



NORTHERN ILLINOIS NEWSPAPER ASSOCIATION

NINA contest deadline looms

NINA's annual newspaper contest includes 28 categories in both daily and non-daily divisions. Entry deadline is **June 30**, with winners announced at NINA's Oct. 20 Fall Conference.

Full contest details at:
www.ninaonline.org

'DIGITAL INK' BLOG
www.ninaonline.org

Vol. 49, No. 2

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@NINAnewspapers

NINA rewards top student journalists

High-school seniors earn scholarships

Student journalists from Prospect, Evanston Township and Rolling Meadows high schools were honored by NINA in the 14th annual Northern Illinois High School Journalist of the Year Scholarship competition.

A total of \$2,050 in scholarships was awarded, including \$1,800 from NINA and \$250 from The Daily Herald.

The annual scholarship competition is open to graduating high school seniors in northern Illinois. NINA presents the scholarships to high school students who demonstrate the standards of honesty, integrity, attention to detail, hard work, creativity and an understanding and commitment to quality journalism.

John Etheredge, NINA scholarship coordinator, said the association has received nearly 500 applications for scholarships since the association first offered a single scholarship award in 1998.

"Each year our judges enjoy examining the students' portfolios and, as in prior years, they were impressed with the high quality of the students' work and their passion to pursue careers in journalism," Etheredge said. "Our judges found it extremely difficult to select the top three portfolios for this year's scholarship awards."

NINA and its member papers have awarded \$20,500 in scholarships since 1998.

Despite the economic downturn, the NINA Board voted earlier this year to increase its annual contribution to this year's scholarship program by \$300. Revenues for the scholarship program

come from NINA member dues and proceeds from NINA training seminars and programs.

"I would like to thank my colleagues on the NINA Board for their increased support for this year's scholarship program and to The Daily Herald for its continuing support and assistance," Etheredge said.



FIRST PLACE
Gina O'Neill
PROSPECT HIGH SCHOOL

Gina has been a member of the staff at Prospect High School's "Prospector" newspaper for the past three years. She served as editor of the paper's Opinion section her junior year and this year as copy editor.

In selecting Gina for the top scholarship award, NINA judges were impressed with her concise and compelling writing on a broad range of difficult and, at times, controversial topics, including teen suicide, student drug use and the separation of church and state.

Gina's skill as a copy editor was also evident to NINA judges who took note of the high quality of The Prospector.

In a letter of recommendation, Jason Block, Gina's journalism instructor, noted that she has "contributed in every way possible" to The Prospector over the past

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The stories we're missing

By Jim Killam

On a recent trip to Lebanon, a friend and I got to spend time in Bourj Hammoud – a crowded, lower-class community bordering Beirut.

It's a true melting-pot neighborhood. Armenians, Egyptians, Syrians and Kurds – many undocumented – live in concrete, high-rise apartments, above a cacophony of markets, small shops and traffic spewing diesel fumes.

About 60 people packed into a tiny storefront for Sunday-evening church. Afterwards, as journalists, we could interview anyone we wanted (with the aid of interpreters). Every person in the room, it seemed, had a compelling story. We ended up writing about:

- a Syrian music-store owner who fled to Lebanon rather than face continued government oppression over the kinds of CDs he was selling;
- a Lebanese man who left a lucrative business career in Abu Dhabi to come live in Bourj Hammoud and train to be a pastor;
- and a Sudanese pastor who watched his brother be murdered for his Christian faith, and who now lives and ministers among the people who killed him.

Every person has a story, and those stories are worth telling. Good journalism schools have emphasized that maxim for generations. For all of these people, this was the first time their stories had ever been written. That's as true in my own neighborhood as it is in a place like Bourj Hammoud. Yet, as an industry we're missing them.

As newsrooms have shrunk, the must-cover beats – government, cops/courts and, to some extent, business – have crowded out all else. Newspapers still have features, but they're usually confined to the Lifestyles or Entertainment pages and the reporting is necessarily shallow. Time and competing demands don't allow for



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anything more.

Walt Harrington opened his wonderful 1997 textbook, "Intimate Journalism," with this quote from historian Will Durant:

"Civilization is a stream with banks. The stream is sometimes filled with blood from people killing, stealing, shouting and doing the things historians usually record; while on the banks, unnoticed, people build homes, make love, raise children, sing songs, write poetry and even whittle statues. The story of civilization is the story of what happened on the banks."

Newspapers today are still doing a decent job of covering the stream. We're doing a lousy job of covering the banks. As we search our industry's soul for areas where we can continue to excel – and that readers can't get anywhere else – we ignore great feature writing at our peril.

Harrington wrote: "The stories of everyday life – about the behavior, motives, feelings, faiths, attitudes, grievances, hopes, fears and accomplishments of people as they seek meaning and purpose in their lives, stories that are windows on our universal human struggle – should be at the soul of every good newspaper."

As our industry collectively neglects these great stories, another problem arises: We are forgetting *how* to write them. A generation of new reporters can deliver a live story from a press conference with a series of Tweets, but has never written a compelling, 30-inch feature story.

The formula is simple. Jon Franklin outlined it in "Writing For Story": "A story consists of a sequence of actions that occur when a sympathetic character encounters a complicating situation that he confronts and solves."

Simpler yet: Characters. Conflict. Resolution. Redemption. That's every good novel, every good TV drama, every good movie. Fellow journalists: We can do this. We need to do this.

At a Rockford coffee shop the other day, a guy named Ray struck up a conversation with me. A former master machinist in a town where those are almost extinct, he's looking for full-time employment. He

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➤ **SCHOLARSHIPS, from Page 1**

three years.

Block wrote: "In addition to being a gifted writer who is willing to take risks, Gina is also a gifted leader who is willing to do anything to help those working under her succeed. She is one of the most patient editors I have ever been around, spending countless hours walking a younger staff member through a story in order to get that story up to Gina's very high standards."

Block added: "Gina has not allowed all of her responsibilities as copy editor to distract her from writing amazing stories of her own. She tackles large topics like drug use at our school and traffic issues, and handles them with a maturity rare for a high school journalist. And she manages all of this while also holding a demanding part-time job, never allowing her grades to slip in the process."

"I've grown to love reporting, editing and even layout just as much as the writing," Gina wrote in her autobiographical essay. "I've learned to respect what reporting stands for; I've seen how stories can not only inform others but affect their lives as well. When I wrote a story about drug usage in school, it did not spark controversy with the administration. Rather, people respect how well we informed the school of this issue. After writing a story on teen suicide, several teachers showed me their appreciation for bringing that topic to light. I've seen how thankful and touched the wife of a late Marine was after we ran a story of his passing and what being a member of a military family entails. That's why I want to pursue a career in journalism."

Gina noted that The Prospector transitioned to the Web last year while retaining its print edition.

"As copy editor I had to learn to break out of the normal, three-draft routine of editing in order to work with writers efficiently for online stories."

Describing herself as The

Prospector's "resident grammar diva," Gina said, "I have learned so much about AP style and editing in general, and I know how to pace myself and focus when reading 24 stories an issue, three times each."

Gina plans to major in journalism with an emphasis on print and online reporting at either DePaul University or Northwestern University. She received a total scholarship award of \$1,200: \$1,000 from NINA and \$200 from The Daily Herald.



SECOND PLACE

Meredith Newman

EVANSTON TWP. HIGH SCHOOL

In selecting Meredith for a second-place scholarship award, NINA judges took notice of her excellent writing and eye for detail as shown in her work as an executive editor for her school's student paper, The Evanstonian.

Meredith has been on the newspaper's staff the past three years, excelling as a news reporter and editor.

Judges were also impressed with feature stories Meredith has written for her hometown paper, The Evanston RoundTable.

Rodney Lowe, a journalism instructor for almost 30 years and faculty adviser to The Evanstonian, said Meredith's "continuous, tireless" work ethic alone warrants a scholarship award.

In a letter of recommendation, Lowe wrote: "She is committed, hardworking and compassionate. Moreover, Meredith is conscientious and tenacious. You should know that she has set some lofty goals for herself and these goals, in my professional opinion, are in reach."

In her autobiographic essay, Meredith said she was inspired to pursue a career in journalism partly because of the influence of Lowe and a feature story she wrote early in her high school journalism career on a classmate, Kelly Chong. Kelly's mother died when she was 3 years old and Kelly has since lived in 15 different foster homes.

Meredith wrote, "While writing Kelly's story, I realized that if I became

a journalist, I would be able to share important stories like Kelly's with others...A career in journalism will allow me to write people's untold stories.

Meredith received a \$500 scholarship from NINA. She will attend Syracuse University this fall.



THIRD PLACE

Alexandria Johnson

ROLLING MEADOWS HIGH SCHOOL

NINA judges picked Alexandria for a third-place scholarship based on the high quality of her work for The Pacer, the student newspaper at Rolling Meadows High School.

"Accomplished" is the word one NINA judge used to describe Alexandria's work, while another said her passion for journalism was clearly evident in her portfolio.

In recommending Alexandria for a scholarship Stan Zoller, a journalism teacher and Pacer adviser, wrote: "It's not unusual for a scholastic journalist to excel at design or editing. It's also not unusual for a high school journalist to be the proverbial editorial leader or outstanding writer. What sets Alexandria apart is that she is exemplary in all of the aforementioned areas and more."

Zoller added: "As I reflect on Alexandria's four years in journalism... it is clear that her passion, leadership, motivation and quest for excellence is unsurpassed."

In her autobiographical essay, Alexandria said she has worked to create an improved standard of journalism at Rolling Meadows High School.

"There is nothing I would rather dedicate my life to; journalism makes me feel powerful, confident and important," she wrote. "To have the opportunity to work on a prominent newspaper and share my words and my voice with millions would be one of the great honors to be accomplished."

Alexandria will continue her journalism education at Northwestern University this fall. She received a total scholarship award of \$350: \$300 from NINA and \$50 from The Daily Herald.

Where are they now?

We tracked down the NINA scholarship winners since 1998, and found a common denominator: success. Find the story on our Digital Ink blog at: www.ninaonline.org

CALENDAR

Friday, June 24

• NINA Board meeting, 10 a.m., Northern Star office, NIU-DeKalb.

Friday, Sept. 9

• NINA Board meeting, 10 a.m., Northern Star office, NIU-DeKalb.

Thursday, Oct. 20

• Fall Conference and Awards Dinner, NIU-DeKalb.

Friday, Dec. 2

• NINA Board meeting, 10 a.m., Northern Star office, NIU-DeKalb.

☛ KILLAM, from Page 2

fills his days by fixing cars and computers for friends, doing odd jobs and hanging out at the coffee shop. There, he talks with staffers and customers about everything from theology to martial arts.

Shadowing someone like Ray for a day or two would produce a wonderful feature story. He is a face of the Rust Belt: a brilliant, supremely talented technician whose skills are no longer valued in the town where he's lived his whole life. So, for now, he's constructed a life that pays the bills, he cares about people and he's a central character in this neighborhood. Yet, he's the kind of guy that

a passerby would dismiss without a second thought.

He's also the kind of guy that newspapers don't have time to write about anymore.

So, here's my plea to reporters: Develop an eye for stories like this. Write one per month. Here's my plea to editors: Let them. Carve time, even if it means missing a government meeting once in a while. And then devote serious space for these stories.

Reporters and editors: This will stoke creativity that you forgot you had. You'll remember a big reason you got into this business. And your readers will remember, or discover anew, the value of a great newspaper.

Journalist of the Year



Investigative reporter and columnist Ben Joravsky (left) of the Chicago Reader was honored April 29 as NIU's 2011 Illinois Journalist of the Year. The "Hoop Dreams" author covers politics for the Reader and also writes a popular blog, "Benny Jay in the Third City." Joravsky is pictured here with Journalism Banquet emcee Allen May of the NIU Department of Communication. NIU also honored Chicago Sun-Times editorial page editor Tom McNamee with its Donald R. Grubb Distinguished Alumni Award.