

The AVBOB FCJ Excellence Awards – 2025

Presented by the Forum of Community Journalists NPC



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Record number of entries received for 2025 awards cycle

CAPE TOWN, 1 JUNE 2026 — The Board of Directors of the Forum of Community Journalists (FCJ) expresses its sincere gratitude to the editors, journalists and photographers from community newsrooms across South Africa whose enthusiastic participation has resulted in yet another record-breaking number of entries for this year's AVBOB FCJ Excellence Awards.

Judges' convener Dr André Gouws confirmed that a total of 599 individual entries were received. Of these, 34 entries were unfortunately disqualified on procedural grounds and could not be considered for adjudication.

The categories that attracted the highest volumes of entries were Hard News — including investigative reportage (78 entries), Front Pages (76 entries) and Human Interest (63 entries). Two newly introduced categories also drew notable interest: Municipal/Local Government Reporting received 36 entries, while the Story of the Year category attracted 22 entries.

This year's judging panel comprises highly regarded industry experts, consistent with the standard set in previous years. Dr Gouws confirmed that three adjudicators have been assigned to each category. The panel will dedicate the next four weeks to a thorough and meticulous review of every entry, with the aim of ensuring that the most deserving work in the community journalism sector receives the recognition it merits.

The AVBOB FCJ Excellence Awards ceremony will be held in Pretoria on **21 August**, coinciding with the FCJ's national seminar, which will take place on the same day. A full list of adjudicators is appended hereto.

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Ben Burger (Executive Director); Marietta Lombard (Deputy Executive Director), Hugo Redelinghuys, Roelien D'Amico, Dustin Wetdewich, Lientjie Mentz, Ronelle Ramsamy, Wayne van der Walt, Quan Dambuza

The FCJ (Forum of Community Journalists) is an independent, voluntary non-profit company dedicated to supporting and advancing the community journalism sector in South Africa. The FCJ champions the vital role that community newspapers play in informing local audiences and holding public institutions accountable. For more information, visit www.fcjonline.co.za.

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JUDGES' PROFILES



Dr André Gouws (convenor of judging panel) is a senior lecturer in the Department of Arts and Cultural Sciences at Akademia in Centurion and an extraordinary researcher in the Department of Journalism at Stellenbosch University. He holds an MA in Journalism and Media Studies (with distinction) from Rhodes University and a PhD in Journalism from Stellenbosch University. Gouws conducts research on digital media, peripheral journalism and journalism education. Since 2023 he has been the public representative for the Forum of Community Journalists (FCJ) in the Press Council of South Africa. He has served as an executive member of SACOMM, the South African Communications Association. He has more than two decades' experience in newsrooms, including at *Beeld* in Johannesburg and *Die Burger* in Cape Town.

Dr Alé Steyn has been the Head of Department for Languages and Cultural Sciences at Akademia since 2020. She obtained her master's and doctoral degrees in Communication Studies (specialising in Journalism) at North-West University, and completed her honours and master's degrees in English Literature at the University of the Free State and the University of Cape Town respectively. Steyn began her career in 2007 at *Volksblad* in Bloemfontein and has more than 10 years' experience at Media24 and, in a freelance capacity, as a sub-editor, page-layout artist, journalist and news and content editor, among others. She was previously a senior lecturer in Journalism and Corporate Communications at the North-West University's Potchefstroom Campus. Steyn's research has been presented at local and international conferences, and she has delivered several guest lectures at universities abroad.



Chantel Erfort Manuel is a community-media specialist with 24 years' experience in the field, 17 years of which she worked in senior media management. She has a master's degree in journalism from Stellenbosch University, where she is currently a PhD candidate and part-time lecturer in the Journalism Honours programme. Manuel also teaches yoga, with a special focus on stress management and trauma-informed practice, and mindful living.

Elaine Krige is a lecturer in Languages and Cultural Sciences at Akademia and obtained a BA in Journalism from the University of Pretoria as well as a master's degree in the same discipline from Stellenbosch University. She worked for 10 years as a journalist for publications, including *Beeld* and *Rapport*, before being appointed news editor of Maroela Media in 2019. During her six years there Krige focused particularly on investigative and in-depth reporting. She joined Akademia in January 2026 to help train future journalists.



Elsabé Retief is an old girl of Groote Schuur High School in Newlands, Cape Town. She obtained her BA in English and Afrikaans-Dutch in 1968, and her BA Hons in Afrikaans Linguistics in 1969. In 1970 Retief studied art at the Accademia dei Belli Arti in Florence, Italy. She then worked for three years at CF Albertyn publishers as copy-editor on *The Encyclopaedia of the World*. Between raising three sons, Retief did everything from restaurant management to proof-reading, until she joined Eikestadnuus in 1991. She was a journalist until 2001, afterwards editor until 2012, and then head of the editorial hub of Boland Media. Retief retired in 2013 and is currently a freelance sub-editor (and very proud granny).



Fanie Heyns obtained an honours degree in journalism and a master's degree in theology at Stellenbosch University. He worked at Die Burger as a reporter from 1986 to 2003, the last 10 years in the sports desk. Since 2003 Heyns has been a media consultant and freelance journalist. He has been working as a freelance journalist for Rapport since 2022.

Heindrich Wyngaard has more than three decades of journalistic experience in print media, radio, television and online. In 2023 he was awarded a Silwerskerm TV Award for Best Presenter of a Talk Show. Wyngaard currently heads the civil-rights organisation Kaapse Forum, which focuses on community development. Most recently he launched the online community news platform Mondstuk Media.



Ivor Price is the co-founder and Managing Director of Food For Mzansi Group, one of Africa's most dynamic digital media ventures. He holds a master's in Journalism Innovation and Leadership from the University of Lancashire. Price began his career early, publishing professionally at just 14 years old in South African newspapers.

Other earlier career highlights include serving as Media24's London-based foreign correspondent and publishing leading community newspapers for the company.

Price is a four-time ATKV Mediaveertjie Award winner, recognised for excellence in television, radio, and column writing. He is also the author of two books and a passionate advocate for journalism that inspires action, uplifts communities, and reshapes narratives across Africa.

Jóhann Thormählen is a versatile content creator with 15+ years' experience in fields such as journalism, strategic communications, content creation, broadcast commentary, and sports reporting. As a multiple award winner, including Vodacom Journalist of the Year, he crafts compelling stories, news and features for print, digital, and broadcast platforms, including multimedia content. Thormählen is a senior sport reporter at Netwerk24.



Kyle Cowan is a specialist investigative reporter at *News24* and two-time winner of the prestigious Taco Kuiper Award for Investigative Journalism, a published author and a pre-eminent voice on state capture in South Africa. He started his journalism career at the community newspaper Zululand Observer in KZN. (Photo: News24)

Dr Marenet Jordaan is the chair of the Department of Journalism at Stellenbosch University. She is also a Journalism Studies researcher with more than a decade of teaching experience in journalism-related subjects. Before starting her career in higher education Jordaan worked as a journalist. She also does academic research on journalism and the media. Currently Jordaan is the South African lead researcher on the international comparative Worlds of Journalism Study.



Marietjie Gericke is an award-winning journalist who dedicated 42½ years to Media24 before retiring more than a year ago. She served as editor of *Ons Stad* community newspaper in Bloemfontein, and for many years afterwards reported for *Volksblad* on general news, with a strong focus on municipal affairs and politics. Gericke later became a specialist journalist - investigative, municipal and politics - for Netwerk24. She has a master's degree in journalism from the University of the Free State, with a dissertation on the social responsibility of community newspapers. Gericke has received numerous awards for her journalistic excellence, including Journalist of the Year in 1992 at the FCJ Excellence Awards; Vodacom regional winner for investigative journalism in 2004 and Vodacom Journalist of the Year: regional winner for financial/economic news in 2016.

Marlene Malan, a qualified translator, worked for many years as a journalist at *TygerBurger*, *Die Burger* and *Rapport*, afterwards 10 years as a freelance journalist and language editor. In 2020 she started her own publishing house, Turksvy Publikasies, which now already has about 80 books to its name.



Mercy Kannemeyer is a writer, director, filmmaker and lecturer at the University of Johannesburg. She has received, among other awards, a Koker Award from the Afrikaanse Taalraad (Afrikaans Language Council) for her contribution to Afrikaans as well as a Rector's Award for Culture from Stellenbosch University. Mercy is also currently the chairperson of PEN Afrikaans.

Mlungisi Louw is a seasoned photographer who works for Netwerk24 in Bloemfontein.
(Photo: Netwerk24)



Owen Kock is a former rugby writer, news editor and sports editor for, among others, SABC, Media24 (*Die Burger*, *Volksblad*, *Rapport* and *Son*) and OFM (Central Media Group). In his days as a rugby writer he wrote about the Griquas, Boland, WP, SWD Eagles, Griffons, Cheetahs and Springboks. Kock also covered school sport in the Free State. He was involved in the launch of the SABC radio station XK-FM (for the Khu and Khwe at Schmidtsdrift in the Northern Cape. It now broadcasts from Platfontein outside Kimberley.). Apart from rugby (first on radio and later for newspaper) his other great passions are High Court, crime and agricultural reporting.

Pieter Delpont is a seasoned media professional with 35 years' experience across print and community journalism in South Africa. He has worked in reporting, sub-editing, and senior editorial roles at *Volksblad*, *Beeld*, *Landbouweekblad* and *Bloemfontein Courant* and he has managed his own newspaper, *Zoom*, for four years.

Delpont also served as media liaison officer for the Central University of Technology in Bloemfontein and as a director of the Forum of Community Journalists. After three decades in newsrooms he transitioned into real estate as an estate agent. Outside work Delpont is passionate about community upliftment; he founded the Heidedaller of the Year Awards and the Heidedal Cultural Market in the community where he grew up and still lives.



Sibongile Maputi is Principal Communications Officer of Parliament. He has a master's degree in journalism and specialised in investigative journalism. Born in 1976 in Cape Town to poor working parents from the Eastern Cape rural town of Middeldrift, Maputi has written 20 isiXhosa novels, two poetry anthologies and one folklore title. He was shortlisted for Jacana Media's Sol Plaatje EU poetry award; his poem "Nkandla", also translated into English, is featured in the 2017 2nd Annual Poetry Anthology.

Simonéh de Bruin has 30 years' journalism experience in community media specifically and is former editor of Cape Community Media, a stable of 13 titles covering news from communities across the Cape Peninsula, the Helderberg, the False Bay coast, the Atlantic seaboard, the Cape Flats and the townships. She is a freelance journalist and believes journalism at its core is about people and integrity, and story-telling and reporting must be rooted in providing context and revealing deeper truths.





Virginia Keppler-Young is a South African communications leader and senior journalist with more than 30 years' experience. Her career was founded at the anti-apartheid newspaper *Vrye Weekblad* during South Africa's transition to democracy, a period, she says, when her love affair with the media was at its height. Keppler-Young served as Bureau Chief of *The Citizen*, News Editor of *Beeld/Netwerk24* and Assistant Editor of *Sondag*. As a Senior In-Depth Crime Reporter for *Beeld*, Keppler-Young also held key journalistic roles at *Rapport* and *Pretoria News*. She headed national media relations and political communications as National Media Liaison. Beyond print

Keppler-Young directed communications and stakeholder management for the City of Johannesburg. She holds a B.Tech Degree in Journalism from the Tshwane University of Technology.

Willem Kempen is an entrepreneur and media practitioner who has worked for titles including *Beeld*, *Finweek*, *Vrye Weekblad* and, more recently, *Binne+Land*. He has three children with his wife, former journalist and now academic Cornia Pretorius, and lives in Potchefstroom.



Yolanda van der Stoep has more than 21 years' experience in the community-newspaper industry and has been named Best Sports Journalist at the FCJ Excellence Awards. During her time in journalism, she developed a love for photography and decided 20 years ago to start freelancing permanently while also doing some publicity work. She was the official media photographer for the Miss South Africa pageant from 2015 to 2024. Some of Van der Stoep's most memorable moments as a photographer include capturing some of the events around the launch of Virgin Mobile in SA with Sir Richard Branson, covering the homecoming tours of two of South Africa's

Miss Universe winners, Demi-Leigh Tebow and Zozibini Tunzi and the visits of sports stars such as Mike Tyson, Floyd Mayweather Jr and Lennox Lewis.

Zenande Maqubela is a former multimedia journalist with 17 years' experience across print and digital media in the Eastern Cape. She is a skilled copy-desk editor, sub-editor, layout designer, photographer and reporter, fluent in isiXhosa and English. From 2015 to 2023 she served as Copy Desk Editor at *Isolezwe LesiXhosa* in East London. She also worked at the *Daily Dispatch* and *The Herald* and holds a B.Tech in Journalism from Walter Sisulu University.

