From: March, Joseph H.
To: Public Relations Division
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Subject: USA TODAY Wins The American Legion's Top Journalism Award

Attachments:

USA TODAY Wins The American Legion's Top Journalism Award

INDIANAPOLIS (April 2, 2009) - USA TODAY has been selected to receive The American Legion's Fourth Estate Award for the series, "The Smokestack Effect: Toxic air and America's schools."

The Fourth Estate Award is presented annually by The American Legion for outstanding achievement in the field of journalism.

"Reporters Blake Morrison and Brad Heath demonstrated the power of ambitious, national reporting and a commitment to the public good that unveiled serious health hazards outside hundreds of schools in large cities and in small towns across the nation," said David K. Rehbein, national commander of The American Legion. "Working with more than 30 reporters and others from Johns Hopkins University and the University of Maryland, they joined teams sent to 95 schools in 30 states where they used pumps, metals filters and other equipment taking snapshot samples of the air outside schools. They found toxic chemicals that can aggravate asthma, trigger learning disabilities and cause cancer decades later."

Environmental Health News, a daily publication of Environmental Health Sciences, a non-profit organization founded in 2002, called the project "simply stunning in its scope and breadth…It's an extraordinary example of how to combine scientific research and database analysis with investigative reporting to uncover an important public health problem, hitherto largely ignored."

Morrison and Heath compiled a database that enabled users to look up any school in the country and empowered parents to learn about the types and sources of chemicals that might

touch their child's school. With it, they identified thousands of schools where the air outside

appeared to be at least twice as toxic as air in the nearby neighborhoods, and in some cases, up to 10 times worse.

"This extensive journalistic effort reflected outstanding professionalism, exhaustive research, unmitigated commitment and dedication that resulted in sweeping and unprecedented action from coast to coast, on the local, state, and national levels," Rehbein said. "Thanks to their work, and the support and encouragement of USA TODAY's executive leadership, America's children have been well served. Journalism does not get any better than that."

"We're humbled by this honor and gratified that our series has made such a difference in communities across the nation," said Executive Editor John Hillkirk. "We're proud that our work has empowered parents, school officials and others to learn more about the impact of industrial pollution on children. And the efforts of Blake and Brad, their editor Linda Mathews, and dozens of others at USA TODAY and Gannett, Johns Hopkins University, the University of Maryland and the University of Massachusetts Amherst made this possible."

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

The award will be presented to Messrs. Morrison and Heath during the 91st National Convention of The American Legion in Louisville, Ky. on Aug. 27, 2009. The series may be viewed at: <http://smokestack.usatoday.com>.

With a membership of 2.6-million wartime veterans, 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 more than 14,000 posts across the nation.

Media contacts: Craig Roberts, (202) 263-2982, Cell (202) 406-0887 or Joe March, (317) 630-1253; Cell (317) 748-1926.