



2026 OCNA Better Newspapers Awards

Category Descriptions

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For examples of winning entries from previous years, view the [2025 Winners Page](#) or the [Awards Booklet Archive](#). To view individual winning entries, click on the winning image for that category.

New for 2026 - If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. This information will support ongoing discussions by the OCNA AI and BNC Committees. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

General Excellence Class 1 through 3 – Active Members

The General Excellence Awards recognize outstanding overall achievement in the community press. OCNA designates each member newspaper to one of four classes - College and University newspapers are in Class 4. First, second, and third place winners will be awarded. All members are encouraged to enter. The General Excellence competition helps newspapers determine their strengths and weaknesses, gives them a comparison with other newspapers, provides staff with a pat on the back, and shows them areas in which they can improve.

Newspapers are to submit the pdf or link to the pdf e-edition copy of one edition from the month of **November 2025** and one from the month of **April 2026**. **Hardcopies of editions are no longer be accepted.** If you are having problems uploading editions to the contest site, please contact Karen Shardlow at k.shardlow@ocna.org for assistance.

Circulation Categories Available:

Class 1: Circ. 1,500 and under

Class 2: Circ. 1,501 - 8,000

Class 3: Circ. 8,001 and over

Judging will be based on the following - for a full description of the judging criteria, please go to [BNC Awards General Excellence Criteria](#)

Front Page	150
Community News	150
Ed. & Op. Ed Pages	100
Presentation	100
Photography	100
Advertising Content	100
Advertising Design	100
Classified Advertising	25
Local Features	50
Sports Coverage	25
Arts Coverage	25
Total	925

General Excellence Class 4 – College & University Members

College and University Newspapers who are members in good standing are invited to enter the General Excellence competition.

Judging criteria has been developed to reflect the specialized communities served as well as the readership represented. (Please note, College and University newspapers are also invited to enter College & University Premier Award categories.)

Newspapers are required to submit either a pdf copy or url link to the entry. Entry should be made through the contest website and should include a copy of each edition selected – one (1) issue from each semester. **Fall semester** – October to December 2025 and **Winter semester** – January to April 2026.

Judging will be based on the following - for a full description of the judging criteria, please go to [BNC Awards General Excellence Criteria](#)

Front Page	150
Community News	150
Editorial Page and Op-Ed	100
Presentation	100
Photography	100
Advertising Content & Design	25
Local Features	100
Sports	50
TOTAL	775

Premier Categories – Active Members

For examples of winning entries from previous years, view the [2025 Winners Page](#) or the [Awards Booklet Archive](#). To view individual winning entries, click on the winning image for that category.

New for 2026 – If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. This information will support ongoing discussions by the OCNA AI and BNC Committees. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

PC01. Arts & Entertainment ****Print pdf or online entry permitted**

Submissions can be made in the form of a feature, photo essay, news article or editorial. It should increase interest in, appreciation of, or participation in activities related to the performing and creative arts.

Submit: PDF of a single story in print or URL link to online article. Include entire page(s).

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Spurs interest/ Appreciation/ Participation in Arts 16; Quality of Reporting 15; Photos/Graphics/Artwork 14

PC02. Best Business & Finance Story ****Print pdf or online entry permitted**

The award will be presented to the newspaper judged to have written and presented the best business and finance story dealing with a community-oriented business or industry, or with the financial aspects of a governing body or agency. Stories dealing with personal budgeting, investments, taxation, etc. are also eligible.

Submit: PDF of a single story in print or URL link to online article. Include entire page(s).

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Quality of Writing 16; Relevance to Community/Reader 15; Research 15

PC03. Best Editorial, circ. over 8,000 ****Print pdf or online entry permitted**

Entries should take a fearless editorial stand. Subject material should be community oriented. Quality of writing, subject matter and impact to community will be taken into consideration.

Submit: PDF of one editorial in print or URL link to online article. Include entire page(s).

Members may enter either Category PC03 or PC04.

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Quality of Writing 20; Subject Matter/Impact to Community 15

PC04. Best Editorial, circ. 8,000 & under ****Print pdf or online entry permitted**

Entries should take a fearless editorial stand. Subject material should be community oriented. Quality of writing, subject matter and impact to community will be taken into consideration.

Submit: PDF of one editorial in print or URL link to online article. Include entire page(s).

Members may enter either Category PC03 or PC04.

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Quality of Writing 20; Subject Matter/Impact to Community 15

PC05. Best Editorial Cartoon **Print pdf or online entry permitted*****CHANGED CRITERIA*****

The entry must consist of a single hand drawn local cartoon created by a human. It should pertain to a subject of local community interest for that paper. Entries can include the work of syndicated cartoonists, provided that the cartoon in question was drawn specifically for the member paper or local group. A letter from the publisher or editor explaining the cartoon is suggested but not required.

Submit: PDF of a single cartoon in print or URL link to online cartoon. Include entire page.

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: AI generated cartoons are not allowed. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Artistic Ability 16; Subject Matter/ Relevance 17; Impact 14

PC06. Best Editorial Page/Section **Print pdf entry only

Entry should consist of an editorial page or section from a single edition consisting of editorials, editorial cartoons, letters to the editor, and guest editorials or columns. Judging will be based on overall excellence in editorials and commentary, layout and design, with an emphasis on local content and local interest in the community as shown by letters, guest and staff columns.

Submit: PDF of an editorial section in print. Include entire pages.

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Layout & Design 10; Quality of Writing 17; Subject Matter/Relevance to Community 17; Community Interest 16.

PC07. Education Writing **Print pdf or online entry permitted

Entries shall consist of a news or feature story on any aspect of education. The focus should be community-based. Quality of writing, research, imagination and initiative will be considered.

Submit: PDF of a single story in print or URL link to online article. Include entire page(s).

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Quality of Writing 15; Research 15; Initiative/ Imagination 13

PC08. Environment Ontario **Print pdf or online entry permitted

The Environment Ontario Award recognizes the news, feature, or editorial which best deals with environmental subjects having impact upon the communities served.

Submit: PDF of a single story in print or URL link to online article. Include entire page(s).

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Research 15; Quality of Writing 15; Relevance to Community 14

PC09. Feature Writing, circ. over 8,000 **Print pdf or online entry permitted

Entries shall be restricted to local human interest features. Entries will be judged primarily on journalistic merit. The writer must be employed by the paper or be a regular freelancer.

Submit: PDF of a single story in print or URL link to online article. Include entire page(s).

Members may enter either Category PC09 or PC10.

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Quality of Writing/Research 16; Initiative/Originality 16; Interest to Community 12

PC10. Feature Writing, circ. 8,000 & under ****Print pdf or online entry permitted**

Entries shall be restricted to local human interest features. Entries will be judged primarily on journalistic merit. The writer must be employed by the paper or be a regular freelancer.

Submit: PDF of a single story in print or URL link to online article. Include entire page(s).

Members may enter either Category PC09 or PC10.

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Quality of Writing/Research 16; Initiative/Originality 16; Interest to Community 12

PC11. Health & Wellness ****Print pdf or online entry permitted**

This award will recognize a feature story related to health matters (including such topics as current health trends, proactive health care, preventative medicine, hospital funding, OHIP matters, holistic medicine, medical research, etc.) Entries will be judged primarily on journalistic merit and research.

Submit: PDF of a single story in print or URL link to online article. Include entire page(s).

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Quality of Writing/Research 16; Initiative/Originality 16; Relevance to Community 13

PC12. Heritage ****Print pdf or online entry permitted**

Submission can be made in the form of a feature, photo essay, news article, or editorial. Should help people become more aware of their heritage or stimulate participation in heritage conservation activities. Areas covered by heritage conservation include architectural, archeological and historical resources.

Submit: PDF of a single story in print or URL link to online article. Include entire page(s).

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Creates awareness/stimulates participation in heritage issues 16; Quality of Reporting/Research 15

PC13. Best Investigative News Story ****Print pdf or online entry permitted**

Entries will be judged on quality of research, reporting, initiative, significance to community, clarity and pictorial treatment of an investigative news story. Judges will give greater weight to depth of research and quality of writing.

Submit: PDFs of one or a series of stories on the same subject (maximum of 4) in print or URL link to online articles. Include entire page(s).

Entries in this category may not be submitted in Best News Story (Category PC14 or PC15).

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Quality/Depth of Research 14; Quality of Reporting/Writing 14; Significance to Community 14; Reporter Initiative 14

PC14. Best News Story, circ. over 8,000 **Print pdf or online entry permitted

Entries will be judged on quality of reporting, significance, clarity and pictorial treatment of a breaking news story. Judges will give greater weight to initiative, research and reporting, taking into consideration time constraints for breaking news.

Submit: PDF of a single story in print or URL link to online article. Include entire page(s). Members may enter either Category PC14 or PC15 and may not enter the same article in “PC13 Investigative News Story”.

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Quality of Reporting/Initiative 14; Quality of Writing 14; Significance to Community 14; Research 13

PC15. Best News Story, circ. 8,000 & under **Print pdf or online entry permitted

Entries will be judged on quality of reporting, significance, clarity and pictorial treatment of a breaking news story. Judges will give greater weight to initiative, research and reporting, taking into consideration time constraints for breaking news.

Submit: PDF of a single story in print or URL link to online article. Include entire page(s). Members may enter either Category PC14 or PC15 and may not enter the same article in “PC13 Investigative News Story”.

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Quality of Reporting/Initiative 14; Quality of Writing 14; Significance to Community 14; Research 13

PC16. Best Rural Story **Print pdf or online entry permitted

Entries will be judged on quality of writing, effective use of photography, clarity, interest and display. Stories may deal with agriculture, rural and remote development (including relevant technology, services, and societal improvements).

Submit: PDF of a single story in print or URL link to online article. Include entire page(s).

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Quality of Writing 15; Research 14; Relevance to Community 13; Design and Photography 12

PC17. Best Feature / News Series, circ. over 8,000 **Print pdf or online entry permitted

Entries should consist of two to four feature or news stories relating to the same subject. Judging will be based on community relevance, quality of writing, clarity of presentation and uniqueness.

***If staff from more than one newspaper in a group produces/publishes the series, it must be entered in the “circ. 8,000 & over” category and may only be entered once.**

*****Series dealing with Police/Court Series must be entered in the new category “PC23 - Best Police/Court Series” and are not eligible to enter this category.**

*****Series dealing with Diversity Coverage must be entered in the category “PC21 - Diversity Coverage” and are not eligible to enter this category.**

Submit: PDF of a series of two to four stories about the same subject in print or URL link to online articles. Include entire page(s).

Members may enter either Category PC18 or PC19.

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Relevance to Community 15; Reader Interest 14; Quality of Writing 14

PC18. Best Feature / News Series, circ. 8,000 & under ****Print pdf or Online Entry permitted**

Entries should consist of two to four feature or news stories relating to the same subject. Judging will be based on community relevance, quality of writing, clarity of presentation and uniqueness.

***If staff from more than one newspaper in a group produces/publishes the series, it must be entered in the “circ. 8,000 & over” category and may only be entered once.**

*****Series dealing with Police/Court Series must be entered in the category “PC23 - Best Police/Court Series” and are not eligible to enter this category.**

*****Series dealing with Diversity Coverage must be entered in the category “PC21 - Diversity Coverage” and are not eligible to enter this category.**

Submit: PDF of a series of two to four stories about the same subject in print or URL link to online articles. Include entire page(s).

Members may enter either Category PC17 or PC18.

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Relevance to Community 15; Reader Interest 14; Quality of Writing 14

PC19. Sport and Recreation Story ****Print pdf or online entry permitted**

Story should help people become more aware of and more involved in sport, recreational and fitness opportunities in the community or address a community problem related to those activities.

Submit: PDF of a single story in print or URL link to online article. Include entire page(s).

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Relevance to Community 15; Reader Interest 14; Quality of Writing 14

PC20. Best Headline Writing ****Print pdf and/or online entry permitted**

Entries should consist of THREE of your best headlines with their decks/subheads, including the full related story. Judging will be based on impact, accuracy, clarity and the effectiveness of the headlines to engage the reader.

Submit: PDF of 3 headlines including related stories in print or URL link to online articles. Include entire pages as published.

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Impact 15; Creativity 15; Accuracy to convey article 15; Quality of Writing 10

PC21. Diversity Coverage ****Print pdf and/or online entry permitted**

Entries will recognize an article or series of articles (max of 4) that **tell the stories of** individuals and/or groups who have been traditionally marginalized, and/or deal with issues involving these communities. Judging will be based on relevance to the community, quality of reporting/research, quality of writing and creation of awareness/ participation.

*****Entries in this category cannot be entered in the Best News/Feature Series category.**

Submit: PDF of a single or series of stories (max of 4) or url links to online articles. Include entire pages. Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Relevance to Community 15; Quality of Reporting/Research 15; Quality of Writing 15; Creation of Awareness/Participation 10

PC22. Best Police/Court Story **Print pdf or online entry permitted

Entries should consist of a single article related to a police investigation or court story. Subject could be a homicide, cold case, feature historical crime etc, and must be community related. Judging will be based on community relevance, quality of reporting/research and quality of writing.

Submit: PDF of a single story or url link to an online article. Include entire page(s).

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Relevance to Community 15; Quality of Reporting/Research 15; Quality of Writing 14

PC23. Best Police/Court Series **Print pdf or online entry permitted

Entries should consist of a series of articles (max of 4) related to a police investigation or court story. Subject could be a homicide, cold case, feature historical crime etc, and must be community related. Judging will be based on community relevance, quality of reporting/research and quality of writing.

*****Entries in this category cannot be entered in the Best News/Feature Series category.**

Submit: PDF of a series of stories (max of 4) or url links to online articles. Include entire page(s).

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Relevance to Community 15; Quality of Reporting/Research 15; Quality of Writing 14

PC24. Best Guest/Freelance Column **Print pdf or online entry permitted

The single column must be locally written by a non-regular staff columnist, guest or freelancer who writes in less than 10% of publications in a year (6 per weekly paper; 1 per monthly paper). Column should cover a topic of community interest not normally covered by the paper in a column, perhaps written by someone with more expertise on the subject (ie. Doctor, veterinarian, racialized individual). Only one entry allowed per individual.

Submit: PDF of column as it appears in any one (1) issue in print or URL links to online column. Include entire page(s)

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Quality of Writing 16; Subject Matter/Interest to Community 16; Reader Appeal 13

PC25. Humour Columnist of the Year **Print pdf and/or online entry permitted

This category recognizes quality of writing, imagination and adept use of humour. Column must be locally written, non-syndicated and appear regularly. Only one entry allowed per individual. Each individual may include work from any publication they are published in. Entry must still be tagged to one individual newspaper.

Submit: PDF of column as it appears in any three (3) issues in print or URL links to online columns. Include entire page(s).

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Quality of Writing 16; Adept Use of Humour and Imagination 16; Reader Appeal 13

PC26. Columnist of the Year **Print pdf and/or online entry permitted

This category recognizes quality of writing, subject matter, imagination and display. Column must be locally written, non-syndicated and appear regularly. Only one entry allowed per individual. Each individual may include work from any publication they are published in. Entry must still be tagged to one individual newspaper.

Submit: PDF of column as it appears in any three (3) issues in print or URL links to online columns. Include entire page(s)

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Quality of Writing 16; Imagination 16; Reader Appeal 13

PC27. Reporter of the Year - Stephen Shaw Award **Print pdf and/or online entry permitted

*****Paid Webinar*****

Entries will consist of three stories showing true reporter initiative. Stories may cover a variety of topics including science, education, public health, business, etc. Judging will be based on local relevance, quality of writing and depth of research. A letter from the publisher or editor elaborating on the story behind the story is suggested but not required. Only one entry allowed per individual. Each individual may include work from any OCNA member publication in which they are published. Entry must still be tagged to one individual newspaper.

Submit: PDFs of three (3) stories in print or URL link to online articles. Include entire page(s).

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Paid Webinar: The Reporter of the Year will be offered the opportunity to host a webinar for OCNA members on an agreed upon editorial topic. Upon completion of that webinar, the Reporter of the Year will be paid \$250.

Judging Criteria: Local relevance 15; Quality of writing 15; Depth of Research 15

PC28. Best Feature Photo **Print pdf or online entry permitted

While the value of spectacular feature photos is recognized, human interest, originality, imagination, and quality of reproduction will also be considered. Photo must be taken by staff or regular freelancer. Technically altered images are permitted in this category. If the image has been technically altered, include original image with the submission.

Submit: PDF of a photo in print or URL link to online photo. Include entire page.

If more than one photo on page or url link, please confirm which photo to judge.

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: News, Feature or Sports Value 25; Impact 25; Originality/Forethought 20; Quality of Entry 15; Editorial Treatment 15

PC29. Best Photo Layout **Print pdf or online entry permitted

Individual photos, impact within the photo spread, effective cutlines, reader interest, originality and imagination will all be considered.

Submit: PDF of a photo layout in print or URL link to online photo layout. Include entire page(s).

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Layout & Design 16; Quality of Photography 15; Impact/Reader Interest 14; Originality/Imagination 14

PC30. Best Sports Photo **Print pdf or online entry permitted

Impact on readers, quality of the entry, and the sports value will be considered along with page design. Photo must be taken by staff or regular freelancer.

Submit: PDF of a photo in print or URL link to online photo. Include entire page.

If more than one photo on page or url link, please confirm which photo to judge.

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Impact 17; Quality of Entry 15; Sports Value 15

PC31. Best Spot News Photo **Print pdf or online entry permitted

The single picture must be of a news event for which no advance planning was possible. This might include events such as fires or accidents. While the value of spectacular news photos is recognized, impact on readers and quality of reproduction will also be considered. Photo must be taken by staff or regular freelancer.

Submit: PDF of a photo in print or URL link to online photo. Include entire page.

If more than one photo on page or url link, please confirm which photo to judge.

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: News Value 20; Impact 18; Quality of Entry 15

PC32. Best News Photo **Print pdf or online entry permitted

The single picture must be of a scheduled or unscheduled event where an opportunity exists for advanced planning and creative control. This might include news events such as press conferences or political photos, etc. While the value of spectacular news photos is recognized, impact on readers and quality of reproduction will also be considered. Photo must be taken by staff or regular freelancer.

Submit: PDF of a photo in print or URL link to online photo. Include entire page.

If more than one photo on page or url link, please confirm which photo to judge.

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: News Value 20; Impact 18; Quality of Entry 15

PC33. Most Creative Grip and Grin Photo **Print pdf or online entry permitted

We all have to take them and run them in our papers, but that doesn't mean they have to be boring. This category seeks to award the creativity and originality of a single photograph of a cheque presentation, ribbon cutting, etc. that goes beyond the ole line 'em up and shoot 'em.

Submit: PDF of a photo in print or URL to online photo. Include entire page.

If more than one photo on page or url link, please confirm which photo to judge.

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Impact 15; Creativity & Originality 20; Quality of Entry 10

PC34. Photographer of the Year ****Print pdf and/or online entry permitted*******Paid Webinar*****

This award honours an individual photographer, reporter/photographer, etc., either employed by the newspaper or who is a regular freelancer, for outstanding skills in a variety of shooting styles, commitment to community journalism and positive response from the community. A letter from the publisher or editor outlining the photographer's commitment to community journalism may be submitted but is not required. Only one entry allowed per individual. Each individual may include work from any OCNA member publication in which they are published. Entry must still be tagged to one individual newspaper.

Submit: PDF of tearsheets (full page as published) in print or URL link to online photos/articles. Include a jpeg of each photo.

Submit one photo (file named by photo type) from any **four** of the following five photography subjects: Spot News Photo, Sports Photo, Community Event Photo, Feature Photo, News Photo.

If more than one photo on page or URL link, please confirm which photo to judge.

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Paid Webinar: The Photographer of the Year will be offered the opportunity to host a webinar for OCNA members on an agreed upon photographic topic. Upon completion of that webinar, the Photographer of the Year will be paid \$250.

Judging Criteria: 1st Photo 15; 2nd Photo 15; 3rd Photo 15; 4th Photo 15; Community Commitment 15

PC35. Community Service ****Print pdf and/or online entry permitted*******CHANGED CRITERIA*****

Entry should consist of one project which extends beyond the normal community service mission of the newspaper. This could be an event, fundraising effort or campaign to make things better for the community. The presentation should convey to judges through PDFs of tearsheets, letters, pictures, urls and other descriptive accounts, the newspaper's activity in this community service. Judges will consider the relative importance of the project, depth of research and reporting on the project, effective use of photos, editorial appeal, advertising and newspaper involvement. A letter explaining the project is suggested but not required. For examples, please see the [2025 winners](#). (Scroll down to Category #PC35)

Submit: Supporting materials.

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Newspaper Involvement 16; Relative Importance of Project 15; Research/Reporting/Quality 13; Benefit to Community 13

PC36. Best Vertical Product ****Print pdf entry only**

Entries can be a single publication or regularly published stand-alone product that is separate from their community newspaper. The award recognizes the company's use of existing staff, current and new advertisers, expanded business opportunities, potential as revenue generator, quality editorial mix, and value to community. Letters from the publisher/editor explaining the product must be included. Entry must not be entered in Category PC39 - Special Section.

Submit: Pdf or link to pdf of vertical product and explanatory letter. (Hardcopies will no longer be accepted)

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Innovation/Creativity 16; Business fit/Profitability 15; Relevance to Community 12; Layout & Design 12

PC37. Best Front Page **Print pdf entry only

Entries will be judged on appearance, layout, headlines, content, writing style, quality and effectiveness of pictures, liveliness and interest. Entry can be tabloid or broadsheet layout.

Submit: PDF of entire front page (not entire paper) from any issue in specified time frame.

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Content/Quality of Writing 16; Reader Appeal 15; Layout & Design 15; Photography 14

PC38. Best Sports Section **Print pdf entry only

Entries will be judged on quality of writing, page design and photography, variety of local content, news, features, and column material.

Submit: PDFs of Sport Section as they appear in any two (2) issues. Must be at least two (2) pages published in chronological order to qualify.(e.g. Page 7 & 8, as opposed to sports stories scattered throughout like Page 5 and 8). An ad page may be published between the sports pages but must be included in the entry.

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Local content/News/Features/ Columns 16; Photography 14; Quality of Writing 14; Layout & Design 12

PC39. Special Section **Print pdf entry only

Judging will be based on originality of idea produced and sold by an advertising department, quality editorial content, effective use of photographs and advertising presentation. Aimed at generating volume sales, the section might be for a grand opening anniversary sale, or special occasion, etc. Section must be distributed within the newspaper. Entry must not be entered in Category PC36 – Best Vertical Product.

Submit: Pdf or link to pdf of special section. (Hardcopies will no longer be accepted)

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Advertising Content/Quality/Support 15; Quality Editorial Content 14; Originality/Creativity 13; Layout & Design 12

PC40. Best Feature/Unit Pages **Print pdf entry only

*****CHANGED CRITERIA*****

Entries should show an innovative approach to a traditional theme or development of a new theme and be aimed at generating volume sales. Topics could include holidays (Mother's Day, Valentine's Day), community events, grand openings, anniversary sales or special occasions. Judging will be based on originality of idea including advertising presentation, quality editorial content and effective use of photographs. Entries must be run-of-press sections. Layout can be two to four consecutive pages.

Submit: pdf of feature/unit (Members may not enter the same submission in the Special Section category.)

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Advertising Content/Quality 15; Quality Editorial Content 15; Originality/Creativity 15; Layout & Design 15

PC41. Best Creative Ad **Print pdf entry only

This award will be presented to the newspaper making the best use of artwork, art/graphic service and/or photographs in the design of a single (or series of up to three advertisement(s) for a customer during the contest period). Entries must have been created by a full or part-time staff member and can include original and/or computer generated graphics.

Submit: PDFs of entry. (maximum three of a series). Include entire page(s).

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Originality/Creativity 16; Visual impact 15; Ad Design 15

PC42. In-House Promotion **Print pdf and/or online entry permitted

The promotion of a newspaper's own business is, of course, very important. Much can be learned about a newspaper's advertising and production department by looking at the material they produce promoting themselves and their newspaper. This award will recognize the best advertisement promoting your newspaper, in print and/or online. Entry must be produced by the newspaper.

Submit: PDF of entry. Include entire page as published in print and/or online. If same promotion is used in print and online, submit 2 PDFs.

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Effective Newspaper Awareness 16; Originality/Creativity 13; Visual Impact 13; Ad Design 13

PC43. Local Retail Layout **Print pdf entry only

To be based on the submission of a layout created in-house by the newspaper, this award will recognize the advertisement produced for a business (i.e. grocery, automotive, clothing, etc.) by the advertising department of the newspaper. Company logos may be used in the ad.

Submit: PDF of entry. Include entire page.

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Originality/Creativity 16; Ad Design 15; Page Layout 12; Visual Appeal 12

PC44. Original Ad Idea **Print pdf entry only

This award will recognize the best idea produced by a newspaper's advertising staff during the current judging period for Demi/PonyTab or Tab/Broadsheet format.

Submit: PDF of entry. Include entire page.

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Creative/Idea 25; Ad Design/Layout 15; Impact 10

PC45. Best Use of Colour **Print pdf entry only

This award will recognize the best use of spot or process colour, in any single advertisement, produced in-house.

Submit: PDF of entry. Include entire page.

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Visual appeal 16; Originality/Creativity 14; Ad Design 13

PC46. Best Community Newspaper Website **Online entry

A website should be well designed, include valuable editorial content, innovative strategies and revenue generation through advertising, be easy to navigate and still demonstrate that it fulfills a community role. This award recognizes the best online newspaper service that does just that. This website may contain the content from a single newspaper or a related group of newspapers.

Submit: URL address. Must include username and password if required to view entire website. If judge cannot access at time of judging, entry will be disqualified.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Content 20; Structure & Navigation 10; Visual Design 20; Functionality 10; Interactivity 10; Overall Experience 20

PC47. Best Online Experience **Online entry

*****Changed Criteria*****

This award recognizes excellence in elevating a story beyond what can be done in print using digital tools available (including but not limited to video, podcasts, sound clips, photo galleries and/or social media). While the story or stories will be judged from their online versions, PDF copies of the printed paper may be included if they include online-specific elements such as QR codes, or augmented print.

Submit: URLs and/or PDFs of no more than four stories on a single topic or theme.

Must include username and password if required to view. If judge cannot access, entry will be disqualified. Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Quality of Reporting/Writing 20; Reader Experience 20; Value added to story 20; Creativity 10

Premier Categories - College/University Members

For examples of winning entries from previous years, view the [2025 Winners Page](#) or the [Awards Booklet Archive](#). To view individual winning entries, click on the winning image for that category.

New for 2026 – If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. This information will support ongoing discussions by the OCNA AI and BNC Committees. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

CU01. Student Feature Writing **Print pdf or online entry permitted

Entries must have appeared in the entrant's college/university newspaper or on the entrant's college/university website. Entries must be community or college/university feature articles. Judges will examine such areas as: use of language, quality of writing, indication of research/ sources (particularly high tech sources), good use of data. Each member newspaper may enter the work of up to three (3) different writers.

Submit: PDF of entry in print or URL link to online article. Include entire page(s).

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging criteria: Quality of Writing 16; Subject Matter (community related) 14; Research/Sources 12

CU02. Student News Writing **Print pdf or online entry permitted

Entries must have appeared in the entrant's college/university newspaper. Entries must be community or college/university news articles. Judges will examine such areas as: use of language, quality of writing, indication of research/ sources (particularly high tech sources), good use of data. Each member newspaper may enter the work of up to three (3) different writers.

Submit: PDF of entry in print or URL link to online article. Include entire page(s).

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging criteria: Quality of Writing 16; Subject Matter (community related) 14; Research/Sources 12

CU03. Student Editorial Writing **Print pdf or online entry permitted

Entries must have appeared in the entrant's college/university newspaper or on the entrant's college/university website. Entries should take a fearless editorial stand. Subject material should be community oriented. Quality of writing, subject matter and impact to community will be taken into consideration. Each member newspaper may enter the work of up to three (3) different writers.

Submit: PDF of entry in print or URL link to online article. Include entire page(s).

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Quality of Writing 20; Subject Matter/Impact to Community 15

CU04. Student Photography **Print pdf or online entry permitted

This award will be presented to the college/ university student who takes the best news/feature/ sports photo (single image, not photo spread) in their school newspaper or on their school newspaper website. While the value of spectacular news photos is recognized, human interest, originality, imagination, and quality of reproduction will also be considered. Each member newspaper may enter the work of up to three (3) different photographers.

Submit: PDF of entry in print or URL link to online entry. (only one photo will be judged. If submitting spread, please include in description which photo to judge). Include entire page as published.

Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging criteria: News, Feature or Sports Value 25; Impact 25; Originality/Forethought 20; Quality of Entry 15; Editorial Treatment 15

CU05. Best Student Online Experience **Online entry

*****New Category*****

This award recognizes excellence in elevating a story beyond what can be done in print using digital tools available (including but not limited to video, podcasts, sound clips, photo galleries and/or social media). While the story or stories will be judged from their online versions, PDF copies of the printed paper may be included if they include online-specific elements such as QR codes, or augmented print. Each member newspaper may enter the work of up to three (3) different writers.

Submit: URLs and/or PDFs of no more than four stories on a single topic or theme.

Must include username and password if required to view. If judge cannot access, entry will be disqualified. Entries submitted to be dated between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Quality of Reporting/Writing 20; Reader Experience 20; Value added to story 20; Creativity 10

CU06. Best College/University Newspaper Website ****Online entry**

This award recognizes the best online college/university newspaper service. A website should be well designed, include valuable and quality editorial content, a social media strategy, be easy to navigate and still demonstrate that it fulfills the college/university community role.

Submit: URL address. Must include username and password if required to view entire website. If judge cannot access at time of judging, entry will be disqualified.

Note: If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

Judging Criteria: Design 20; Editorial Content 20; Social Media 20; Community Involvement 20; Use of Technology 20