

# Post-Dispatch wins Scripps Howard award for Ferguson coverage

The Scripps Howard Foundation has awarded its first place national breaking news award for 2014 to the staff of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch for coverage of the shooting death of Michael Brown in Ferguson and the chaotic events that followed.

“A news organization is never tested more thoroughly than when a major story breaks in its backyard,” the contest judges said. “The Post-Dispatch was tested by a story that was fluid, emotional, important and not easily told with clarity and balance. It passed this test with textbook execution.”

The Cincinnati-based foundation announced the awards and finalists Tuesday. The contest entries were reviewed by industry experts who studied them during two days of judging at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies in St. Petersburg, Fla.

Post-Dispatch entries for editorial writing and photojournalism, both focusing on Ferguson events, were finalists in the Scripps Howard competition. They were: “Lessons from Ferguson,” editorials by Tony Messenger and Kevin Horrigan and a portfolio of photos by Robert Cohen.

Brown, an 18-year-old unarmed black man, was shot and killed by Darren Wilson, a white Ferguson police officer on Aug. 9 following an altercation on a city street. A St. Louis County grand jury declined to indict Wilson last November, and a Justice Department report released earlier this month concluded that Wilson had been justified in shooting.

The circumstances surrounding Brown’s death and the grand

jury's decision led to months of protest, sporadic violence and property destruction. News organizations from throughout the country converged on what quickly became a national story. The incident prompted an examination of police practices, racial disparities in law enforcement employment and injustice in the operations of municipal courts.

The judges who reviewed the breaking stories for the Scripps Howard contest said the Post-Dispatch editors recognized the implications of the story from the first minute they learned of the shooting. "Using every resource at its disposal, the Post-Dispatch began reporting the story and telling it, first on social media and by morning in print," the judges said. "Its reporters and photographers stayed on the streets, with apparent inexhaustible commitment. And its editors and layout team pulled together the results in vivid and compelling packages on day one, day two and beyond."

The newspaper's reporting staff was sometimes exposed to physical violence in carrying out their assignments. Once about 20 people picketed the Post-Dispatch claiming it was biased against protestors. The newspaper scored news beats in its coverage such as the official autopsy of Michael Brown and surveillance video of Darren Wilson leaving the Ferguson police station after the shooting.

The award carries with it a trophy and \$10,000. The other finalists in the breaking news category included the Everett, (Wash.) Daily Herald for its coverage of a mudslide that crushed a rural neighborhood killing 43 people, and the CBS Evening News' reporting from Cuba following the surprise announcement of re-established relations with the United States.

The Scripps Howard Foundation, established in 1953, is the charitable arm of E.W. Scripps Company, which owns television stations and other media outlets throughout the country. Recipients of the journalism awards will be honored in Denver

on May 21.