

Gateway Journalism Review celebrates 50 years, honors St. Louis locals with Whistleblower and Freedom Fighter awards

St. Louis Post-Dispatch reporter Jeremy Kohler and St. Louis Attorney Mark Pedroli will be honored by Gateway Journalism Review this week for keeping tabs on St. Louis County government and transparency within Missouri's government.



Jeremy Kohler and Mark Pedroli
Additionally, GJR will present PBS Newshour's anchor Judy Woodruff a Lifetime Achievement Award at the magazine's 50th

anniversary virtual celebration on Oct. 13. Gateway was founded in 1970 as St. Louis Journalism Review by Charles and Rose Klotzer.

The [event](#) will include a pre-election conversation with Woodruff. The anniversary celebration and awards ceremony, the magazine's primary fundraiser each year, was postponed in April because of the pandemic.

2020

Freedom Fighter Award

Jeremy Kohler was awarded the 2020 Freedom Fighter Award for his investigative reporting uncovering a [pay-to-play scheme of former St. Louis County Executive Steve Stenger](#).

Kohler has worked for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch for about 22 years.

In addition to his reporting on Stenger, Kohler also extensively covered the [McCloskey couple](#) who were [recently indicted by a St. Louis grand jury for waving guns at racial injustice protestors](#) over the summer and Ferguson protests in 2014, said St. Louis Post-Dispatch Editor-in-Chief Gilbert Bailon.

"Recently, he's been an outstanding beat reporter on the St. Louis County beat," Bailon said. "That beat is ripe with everything from political intrigue, the pandemic, and jail deaths. By nature, he is an investigative reporter, but he's a damn good beat reporter too."

Bailon said Kohler's investigative and

storytelling skills are what keeps him continually publishing hard-hitting stories that help keep the Dispatch's work relevant to a local and, sometimes, the national audience – even as local newspapers across the country are in a financial crisis.

“He is very astute and a keen observer,” Bailon said.

Since the pandemic began in March, Kohler said reporting his beat has been one of the busiest at the paper, as he kept an eye on a zoom meeting for a story he was currently following in an interview with GJR.

“It's been an enormously uncommon year,” Kohler said. ‘It's been really two years of constantly breaking news.’”

In addition to being in multiple places in one time keeping tabs on multiple stories Kohler also tries to plan investigations for his own story ideas in attempts to set the agenda of the public discussion instead of simply reacting to the news cycle, he said.

2020

Whistleblower Award

Mark Pedroli, an attorney and founder of the Sunshine and Accountability Project, was awarded GJR's 2020 Whistleblower Award for unearthing Missouri government secrets by using the state's sunshine law.

Tony Messenger, St. Louis Post-Dispatch

columnist who has written about Pedroli's cases against the government officials for violating the transparency law said the attorney's cases elevated the issue of transparency with his suits.

"Those lawsuits make a big deal," Messenger said. "Writing about these issues don't necessarily force lawmakers to do the right thing, but when they have to go to court and defend their actions, they look at sunshine a bit differently."

Pedroli's successes have brought real accountability in city government, Messenger said.

He has sued the [former Missouri Governor Eric Greitens](#) for using a burner app, [Missouri House of Representatives](#), and [St. Louis County jails](#), among other governmental entities, Pedroli told GJR.

The Sunshine and Accountability Project's recent litigation was against the [St. Louis City for having closed meetings about airport privatization](#). The attempt has since failed, arguably because of the Project's suit, Pedroli said.

"Most of the records we are litigating over are public records and should be disclosed. Not only because they are public records, but because these records also help the public weigh in on reforms that need to be done. For example, in the prisons," Pedroli said.

Since the pandemic, the Sunshine and Accountability Project has followed who knew what and when regarding the

Coronavirus, Pedroli said.

“We know that there was a wide variety of Senate and House of Representative Members who were in meetings in February.

Top Secret meetings about science – what’s so secret about the deadliness of a

virus?” Pedroli said about the report that elected officials had private

meetings a month before the pandemic began, warning about the potential

consequences the virus could have on the nation’s economy and the stock market.

“We know what happened with those secrets. They used them for their advantage

and sold stock before the market collapsed.”

To him, transparency is a prerequisite to civil liberties, the ability to reform a democratic government, and keeping the public safe.

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