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Legion Announces 2013 Recipients of Top Journalism Award

INDIANAPOLIS (May 10, 2013) – A Hawaii television station, America’s newspaper and a war correspondent’s video on the website of the nation’s “newspaper of record,” will receive The American Legion’s Fourth Estate Award during the organization’s 95th National Convention in Houston, Texas, on August 29.

The Fourth Estate Award has been presented annually by The American Legion since 1958 for outstanding achievement in the field of journalism. Nominations were considered in three categories: print, broadcast, and new media (Internet).

Taking top honor in the print category for a second time was USA TODAY. A fourteen-month investigation of more than 460 forgotten lead factory sites, including tests of more than 1,000 samples of soil in 21 neighborhoods by reporters Alison Young and Peter Eisler, found significant lead poisoning risks. Failures by the EPA and state regulators had left thousands of families across the country in harm’s way for more than a decade. The series, Ghost Factories, drew calls for action from seven U.S. senators and has led the EPA to re-examine health risks at all 464 sites nationwide. More than a dozen states have launched their own investigations and several sites have already been targeted for cleanup.

Hawaii’s KITV-TV brought closure to a long and dark phase of history with the production of a one hour documentary on the life of Marianne Cope, just canonized by the Vatican for her work on the Kalaupapa peninsula in the mid-1800s. Of the more than 8,000 people torn from families and left to die in the leprosy settlement of Kalawao and Kalaupapa, only 18 remain today. With the disease no longer a threat, these elderly and frail patients traveled to Rome for the canonization. For them, her sainthood validated that their suffering and sacrifice have not been in vain. KITV’s Pamela Young, Rex Von Armswaldt and Gary Sprinkle poignantly closed out a dark phase of history with a story of hope, faith and courage.

In the Internet (new media) category, freelance war correspondent Alex Quade won her second consecutive Fourth Estate Award for her video report, “Chinook Down,” for the New York Times website. Her short documentary revealed the full story and human toll behind a WikiLeaks headline of a Chinook helicopter shot down by a surface-to-air missile in Afghanistan, killing all onboard. Quade was supposed to be on that helicopter. She survived to report firsthand on the firefight and recovery. For five years, she gathered material on the attack, interviewing pilots who provided air support to rescue teams on the ground, obtaining previously unreleased Pentagon documents via Freedom of Information Act appeals, and video. The result of Alex Quade’s investigation was a 10-minute video for the New York Times that brought closure to the families; as one soldier who had long suffered from PTSD told her, “You helped me come home from the war.”

“These outstanding journalists have gone above and beyond the works of their peers; Each of them has exhibited the highest commitment to excellence in the research, writing and production of masterful reports that have truly made a difference for the better in our world,” said James E. Koutz, national commander of the 2.4 million member American Legion.
“These journalists are among the best of the best,” he said. “I will be honored to present each of them with our highest recognition of journalistic accomplishment, The American Legion Fourth Estate Award.”

Previous winners of the award include Dateline NBC, C-SPAN, United Press International, the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review, the Indianapolis Star, the Detroit News, Fortune Magazine, ABC News, and Life Magazine, among others.

The nation’s largest wartime veterans organization, The American Legion was founded in 1919 on the four pillars of a strong national security, veterans affairs, Americanism, and patriotic youth programs. Legionnaires work for the betterment of their communities through nearly 14,000 posts across the nation.

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