
The Judge

Les Holloway

Commencing as an apprentice compositor at the age of 14, Les Holloway spent the next 43 years working through a number of departments at The Courier including advertising, (more than 30 years, 14 years as Advertising Manager) Promotions and Circulation. He was at the forefront of colour technology within the newspaper industry during the 60's and 70's.

On retirement from The Courier in 1994, Les commenced his own advertising business. "**Advertising Works**" catered for a number of retail businesses in TV, radio and Newspapers in particular.

This will be his 16th year of judging the VCPA Norske Skog colour awards. Les said: "I enjoy judging these awards because colour represents to me enormous growth newspapers have made and the impact that it has created with readers".

Overall comments

Every circulation selected was tough to judge this year. The standard of photographs and creative elements selected are to be commended. And I am pleased to see an increase in the use of colour in advertisements. From each section I could have selected almost 10 or 12 entries as a winner. (I suppose that's what I deserve after having had some easy judging in the early years of this award. I think I will put in for a pay increase – 6 bottles of wine instead of one!) Well done to all proprietors and also to the staff who make the day-to-day decisions in the selection of colour material to be used.

Circulation under 3000

General Comments: Yea Chronicle – Colour used was limited but well handled. Bright Observer – Again served their readers well with both editorial and advertising colour. "Regional Extra" was bright and interesting. Campaspe News – As achieved over recent years, the colour was brilliantly handled throughout. Deserves its high ranking. Nhill Free Press – Last year's winner in this section. Excellent standard, but missed colour opportunities. Seymour Telegraph – Colour used on almost every page to reader advantage. "Trade Directory" a winner. Front-page photo 16th February, 2011 was a ripper! Snowy River Mail – Colour extensively used. The "Photo News" section was excellent. Circular Head Chronicle – As always, well presented with colourful images. The "Frenzy" section looked sensational. Myrtleford Times – Upheld the quality of previous years. The College advertisement on page 5, 14th July, 2010 looked good as did the "At Your Service Guide". The Stawell Times News and The Ararat Advertiser – Regional Publishers should be proud in the manner in which both of these publications serve their readers. They produce a consistent publication that is a benchmark for other to follow. The Loddon Times colourful front pages could have been better supported with additional colour throughout. The Moyne Gazette – One of the best and most consistent users of colour throughout the years I have been judging this award. Kaniva Times – Limited use of colour, but nevertheless, excellent. Ovens & Murray Advertiser – A previous winner again showed why. Excellent use of colour on page 6, 14th July, 2010. Yarram Standard – I admired their front-page approach. Philip Island & San Remo Advertiser – Used colour throughout. Perhaps missed some advertising opportunities.

Huon Valley News – Managed some excellent colour in editorial section. Good use of colour on page 7, 14th July, 2010. The Pyrenees Advocate – An excellent colour photograph on page 7, 16th July caught my eye. More colour would catch readers’ eye too. Rainbow Jeparit Argus – Adopted a big, bold colourful front page to their publications. Tarrangower Times – Shows promise with some excellent front-page pictures.

Highly Commended:

Casterton News

Appealing use of editorial colour images were sharp. This is a smaller circulation publication that deserves credit for its work.

Mansfield Courier

One of the few newspapers in this section to still use front-page pointers. Balanced use of colour throughout ensured a Highly Commended placing.

Winner:

The Euroa Gazette

As last year, the editorial colour was excellent. It seems as if they were determined to provide their readers with a colourful display, and they certainly did.

Circulation 3,000 - 10,000

General Comments: Pakenham Gazette – A leader in the colour field. “The Best of Berwick” was a beauty! The Advocate Daylesford – As usual was in the mix of possible winners. Riverine Herald – Has been a consistent user of colour for many years. They have not lost the touch. Wimmera Mail Times – Last year’s winner in this section has maintained their excellent record. Colac Herald – Colour was very well presented with some interesting techniques. Wangaratta Chronicle – One of the favourites in this section. “Know Your Trader” section was brilliant. The Guardian Swan Hill – Consistent use of colour throughout the publication, but needs attention to reproduction quality. Benalla Ensign – Interesting approach to the “Nunen Street Narrative”. Kyabram Free Press – Excellent study piece front-page, 14th July, 2010. South Gippsland Sentinel Times - Editorial pictures, generally, were fairly dark in colour tone.

Highly Commended:

The Spectator, Hamilton

A fine production full of colour and interest. “Your Space” and “Social Scene” would certainly attract readers.

The Free Press, Kilmore

Excellent throughout. "The Weekender" section was pleasing to the eye, and colourful. I could not separate these publications for the Highly Commended status.

Winner:

Yarrowonga Chronicle

Brilliantly presented with sharp reproduction and interesting editorial choices. The La Porchetta advertisement was a beauty, as was "The Out and About" section. Well done Yarrowonga Chronicle, you deserve the accolades.

Circulation Over 10,000

The Adviser - Colour presented throughout the publication was nicely balanced. Ballarat News – Again, full of interesting colour. The Weekly Advertiser – The “Local Trade Directory”, 15th July, 2010 was a winner. SN News – Beautifully presented with many excellent colourful pages. The publication was very competitive with all entries. Mildura Weekly – The standard of every publication was so high, and the Weekly is no exception. Interesting picture on page 21, 16th July, 2010. I also admired the two-page spread on 18th February, 2011. The Bendigo Miner – The front-page pointers still look great as well as being informative. Readers must also like that approach. Bendigo Weekly – Chock-full of colour. What else would I expect after the Weekly gained a Highly Commended last year. The front-page heading, “Class Act” of 16 July 2010 told it all! Mildura Midweek – I’m delighted at how publications in this section are presenting. Mildura Weekly was awarded first place in 2009 – nothing has diminished since. The “Apprentice Trainee Award” section was sensationally presented. Mountain View Mail – Has improved its approach to editorial colour. The Gazette Warragul & Drouin – Seemed to be a little flat this year. The colour reproduction was not sharp enough. Latrobe Valley Express – The “Latrobe City Link” feature was quite attractive. The Traralgon Journal and Moe & Narracan News – Kept up their record of producing colour on almost every page. Midland Express – Typical of the many fine publications in this section. Good spread of colour. The North Central Review – Consistent in their use of colour. “Trade Directory” and “Classicolour” sure to attract readers.

Highly commended:

The Moorabool News

Nicely presented. The “Wine and Dine” page was excellent. The News could look at further colour opportunities to enhance the publication. Feature sections were attractive.

Surf Coast Times

Wow! Obviously a strong performer in its circulation area, beautifully presented, full of interest and colour.

Winner:

Albury Wodonga NewsWeekly

The clean, classical approach to this publication was emphasised by the excellent choice for colour treatment of both editorial and advertising matter. Each page was nicely balanced. Every publication presents differently – this one is among the best. What a lovely production.

The Judges

Neil Newitt

Neil Newitt is a photojournalist with more than 25 years experience. He started his newspaper career on regional newspapers: The Warwick Daily News and Toowoomba Chronicle in Queensland, before moving to The Warrnambool Standard, then to the Age in 1986.

Whilst at the Age, Neil covered all areas of photography including news, sport and features. His time at The Age included four years as Pictorial Editor (News).

Now based in Clunes, near Ballarat, Neil shoots features and photographic essays for various clients around Australia. His work has appeared in numerous publications from music journals to motoring titles. He is a regular contributor with R. M. Williams Outback magazine. Neil is also a guest lecturer in Photojournalism at RMIT and regularly addresses groups on the issues of press photography.

His photograph of drought conditions near Wycheproof was a finalist in the 2005 Walkley Awards.

John French

Commenced work in 1969 as a cadet photographer on The Age. After a 4-year cadet ship doing everything as well as suburbans, became graded in 1973 and formed a love of news, sport and fashion.

In 1976 traveled to Sub-Antarctica and then in 1978 to Egypt with United Nations Emergency Forces. Late 1978 became assistant pictorial editor of The Age, 1980's promoted to Pictorial coordinator and 1989 became Pictorial Manager. Retired 2006 but joined Leader as their group Pictorial Editor five months later, moving from 20 odd staff at The Age to 48 covering 45 mast heads.

My expertise besides management has been in the introduction of live color into newspapers back in 1979 and the daily use of color from 1989. Also the introduction of digital photography in 1991 with The Age being the second paper in the world to go digital.

Photographic highlights would be Sub Antarctica, Egypt, over 30 AFL Grand finals, Australian Open Tennis grand slams, and various Commonwealth games around the world.

Two latest achievements were "Snapshots" (39 Leader photographers doing a day in the life of Melbourne) and "Game day" with 46 Leader shooters doing two of their local sports of interest.

Best Photographic Study – Circulation Under 3,000

Runner-up: Nicole Valicek
The Northern Times
'Best Mates'

Winner: Mark Knowles
The Loddon Times
'Friendship'

Winner's Comment: A nice balanced picture with good symmetry, a clean backdrop and the subject is not looking at the camera.

Best Photographic Study – Circulation 3,000 – 10,000

Runner-up: Nigel Hallett
Colac Herald
'Winter Paradise'

Runner-up Comment: An engaging and interesting picture, a bit overworked in Photoshop but the highlights of green on the sheep's backs is very effective.

Winner: Chris Fleming
Macedon Ranges
'Owls this for a Cutie'

Winner's Comment: A great nature photo with good balance. An engaging photograph.

Best Photographic Study – Circulation Over 10,000

General comment: Great selection of images

Runner-up: Andrew Perryman
Bendigo Weekly
'Time to brush up on Oral Health'

Runner-up Comment: Andrew has used the wide angle with great ability and an exceptional lighting standard.

Winner: Andrew Perryman
Bendigo Weekly
'Your Move'

Winner's Comment: The ability to use space and the simplicity of a few chess pieces is incredible. An extremely engaging picture.

Best News Photograph – Circulation Under 3,000

Runner-up: Ken Jenkins
Northern Times
'Prince of the People'

Runner-up Comment: He was well aware of his environment and captured the moment and lots of expression, as well as the Prince.

Winner: Scott Bourne
Cohuna Farmers Weekly
'Inundation'

Winner's Comment: It perfectly illustrated the crisis of the area with an image that will be remembered for a long time.

Best News Photograph – Circulation 3,000 – 10,000

Runner-up: Nigel Hallett
Colac Herald
'In the Line of Duty'

Runner – up Comment: House fires are more than just a burnt house, they're the human and animal tragedy. It's great to get something than just a burnt out house, in the aftermath of a fire.

Winner: Josh Nash
Portland Observer
'Mt Richmond Burns'

Winner's Comment: He's captured the intensity of the fire which is well balanced & offset with the size of the fire truck.

Best News Photograph – Circulation Over 10,000

Runner-up: Andrew Perryman
Bendigo Weekly
'PM in the Hot Seat'

Runner-up Comment: With quick reflexes, Andrew was able to capture the engaging moment.

Winner: Maree Regan
East Gippsland News
'Caravan's go up in Smoke'

Winner's Comment: This has all the elements of a great news photo, fire, victim & environment. Unfortunately the published image did not show enough of the fire, leaving too much of the environment we didn't want to see, the caravan and nearly covered up the human element, the victim on the ground. I'm sure there were better taken but congrats on what is still a great news photo.

Best Sports Photograph – Circulation Under 3,000

Runner-up: Ethan Hoare
Circular Head Chronicle
'Doubling up at WC Classic'

Runner-up Comment: Timing, focus, composition, all exemplary.

Winner: Melissa Beattie
Bright Observer
'High Flyer'

Winner's Comment: Pin sharp, crystal clear plus well timed top action. She was well aware of her environment and shot to make sure the background wasn't in focus. She should also receive a lifetime KFC Membership.

Best Sports Photograph – Circulation 3,000 – 10,000

Runner-up: Nigel Hallett
Colac Herald
'Rough Ride'

Runner-up Comment: It's what you call a really good, bold, rodeo action shot.

Winner: Stewart Chambers
Pakenham Gazette
'It's raining, it's pouring'

Winner's comment: Stewart's emotive picture puts you right in the middle of the action. Trying to take pictures in wet conditions is difficult enough but has gotten a good composition, exposure and shutter speed to capture both the rain and the action.

Best Sports Photograph – Circulation Over 10,000

Runner-up: Andrew Perryman
Bendigo Weekly
'Head and shoulders better than the rest'

Runner-up Comment: An interesting picture and different because it's shot before the line.

Winner: Jamie Lafrantz
Warragul & Drouin Gazette
'The off-stump was re-arranged'

Winner's comment: Reproduced and cropped excellently in the paper. It's a good bold shot full of action with ball, bails & wicket flying. Photographically timed to perfection.

Overall General Comment:

This is the strongest field of entries in every category we've ever had. The judges did not struggle to pick winners in any categories this year. Next year the judges look forward to more entries from more papers.

It's fantastic that the entries at this point have reached such a high standard that for judging purposes we will need to place a restriction of no more than 5 entries per photographer, per category. To encourage other, we're asking for A4 prints and only A4 PDFs to keep in line with technology.

Taking into consideration: Encouragement – Consistency – Quality

Circulation Under 3,000

Scott Bourne, Cohuna Farmers Weekly – for his News Photograph ‘Inundation’ because it will be one of the most memorable.

Circulation 3,000- 10,000

Stewart Chambers, Pakenham Gazette – for his Sports Action Photograph ‘It’s raining, it’s pouring’ because it captured the mood and the play under the worst conditions.

Circulation Over 10,000

Andrew Perryman, Bendigo Weekly – once again, for his amazing art using space and shadows.

The Judge

John Jennison is a Chartered Professional Engineer (CPE) with over 40 years experience in the newspaper industry, having held senior positions at two major newspaper groups. His involvement in the change process has been considerable and his leadership has resulted in many impressive results. He has served on industry committees and on local and international judging panels.

Born in Echuca as a war baby John was educated at Geelong Grammar School and studied Mechanical Engineering at RMIT. Married to Susan they have two children, a son and daughter. Based in Melbourne John now is a director of a consulting business specialising in newspaper practices, research and book publishing. Recent major projects have included the commissioning of two newspaper plants in Malaysia, restructuring production at the New York Daily News and colour management for the Dogan Group in Turkey

Keen on coffee, films and theatre, his other interests are travel and restoring to working order the remains of the family farm in southern NSW, very much hindered by the drought.

Comments:

In another year of changing fortunes for newspapers around the world, it is so encouraging to see such a multitude of small circulation newspapers making such a successful go of the industry. Only quality and value will survive the ravages of financial crisis, drought, the internet and social media, you are all on that path.

It says a lot for the type of people in Victoria who work at Country Newspapers, just how dedicated and skilled you are. And just how wonderful a job you are all doing.

As media gets more global it is becoming more and more apparent that communities still want their own identity. Only a strong robust country press can provide that assurance.

Social media may have a place, probably in the school yard, but only community newspapers can and should provide the integrity and responsibility to the people they serve.

Runner Up:

The Ararat Advertiser

Again the resources of a major group provided the where with all to produce a top quality product. A bit more attention and this newspaper could easily take the top spot.

The Page 1's presented maturity and impact, the EGN pages superb. It is interesting to note that "by lines" are not published with stories, though some photos do.

The Sport section is most comprehensive with an abundance of stories and results. Special advertising sections well catered for. Overall the Ararat Advertiser is a quality product giving an excellent service to its readers and advertisers.

Winner:

Bright & Kiewa Valley Observer

The bigger organisations can obviously push more resources into their product. But the North East Newspaper stable are clearly putting out many quality newspapers.

The Bright Observer is well presented in editorial, pictorial, advertising and production. Local stories and issues are all covered extensively and subbed expertly with sensible and

clear headlines. An emphasis is placed on community engagement. Pictorial was very impressive with lots of photos. Many of the compositions showed mature skill and creation.

The resources of the newspaper are enhanced by a strong support from a varied advertising base. Neat headings and special sections help readers find their way. Display ads are extensive but do not overcrowd the editorial pages. This is probably what gives this newspaper a “difference” to others.

The newspaper is printed to a reasonable level of proficiency, fold is neat, print sharp and clean with good colour balance. Colour managements protocols between prepress and press are obviously in place.

Congratulations to the winners and to all other for producing great newspapers that serve their communities. Please keep up this great work.

The Judge

Graham Gorrel has had 50 years experience in newspapers beginning at The Wagga Daily Advertiser in 1958. For more than 20 years he edited regional daily newspapers at *The Daily Liberal*, Dubbo, and *The Daily Advertiser*, Wagga, before being made Chief Executive Officer of The Daily Advertiser Group (now Riverina Media Group) in 1991. He retired in 2003 but maintains a close interest in the newspaper industry by writing a weekly column in The Daily Advertiser, has a newspaper consultancy business and judges newspaper and journalism awards in NSW, Victoria and South Australia.

In 1978-79 he spent time in England working for the North London Newspaper Group and The Sun, one of Rupert Murdoch's newspapers, in Fleet Street. He was a director of the Pacific Area Newspapers Publishers Association for 10 years, two as president in 2002-03.

He is a passionate believer in regional development and rural health and has written many articles and editorials on the subjects. He is a non-medical board member of the Riverina Division of General Practice.

General Comments:

Rarely have I been privileged to judge in any state a section of such high quality. The majority of the 23 entries were so good it would be quite comfortable for me to recommend their entire crew to any would be newspaper publisher. Each of the four disciplines required to be assessed scored high marks making the task of selecting a winner and highly commended from those nine newspapers I selected for the final judging one of the most difficult assignments in my time as a judge.

The quality, design and layout of display advertising continued to improve with excellent work by the graphic design people. Proprietors can be justifiably proud of the work being produced that, in my view, should provide potential advertisers with a product that stacks up well compared to what the electronic media has to offer. What was interesting was the fact that a number of newspapers found Easter as a renewed selling point, some publications had outstanding advertising features highlighting events and tourist opportunities within their region.

Again, the editorial work was outstanding emphasising all the very best traditions of a vibrant Country Press. If there has been some criticism of the printed word in recent years it was certainly not evident in the issues submitted for judging. Early general news pages, comment sections and the letters pages were, in most entries, enthusiastically written and displayed for ease of reading. Sport again showed an overall quality, the benchmark set by a number of newspapers in recent years for great news sports stories, rather than a results service, stood out.

There has been a marked increase in news and sports photography. Some of the social news picture pages were excellent, bright, breezy and well laid out. The majority of copies submitted for judging were of a high technical standard. I was excited by the overall standard, quality and presentation of the entries and if these standards are maintained I would venture to suggest the future of the industry in Victoria is in very good, safe hands. The degree of professionalism is to be commended.

Special Mention: Yarrawonga Chronicle, The Colac Herald, Benalla Ensign, South Gippsland Sentinel Star.

Highly Commended:

The Spectator, Hamilton

This newspaper has become a real contender for top class honours in the past two years with tremendous improvement in advertising and editorial sections. The Shop in Hamilton for Christmas feature was excellent while in editorial the newspaper showed great leadership by inviting readers to have their say on Hamilton's future. There was outstanding sports photography in a breezy, fresh approach to the sports section.

Wangaratta Chronicle

Strong, hard-hitting focus of local issues, backed by quality editorial comment were features of another excellent year for this newspaper. EGN display advertising appears to have gone up another notch. Photography and layout were top class yet again while the Easter touring feature was the standout in top quality advertising programs. Each of the four criteria for judging was of a high standard.

The Great Southern Star

I found it difficult to find fault with any of the four disciplines for assessment, a strong newspaper in all respects. Great news stories backed by hard-hitting editorials, of which one about potholes on local highways and byways was a classic, showed why this newspaper was a strong contender. The bumper 88-page Easter issue with its Wedding Expo advertising feature was high class.

Pakenham Gazette

For so long the benchmark of a great local newspaper, this publication continues to maintain high professional standards across the judging schedule. The depth of general news stories, its outstanding sports section, particularly in the winter, and its skilled and masterly advertising-design team were again very highly commended.

Winner:

The Wimmera Mail-Times

A cracker! Right through each issue submitted for judging this newspaper excelled in every department. It was a joy to read from the excellent handling of stories and especially its comment and letters pages, which were quite outstanding. Advertising was first rate, creative and layout was superb. Front pages whet the reader's appetite and they would not have been disappointed right through to a comprehensive and authoritative sports section.

The Judge

Mr. Barry Wilson has been actively engaged in the newspaper industry for over 25 years. His experience ranges through reporting, editing, sales, graphics, pre-press and senior management roles.

The 1980's saw Barry keenly embrace desktop publishing. On the Sapphire Coast he established a desktop published tourist newspaper and the following year, as founding editor, he co-launched the Merimbula News Weekly.

In 1994 he moved to Bowral as special projects manager for Macquarie Publications (later acquired by Rural Press) and then joined the Kiama Weston Group of newspapers as marketing manager and then group managing editor. The flagship Kiama Independent won the inaugural PANPA 2000 Newspaper of the Year Award in its circulation category and the Weston papers always featured prominently in CPANSW awards.

In 2006 he established a media consulting business providing specialist guidance to regional newspaper publishers. He has researched newspapers and associations in Europe, and attended the 2002 World Association of Newspapers conference. He is a current councillor and past president of the CPANSW and a past committee member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations.

General comments:

This was an interesting year since my judging category remained constant but the circulation base changed from assessing the under 3,000 to now the over 10,000 circulation newspapers. It provided me with the opportunity to examine how bigger readership issues were written and presented.

This year 23 newspapers entered, although 3 of these did not submit their full complement of 4 issues.

All entrants deserve congratulations on their outstanding efforts and the informative newspapers they publish. Of note was the diversity of presentation and the size of the editions – ranging from 16 pages for several, up to a mammoth 180 pages in the **Surf Coast Times**.

The following general observations are offered to assist future Award entries:

- It was exciting that some publishers experimented with new style mastheads but I caution not to change for changes sake; some old elements are still relevant with the new generations.
- Headlines and captions were sometimes languid and unsupportive of stories that were often well researched, constructed and presented.
- It was pleasing to see numerous letters from readers, although their impact was frequently lost through uninspiring layout, negligible section introduction or little use of colour.
- Public comment and editorial opinion are our respected heritage, but several editors failed to lead their community.

- When it comes to circulation, eye catching front page content and design are paramount. They are the 'welcome mat' for readers and it was pleasing to witness that many newspapers invested considerable resource in achieving this impact.
- With the larger circulation base, many sizeable newspapers allocated less centimetres to news. With some, this meant dropping sport or editorial and less content in reporting.
- Some newspaper designs were outdated or lazy. Design is a powerful tool and should be planned ahead of the deadline rush where possible.
- Colour was used by most newspapers and provided new opportunities for design and reader impact. That said, colour was sometimes misunderstood, over-done and saturated.
- Our society evolves within order and rule. For a newspaper this maintains confidence and enhances reading pleasure. Layout and typography are key elements that subliminally impact a reader - particularly column width, font size and leading. Several newspapers could be improved by attention to these aspects.
- With the brilliant improvement of digital cameras, more energy is available for the photographer to focus on excellent compositions, presentations and cropping. This was well achieved by many entries.
- It was surprising that several newspapers made it difficult to find, or sometimes did not promote their telephone, fax, email, web, mobile or other important contact names and details.
- Advertising was of a high standard throughout most newspapers and sections like service directories benefited through colour and design upgrades.

Newspapers face an incredible array of new challenges, so constant review is required. Editors need to embrace new media options, including social networking to ensure timely news delivery, reader retention and credibility. To maintain readership and connect with fast moving, time-poor readers, it is critical to adopt new modern production techniques - so attention to design, content, headers, banners, layout, typography, photographic composition through to effective colour design is paramount. Publishers must continually conduct a critical analysis of their entire publication.

I congratulate all newspaper entrants, as you are serving your communities with diligence and passion but I also caution all publishers to quickly adopt the new age of social media and communication.

**Highly Commended:
The Bendigo Miner**

On looking at each edition of *The Bendigo Miner*, I was impressed by a powerful front page picture and story technique. Inside the content was presented in a clean uncluttered form with structured headlines and stories. In such a well presented newspaper an editorial void surprised and would have well-suited each of the cover stories. Printing was of good quality while layout displayed balance and creativity. An element that may benefit a review was the randomly coloured/sized 'Guide Today' tiles on the cover - not very reader friendly. Perhaps some thought could also be given to catering for the sporting fans within their readership.

**Runner-Up:
Bendigo Weekly**

This year's runner-up is the ***Bendigo Weekly*** who after a series of back-to-back wins appeared to have experimented with some content and layout changes that took some of the shine off their great newspaper presentation, while competitors had lifted their game. This fine newspaper continued to present well-written, tasteful and creatively presented articles. Some issues suffered from illegible captions laid over pictures and the challenges for commercial space, but there were many examples of design and colour brilliance. The letters and opinion pages scored extremely well as did their feature articles – always well written with vivid and exciting graphics. This newspaper was an example of good communication and leadership that continued to well serve its community.

**Winner:
Mildura Weekly**

Out of 20 newspaper entries, this year's winner is the ***Mildura Weekly***. Consistency was the word that underpinned this well written and invitingly presented tabloid. The newspaper served its community admirably with strong well researched stories, effective use of colour and a little light humour from its page two 'Chaff' column. Graphic elements were used wisely to tweak the appeal of pages and help draw readers' attention. Worthy articles were written for interest, not just to fill a space – in fact good articles were always given the space they deserved. Sport was also well supported in the ***Mildura Weekly***, classifieds colourful and so too the 'boys toys' car section. Further improvement could be achieved by consistently including an editorial every week as well as using a thematic graphic style for regular features. Pluses for this impressive newspaper were many, including well placed photography through accompanying stories, soft colour tints gently highlighting story panels, while story briefs attached to strong headlines invited the reader into the well written articles. Congratulations to a very worthy winner.

Awards for Local Reporting

The Judge

Lisa Waller – Journalism Lecturer at Deakin University

Circulation Under 3000

Highly Commended:

The Castlemaine Mail for its strong series of articles on the fight to save a local swimming pool.

The Ararat Advertiser for its report on Facebook bullying in the district.

Winner:

The Northern Times - Flooding crisis in the Kerang region.

The Northern Times' extensive series of reports on the January 2011 floods are informative, engaging, well presented and cover the floods from many angles. This is a great example of a small paper playing to its strengths during a crisis when its own operations were affected by the disaster, making the excellent coverage even more commendable.

Circulation 3000 - 10,000

Highly Commended:

The Bairnsdale Advertiser for its campaign on the need to control wild dogs.

Wimmera Mail Times for its coverage of plans to redevelop the Horsham Town Hall.

Winner:

The Portland Observer for its coverage of a plan to close aged care facility Sea View House.

There were many excellent entries in this section but the Portland Observer stood out for this series of reports. It demonstrates real excellence in journalism because reporter Tiana Richardson has dug deep to get to the political story behind the push to close the facility. This is not advocacy journalism. It presents fair and balanced coverage, creating a public forum for discussion and debate of the issue. There's politics, there's human interest. It's well written and presented. A really outstanding entry.

Circulation Over 10,000

Highly Commended:

Bendigo Weekly for its investigations into hospital funding.

Winner:

Warragul & Drouin Gazette

Another excellent piece of reporting where the paper can be seen to play its watchdog role on local government very well. Keith Anderson and Yvette Brand have done an outstanding job covering the council's reaction to ratepayers' questions over its purchase of a house. These reporters get much of the 'real' story through their research and expose the council's unwillingness to be transparent over its purchase.

The Judge

Dr Katrina Mandy Oakham is a senior lecturer in journalism at RMIT University and last year was the recipient of a Federal government Carrick citation for her outstanding contribution to student learning.

Before taking up her current position as the research leader in the journalism program at RMIT, Dr Oakham was part of the Deakin University journalism team and co-coordinated the program there for more than eight years. Prior to Deakin, she was the head of the media division at the East Surrey College, in England and acted as a consultant to the National Council for the Training of Journalists and the Argus Newspaper Group in southern England.

Dr Oakham has worked as a senior journalist, columnist and editor on newspapers and magazines in Australia and England and she was the convener of the Country Press Post Cadet Training Program for 11 years. She has acted as a consultant producing training programs for such organizations as The Age newspaper and the Shepparton News Group.

Her work in producing a virtual newsroom in the form of the CD Rom HOTcopy won her the Australian Institute of Training and Development's 2002 award for innovation in learning.

She is the editor of the widely used journalism text, *Don't Bury The Lead* and she is co-author of the book *Reporting in a Multimedia World*.

General Comments

Memo Minister Conroy: there is one section of the Australian media you don't need to focus on in your upcoming inquiry, that is, Victorian country and regional newspapers.

The implosion of the Murdoch empire and the News of the World scandal may appear to have very little to do with the running of country newspapers in Australia but the issues raised by these events and the upcoming media inquiry in this country have focused around one central question – what is the role of journalism in our modern society?

Every year when I come to judge this category, I am always reassured that Victorian country newspapers have the right answer to that question and that is, they monitor, guard, reassure and champion their communities.

My observations from last year remain relevant. In order to maintain their health and viability these country and regional newspapers must continue their efforts to engage local readers. Journalism is now a dialogue, not a lecture and it is clear many of this year's entrants are having some great conversations with their readers. However it is equally clear that some papers are not yet ready to make this mind shift and continue to throw their stories at the page with little consideration of how the reader gets to those stories. Confusing layouts and mixed up type faces and fonts jostle together on some pages and look very uninviting.

Simplicity remains a core issue for me. Layouts should be clean and simple as should the news writing. When I was a cadet, the ideal of news writing was drummed into me again and again - good clean copy should be able to be read and understood by an intelligent 12 year old! And while I have become a little accustomed to long and winding intros that sometimes stretch out to 60 words in one sentence, I cannot forgive any intro, in any

newspaper, which begins with the word “yesterday” – we produce newspapers and by definition that means we don’t start with old news.

Circulation under 3,000

As with last year’s entries it was very difficult to separate the contenders in this category.

To use an extended football analogy here, we definitely had a top four which could have easily extended into a top eight, because really there was only a kick difference between contenders in this lively group of entrants.

Every year the stable of Northern Eastern newspapers produce strong contenders. These papers like the Ovens and Murray Advertiser and the Mansfield Courier always deliver good lively fronts and terrific backs. These papers are characterised by clean, block layouts and many, many good local stories.

The inside pages of these papers were again packed with lots of lively local coverage, good use of colour throughout and regular features like “Indigo Identities” and “Our Hidden Treasures” demonstrated a strong sense of community engagement.

Another Highly Commended must also go to the Yarram Standard which also always delivers with great fronts, strong headlines and good on-the-ground news coverage.

The Campaspe News also deserves an honourable mention with its terrific fronts and its ability to respond to extraordinary circumstances with extensive and comprehensive flood coverage.

Winner: Myrtleford Times

But this year a premiership drought is broken for the Myrtleford Times, the winner in this category, with its dramatic coloured fronts and backs with excellent breaking hard news stories by young journalist Alex Baird. As this is a journalism award it is appropriate that this paper takes the title as it is literally jam packed with good journalism.

Alex Baird and the rest of this paper’s reporting team are fine little terriers, troublesome watchdogs, alert and alarmed about threats to their local community be it a threat from drugs, criminals, disease or weaknesses in local flood mitigation works.

One of the dramatic backs from this winner had a literally in-your-face photograph taken by Cheryl Browne which shows Bright’s coach attempting to inspire his mud spattered and weary grand final contenders and urging his mountain men to produce a last final quarter effort that wasn’t to be. It is this photograph that sums up why this paper moved from contender to champion. There is clearly an editorial team here prepared to get dirty and do the grunt necessary and sometimes news reporting ain’t pretty!

Circulation 3,000 - 10,000

This category was the battle of the Big Wet. Water, water everywhere, and particularly all over dramatic fronts and backs of many entries in this category.

I must begin by declaring a continuing conflict of interest in nominating my first Highly Commended in this category as the Colac Herald. The continuing improvement in the hard news coverage of this entrant is still very evident and judging from the bylines much of this coverage is still being produced by former students of mine which inevitably leaves this judge with a smile on her face. This entrant in its accompanying statement summed up what the Herald sees as its job in relation to its own community as “telling their stories, sharing their triumphs and shining light on what concerns them.” Is there a better mission statement for a genuinely local newspaper?

Also Highly Commended in this category is the Wangaratta Chronicle with its dramatic front consisting of one word “Swamped “, superimposed on a great aerial shot by Simone Gladigau with an isolated home cut off by a murky brown lake of flood waters. Gladigau’s work, combined with great action shots by Cheryl Browne also produced some lively backs. The reporting of Jeff Zeuschner exposing the inadequacies of local water storages should also be commended. This is a paper engaged at all levels with its community evident in its editorials, letters and vox pops sections.

Another Highly Commended goes to The Great Southern Star and I don’t think it is any secret this cheeky and exuberant newspaper has been a judge’s favourite and it continues to impress with great fronts and excellent hard news coverage.

To extend the football language I really did have to go into extra time to separate out the two grand finalists in this section.

Just beaten and taking out second place was the voice of the Wimmera, the Wimmera Mail-Times, which produced three outstanding issues with fronts and headlines that grew dramatically as the Big Wet played out on its news pages. Headlines moved from “Flood Watch” to “Big Flood” to “Giant Flood” – less is always more when it comes effective heads. Here was the editor’s dream coming true - all sections - the photos, the writing, the reporting, the layout and the oft overlooked work of subs, all came together to produce a truly terrific paper.

So who could top this champion performance? Well in order to settle on a winner I had to keep going back to the name of this award category, that is, Journalism.

Winner:

Pakenham Gazette

Last year this entrant presented us with a centenary of fine journalism and demonstrated that a good yarn is a good yarn be it 1910 or 2010. This year’s winner, The Pakenham Gazette, just pushed past its competitor with its command of what makes good journalism. This paper consistently produces fine journalism which is clearly evident in its coverage of dramatic local events like flooding and other natural disasters. But this kind of vigilant journalism also finds the stories in everyday life such as stories about a grieving mother

looking for answers about her murdered son or the retirement of a 70 year old paper boy. Having read this newspaper from cover to cover one can't help but wonder when the people of Pakenham actually sleep – so many people doing so many things – and it is all there. The consistently high standard of reporting by Melissa Meehan is to be commended.

Another standout feature of this paper is its effort to engage its readers in a conversation whether through conventional letters to the editor or its Facebook feedback column. I also loved the “Looking Back”, “Take 10” and “My Passion”, regular features which gave more opportunities for locals to tell their stories.

Circulation over 10,000

In this section I was again faced with a feisty challenger prepared to take on the declared premiers and champions in this field.

But first Highly Commended must go to the Gippsland Times and Maffra Spectator with its consistently good layouts, good local reporting by Eleanor Venables, good use of photos and particularly evident is this paper's efforts to open up the conversation with its readers with such regular features as “Word of Mouth”, “Times Past” and “Streetbeat”.

This year saw a colourful and lively Gold Coast type challenger emerge keen to take on the paper with the established premiership track record in this field. But was this delightful challenger good enough on the day to pull the winner's cup from the tight grip of the paper I referred to last year as the Makybe Diva of this category and perhaps this year could be described as the Collingwood of this category?

Well not quite...

Highly Commended goes to that feisty challenger, the Mildura Weekly. It was very hard not to succumb to the obvious attractions of this year's runner up. It was a genuine delight starting with yummy coloured fronts featuring hot pink tractors and vanilla thrillers (battle for best vanilla slice). Inside were great features including the achievements of local women. I really loved the yarn of the kiss of life for a hanged goat and if the judge's memory is still functioning I think this story went national. Then there is the always appealing Chaff column. Not that this contender is only good at dealing with lighter side of life but it is also ready to take on the big issues such as the story of a Mildura Mum fighting cancer whose continuing battle demonstrates this disease does not defeat spirit.

Winner:

Bendigo Weekly

And as for the Collingwood of this category? Yes well it goes back to back with this year's winner being... the Bendigo Weekly. This paper is a champion in so many respects with its strong hard news reporting (special mention should go to the reporting of Anthony Radford), the once again award winning photographs by Andrew Perryman, and an editorial team prepared to chance their hands with dramatic short headlines and arresting layouts . There is obviously a headline specialist amongst the team with three winning heads shouting from the front pages this year “Pressure”, “Law Less” and “Off Course” – maximum impact achieved!

Awards for Journalism

This paper is always a standout in demonstrating that it has learnt that modern journalism is all about the conversation you have with your readers which they demonstrate through the maintenance of lively editorials. This year I admired their incorporation of the new tech ways of maintaining that conversation with their special Facebook “Hush Hush” section.

But of course, where this paper always steps up to the winner’s podium is in its blatant commitment to campaign for its community on those issues that matter, be they issues about the number of police on the ground, secret negotiations on a new hospital, or the state of local schools. When it comes to watchdogs this newspaper is a pure bred Dobermann.

In one of its editorial the paper argues that good things would not happen in its community if “local media had decided to take spin as substance, accept and not question the polities and fight for the community by challenging and challenging hard.”

“Challenging hard” - this should be worn on the back of all winners’ vests. Congratulations again to a most worthy winner.