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2012 Ancil Payne Awards for Ethics in Journalism Winners Announced

*– Two freelance journalists and the Yancey County News
are recipients of 13th annual award –*

Eugene, Oregon (16 April 2012) – Freelance journalists Matthew LaPlante and Rick Egan will share a 2012 [Ancil Payne Award for Ethics in Journalism](#) for their efforts to document [the ritual killing of “cursed” children in Ethiopia’s South Omo River Valley](#). A 2012 Ancil Payne Award also goes to the [Yancey County News](#), a weekly newspaper in rural Burnsville, North Carolina which, in 15 months of operation, has established itself as a check on corrupt local law enforcement.

When Egan and LaPlante chose to report on the ritual killing of *mingi*, or “cursed,” children in Ethiopia – a story that had previously been unnoticed by world media – they first approached their employer, the *Salt Lake Tribune*, for funding but were turned down. Without employer support, fellowships were unavailable. The two cashed in vacation days, tapped savings, and LaPlante even quit his job at the paper, to pursue the story, which was eventually published by CNN.

Broaching a sensitive subject through a translator, discovering illegal adoptions, and the potential for being present when a child was killed were only a few of the ethical challenges the reporters contemplated before they commenced their reporting. In addition to their willingness to risk their economic security, the judges applauded Egan and LaPlante for their careful consideration of the ethical issues in advance.

“Having resolved their ethical dilemmas in advance of leaving the U.S., these journalists were able to report this tragic story in a way that was direct and very effective,” the judges said.

The judges called the work of Jonathan and Susan Austin, who started the *Yancey County News* in Burnsville, North Carolina – the county seat of Yancey County, population 17,700 – in 2011 after Jonathan’s nearly 30-year journalism career, “classic public interest journalism at great personal and economic risk.” Shortly after it began publication, the paper reported a state investigation into elections fraud involving the sheriff’s department that other local papers had ignored. Also in 2011, the paper reported that the deputy sheriff, who many revered for his tough-on-crime attitude, was pawning county-owned firearms for personal gain.

“To take on the powers that be in a rural community where citizens are afraid to speak out against local law enforcement is very brave,” the judges said. “To stake your livelihood and personal safety on it is above and beyond. This is an extraordinary example of serving the public good.”

“While these two awards are for situations that might seem worlds apart, the pressure on these journalists was very similar,” said Tim Gleason, Edwin L. Artzt Dean of the School of Journalism and Communication and chair of the judging panel. “Risking one’s economic and personal security in pursuit of the public interest is both exceptional and

courageous. LaPlante, Egan and the Austins all chose on their own volition to take great risks in the pursuit of truth and justice. This kind of journalism reflects the true spirit of the Ancil Payne Award.”

Judges for the 2012 Ancil Payne Awards for Ethics in Journalism were:

- Scott Carney, investigative journalist and *Wired* Contributing Editor
- Alicia C. Shepard, former National Public Radio Ombudsman
- Professor Tom Bivins, John L. Hulteng Chair of Media Ethics, University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication
- Peter Bhatia, Editor and Vice President, *The Oregonian*
- Joann Byrd, retired Editorial Page Editor, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*
- Tim Gleason, Edwin L. Artzt Dean and Professor, University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication (Chair)
- Peggy Kuhr, Dean, The University of Montana School of Journalism
- Mark Zusman, Editor, *Willamette Week*

The 13th annual *Ancil Payne Awards for Ethics in Journalism* will be presented on Thursday, May 17 at 12:00 p.m. during a luncheon on the University of Oregon campus in Eugene, OR. A panel discussion among the winners will follow. Online registration opens April 23 at journalism.uoregon.edu/reg.

More information about the Ancil Payne Awards for Ethics in Journalism, including a list of past winners, is available at payneawards.uoregon.edu.

About the Ancil Payne Awards for Ethics in Journalism

Ancil Payne, a legend in Seattle broadcasting, established the Payne Awards at the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication in 1999 “to honor the journalist of integrity and character who reports with insight and clarity in the face of political or economic pressures and to reward performance that inspires public trust in the media.” Payne, who died in October 2004, was former CEO of KING Broadcasting; under his leadership, the company developed a national reputation for its commitment to ethical journalism.

About the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication

The [University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication](http://journalism.uoregon.edu) (SOJC) produces

outstanding writers, editors, digital media makers, strategists, and critical thinkers by providing a program rich in ethics, innovation, and social responsibility. Students hone their skills while participating in award-winning student media such as Flux, Mosaic, and Oregon News, and more than 10 student groups, including Allen Hall Advertising, Allen Hall Public Relations and the National Broadcasters Association. In addition to learning from an accomplished and diverse faculty, students have unparalleled opportunities to network and learn from experienced industry professionals. The SOJC hosts the annual Journalists- and Executives-in-Residence programs, as well annual events including the Ancil Payne Awards for Ethics in Journalism, the Hulteng Conversations in Ethics, and the annual Johnston and Ruhl Lectures. The school counts nine Pulitzer Prize winners among its more than 9,000 graduates. journalism.uoregon.edu

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