspaper's overall appearance, with special attention to the use of headlines, photographs, art, and quality of reproduction. Limit 1 entry per newspaper. **TO ENTER** upload PDF files of three entire separate issues.

30. HEADLINE

Each entry will consist of a single headline, best capturing the essence of the story in a compelling, accurate, clever and/or humorous way. Limit 4 entries per newsroom. **TO ENTER** upload full page PDF files, which should be named the same as the headline.

31. LEDE

An entry consists of a single story lede written by the reporter or copy editor. Entries will be judged on quality of writing, effectiveness, and/or humor and cleverness. Limit 4 entries per newsroom. **TO ENTER** upload full page PDF files, which should be named the same as the headline.

32. WEBSITE

Recognizes a news organization's online presence and the involvement of its local staff in the updating of content and maintenance. Judged as All Multi-Day and All Weekly. Members using third party vendors to host and design their sites are eligible as long as their staff is primarily responsible for content and maintenance. Judges will visit the site live at predetermined times. Criteria will include quality of locally produced content, overall design, consistency of updates and functionality of the site such as ease of navigation and customer service interactivity. **TO ENTER** Submit a link (URL) to your website online. Please include user name and password, if necessary, in the comment box on the online entry. Use the comment box to offer any additional information about your website.

33. USE OF ONLINE VIDEO

This category recognizes the newsroom's effort to report a story through video. Emphasis will be on the viewer experience and quality of the story. May stand on its own (as in breaking news coverage) or part of a larger project that is tied to the print newspaper. The entry should include a short description of the video and news event and may include a PDF tearsheet or URL of a story that accompanied it (if there was one). Entries should be submitted as a URL and will be judged as All Members. Limit four entries per newspaper. **TO ENTER** Submit a link (URL) to your website online. Please include user name and password, if necessary, in the comment box on the online entry. You may upload a related PDF tearsheet, if applicable. Use the comment box to offer any additional information about your website.

34. USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

This category recognizes the organization's use of social media to complement or promote its editorial coverage, including breaking news. Use of all major social media platforms is permissible and screen shots or PDFs of their use is encouraged; a letter of explanation must be included. Entries will be judged on effectiveness of promoting content/coverage. Entries will be judged as All Multi-Day and All Weekly. Limit four entries per newsroom.

TO ENTER Submit a link (URL) to social media post or upload a screenshot. Use the comment box to offer any additional information about your entry.

35. DANIEL M. PHILLIPS FOI AWARD

Winner in this category should demonstrate an active commitment to Freedom of Information. Submit full-page tearsheets with FOI information (stories, editorials, advertisements, etc.). Documents, background information, or letters may be submitted to better explain the effort. Entries will be judged on the newsroom's efforts to support freedom of information through editorials, news stories, or actions taken by the newsroom to gain access to government records and/or meetings in order to provide readers with the facts they are entitled to. Entries will be judged as All Members for one overall award. Limit 1 entry per newsroom. **TO ENTER** upload full page PDF files or a URL. Use comment box for further explanation of the project if desired or upload a note in PDF form with entry.

36. COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

Entries in this category should demonstrate leadership by the newsroom in a project or promotion which has as its purpose the improvement of the quality of life in the community or state. Examples would be support of a bond issue, or construction of a new park or hospital. The entry should demonstrate that the newspaper provided either the primary development of the project or a role which would be considered essential to the effort. A note may be submitted regarding impact on the community. Judges should consider the relative impact on the readership area served, keeping in mind that newsrooms of all sizes are competing in this category. Entries will be judged as All Multi-Day or All Weekly. Limit 1 entry per newsroom. **TO ENTER** upload full page PDF files. Use comment box for further explanation of the project if desired or upload a note in PDF form with entry.

37. GENERAL EXCELLENCE

Submit uploads or URLs for three consecutive issues of the newspaper, one of which should be from the week of Feb. 25-March 2, May 19-25, or September 8-14. Judges will consider the overall product. Winners in this category should exemplify excellence in all aspects of news gathering, including mechanical excellence, editorial content, advertising, layout and general appearance. Limit 1 entry per newspaper.

ADDITIONAL NOTES ON GENERAL EXCELLENCE:

General Excellence prizes will be based on a point system, with the judge's points awarded for your General Excellence entries added to points you earn by winning awards in other categories. Each newspaper that wins a first, second or third place award in the other 36 numbered Better Newspaper Contest categories will receive points toward the General Excellence award. Points will be awarded as follows: individual and overall categories #1-34 = 3 for first, 2 for second and 1 for third; and FOI and Community Service awards, 10 for first, 5 for second and 3 for third. The judges will award points for issues in your General Excellence entry as follows: 30 for first choice, 20 for second choice and 10 for third choice. After the judging is completed, all points will be totaled to determine the top awards given in each competition class.