

Two SIUC graduates make Editor & Publisher list of inspiring young journalists

Photojournalist Tiffany Blanchette was standing with a family after their house had burned down just east of Kankakee, IL when the family's lost cat appeared. Blanchette captured the touching scene with her camera.



Kankakee couple Valerie Steele and Gerald Levesque embrace their pet cat, Tigger, outside their destroyed home east of Kankakee on May 4, 2021. Levesque's quick actions saved Steele, his son and all their pets from the total loss house fire. Photo courtesy of Tiffany Blanchette/Daily Journal
For Blanchette, 33, this was a particularly rewarding moment in her early career as a photojournalist. Another such moment was when a Bradley, Illinois, police officer, Sgt. Marlene Rittmanic, was [killed](#) and her partner critically injured while

responding to a call about a barking dog at a Bourbonnais hotel in 2021.

Blanchette covered this story from the first 911 scanner call in the middle of the night and as the national news outlets showed up for the funeral.

Blanchette was recently featured in [Editor and Publisher's annual 25 Under 35 Salute](#). Southern Illinois University Carbondale, had two alumni, Blanchette and Travis Lott, listed. Others in the Midwest included a Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University, Lizzie Schiffman Tufano, and a Loyola University Chicago alumna, Alicia Ramirez.

Blanchette edits photos for [The Daily Journal](#) in Kankakee, Illinois, south of Chicago. As an SIUC photojournalism alumna, she appreciated the instruction from Professor Phil Greer in a basic photojournalism elective.

She started as a reporter at the Daily Egyptian, the campus newspaper, rising the ranks to photo editor and editor-in-chief. "SIU was an amazing launch pad in terms of learning the ropes of journalism and also finding a passion for it," she said. A photographer in Kankakee reached out to her after she graduated, inviting her to be an intern at the Daily Journal. She was eventually promoted to photo editor.

In Southern Illinois, 31-year-old Travis Lott reports for the County Journal, which covers Jackson, Randolph and Perry counties. He writes stories ranging from pieces about murder cases to articles about fourth-grade classes collecting Valentine's Day cards. Lott developed his multimedia skills at his media outlet, serving as a jack-of-all-trades at an outlet with only three writers covering more than 20 communities.

"I carry my camera bag with me; I shoot photos and write news simultaneously at all times. We all have to have access to the Facebook page and continue providing updates on Facebook and

Twitter. We shoot video with our DSLR's, with our phones. Every single one of us has to do a little bit of everything."

He was a journalism and philosophy double major at SIUC. His investigative journalism professor, the late Bill Recktenwald, helped Lott land his first journalism job. "The biggest piece of advice I got from him [Recktenwald] that I still use in every single interview is the final question, is there anything else?" Recktenwald told students about the time he was interviewing a coroner about a death. When he asked is there anything else, the coroner disclosed that he found a note in the stomach of the person; it was a suicide note that changed the story.

Other journalists between the coasts who were named to the list include:

- Ashley Fenner, 31, Email Newsletter Manager for Lee Enterprises
- Ashton Pittman, 33, News Editor, Mississippi Free Press
- Kolton Rutherford, 25, Senior Reporter, Log Cabin Democrat
- Lizzie Schiffman Tufano, 34, Vice President of Revenue, Block Club Chicago
- Maddie Thomas, 31, Director of Strategic Operations, Local Media Consortium
- Emily Ward, 35, Events Director, Georges Media Group (parent company of The Advocate, The Times-Picayune, NOLA.com and The Acadiana Advocate)

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