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Press release: AVBOB FCJ Excellence Awards winners for 2023 announced

The **AVBOB** FCJ Excellence Awards, hosted by the Forum of Community Journalists NPC (FCJ), is a well-known event in the media industry with exciting new categories introduced in this year's competition and entries exceeding 500.

This year, participants showcased their exemplary work across various categories, with front pages, the newly introduced back pages category, free newspaper of the year, and compelling human-interest reportage dominating the entries.

The dedication and talent displayed by community journalists in various writing and photography categories underscore the vibrancy and diversity of community journalism in South Africa.

The adjudication process was overseen by André Gouws.

Winners were announced at a prize-giving dinner at @Sandton Hotel on August 2 with top honours for Journalist of the Year going to Daleen Naudé from Middelburg Observer, Highvelder's Wayne van der Walt, for the second year in a row, took the Photographer of the Year title and this year's recipient of the Alet Roux Trophy for Most Promising Journalist went to Matthew Handley, also from Middelburg Observer.

AVBOB, through its financial investment in the FCJ and industry and the ongoing support from Caxton and Media24 allowed the FCJ to further enrich its offering and support to community journalists.

Directors

Ben Burger – Executive Director, Marietta Lombard – Deputy Executive Director,
Wayne van der Walt, Hugo Redelinghuys, Roelien D'Amico, Dustin Wetdewich, Lientjie Mentz
Ronelle Ramsamy (co-opted).

About the FCJ:

The FCJ (Forum of Community Journalists) is an independent, voluntary non-profit company striving to promote and express the interests of all journalists employed on a permanent or freelance basis at regional community newspapers and online community publications in South Africa.

The ongoing support of these sponsors allows the FCJ to enrich the competition and grow the competition and this year saw the introduction of the best vernacular writing category with Bulelani Matshoba from Pondoland Times and Unathi Obose from City Vision each receiving Certificates of Merit.

In his address, **AVBOB** CEO, Carl van der Riet, said “Our support for these **AVBOB** FCJ Excellence Awards stems from a shared purpose: we both believe in the power of community. We are deeply rooted in the communities we serve, and we see community journalism as a vital source of information and empowerment.”

“As a business, we stand ready to continue our support to community media - as one of the platforms to reach communities - in order to preserve a vibrant, diverse and independent press. Tonight, we are celebrating brave and exceptional journalism! To all the nominees and winners, a heartfelt congratulations. The stories you tell matter, your voices matter, and your impact is undeniable.”

The FCJ also hosted its national seminar prior to the gala dinner with guest speakers Mondli Makhanya, editor-in-chief of City Press and political commentator, and Willem Kempen and Cornia Pretorius spoke about Artificial Intelligence and Community Journalism.

Winners:

Journalist of the Year

Third: Michelle Pienaar (George Herald)
Second: Dave Savides (Zululand Observer)
WINNER: Daleen Naudé (Middelburg Observer)

Photographer of the Year

Third: Gypseenia Lion (Bloemfontein Courant)
Second: Ettienne van Rensburg (Vaalweekblad)
WINNER: Wayne van der Walt (Highvelder)

Alet Roux Award for Upcoming Journalist of the Year

WINNER: Matthew Handley (Middelburg Observer)

Photography

General

Third place: Carina Roux (TygerBurger)
Second place: Gypseenia Lion (Bloemfontein Courant)
WINNER: Wayne van der Walt (Highvelder)

News

Third: Wayne van der Walt (Highvelder)
Second: Ettienne van Rensburg (Vaalweekblad)
WINNER: Jamey Gordon (DistrictMail & Helderberg Gazette)

Sport

Third: Ettienne van Rensburg (Vaalweekblad)
Second: Rashied Isaacs (People's Post)

WINNER: Wayne van der Walt (Highvelder)

Writing Categories

Editorial Comment & Columns

Third: Nielen de Klerk (TygerBurger)

Second: Lise Beyers (Paarl Post)

WINNER: Dave Savides (Zululand Observer)

Digital Reporting

Third: Christiaan Cloete (Vaalweekblad / Ster North)

Second: Samantha Lee-Jacobs (People's Post)

WINNER: Michelle Pienaar (George Herald)

Headlines

Third: Liezl Scheepers (Parys Gazette)

Second: Samantha Lee-Jacobs (People's Post)

WINNER: Daleen Naudé (Middelburg Observer)

Human Interest

Third: Jani de Beer (Benoni City Times)

Second: Wouter Pienaar (Potchefstroom Herald)

WINNER: Esmé Erasmus (TygerBurger)

Hard News

Third: Michelle Pienaar

Second: Gerhard Rheeder

WINNER: Dave Savides

Investigative reporting

Third: Christiaan Cloete (Vaalweekblad / Ster North)

Second: Daleen Naudé (Middelburg Observer)

WINNER: Anton Van Zyl (Limpopo Mirror & Zoutpansberger)

Sport

Third: Mark Kinnear (Lowvelder)

Second: Ettienne van Rensburg (Vaalweekblad)

WINNER: Hugo Redelinghuys (Suid-Kaap Forum)

Best Front Page

Third: Bedfordview and Edenvale News

Second: TygerBurger Table View

WINNER: City Vision

Best Back Page

Third: Zululand Observer

Second: Lowvelder

WINNER: George Herald

Free Newspaper of the Year

Third: TygerBurger Milnerton

Second: Roodepoort Northsider
WINNER: NoordkaapBulletin

Paid Newspaper of the Year

Third: Suid-Kaap Forum
Second: Lowvelder
WINNER: Zululand Observer

The panel of judges, led by Gouws, comprised seasoned industry professionals, including Bruce Stephenson, Jacolette Kloppers, Alé Steyn, Tobie van den Bergh, Elsabe Retief, Kyle Cowan, Buks Viljoen, Jana Smit, Dewet Potgieter, Willem Kempen, Johann Maarman, Mercy Kannemeyer, Marlene Malan, Pieter Delpport, Virginia Keppler-Young, Colin Hoffman, Johann Gresse, Cornia Pretorius, Yolanda van der Stoep, Mlungizi Louw, and Roger Sedres.

Ends.