

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – MARCH 7, 2009
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MINNESOTA JOURNALISM CENTER

**WINNERS OF 32nd ANNUAL FRANK PREMACK MEMORIAL AWARDS
COMPETITION ANNOUNCED**

The winners of the 2008 Frank Premack Public Affairs Journalism Awards include *MinnPost.com*, *The Bemidji Pioneer*, *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, *Rochester Post-Bulletin*, *Star Tribune* and *Morrison County Record*. Winners will be honored at the Frank Premack Public Affairs Journalism Awards Program, held Monday, April 20, 2009 at 5:00 p.m. in the A.I. Johnson Room at McNamara Alumni Center, located on the East Bank of the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis campus. The 32nd annual awards program will celebrate the winning works and best practices of public affairs journalism, and will also feature the presentation of the Graven Award to Brad Swensen of *The Bemidji Pioneer* and the Farr Award to Joel Kramer of *MinnPost.com*. The winning journalists and award winners will have the opportunity to speak about their work.

The Premack award winners to be honored for work produced in 2008 are:

Excellence in coverage of breaking news about public affairs (7 county metro): *MinnPost.com* and Jay Weiner are the winners of the excellence in coverage of breaking news about public affairs award for their coverage of the Coleman-Franken recount contest published November 13-December 20, 2008. In the coverage, Weiner merged solid, traditional reporting skills with insightful and entertaining non-traditional story telling. His reporting was instant – sometimes within minutes of events—and mostly filed daily on deadline.

Premack judges in this category said: “MinnPost was able to breathe life into a process that moves at a glacial pace and thus keep readers interested in a story of great political importance. It offered a very in-depth, personal perspective that made coverage refreshing and interesting. It also offered a glimpse into the contributions that a non-traditional model of journalism can provide to public affairs coverage with an extended lifecycle.”

George S. Hage Award for Excellence in coverage of breaking news about public affairs (Greater Minnesota): *The Bemidji Pioneer* and political editor Brad Swenson are the winners of the George S. Hage Award for excellence in coverage of breaking news in Greater Minnesota for “Help for Cattle Farms” and “Peterson: Implementing farm bill is next step” published August 17, 2008. The two-part article features a rare interview with U.S. Representative Collin Peterson, Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, who played a key role in drafting the next five-year farm bill and bringing aid to farms fighting bovine tuberculosis.

Premack judges in this category said: “Swenson’s story demonstrated timeliness and impact, and was a smart use of a large amount of information gathered on deadline. The article is especially



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relevant because it contained candid comments from a national policymaker who rarely talks in-depth with the media.”

Excellence in investigative or analytical reporting about public affairs (7 county metro): The *St. Paul Pioneer Press* and reporters Jeremy Olson and Paul Tosto are the winners of the investigative or analytical reporting award for their series “The Death of Subject 13” published May 18, 19 and 20, 2008. In this piece, Olson and Tosto reported for the first time on schizophrenia patient Dan Markingson’s death and the resulting lawsuit and probes. In the process, they pulled back the curtain on the rarely viewed world of industry-funded clinical research and the financial incentives that can compromise a doctor’s decision-making.

Premack judges in this category said: “Through the eyes of one patient, this story shed considerable light on the complicated and competing interests between the development and path to market of new drugs, funding needs of the University and the integrity of medical research. The judges are hopeful that the new ethics task force implemented at the U of M is resulting in changes in conflict of interest policies.”

Excellence in investigative or analytical reporting about public affairs (Greater Minnesota): The *Rochester Post-Bulletin* and Jeff Hansel are the winners of the award for investigative or analytical reporting in Greater Minnesota for “Mystery Illness” published on March 29, 2008. In this story Hansel described a debilitating neurological illness that was striking workers in a hog processing plant in Austin, MN.

Judges in this category said: “We were impressed to see a project where a system is put under a microscope and is shown to work, because everyone did their jobs. This story had the potential to calm an unsettled community and demystify a complex health issue.”

Excellence in opinion journalism (7 county metro): The *Star Tribune* and Jill Barcum are the winners of the award for excellence in opinion journalism for “Resolution Needed in AG Controversy” published on March 23, 2008. The editorial expressed that nonpartisan inquiry should probe ethics allegations in the Attorney General’s office.

Premack judges in this category said: “The editorial was well researched and offered thoughtful recommendations which led to action. This is an important topic which directly impacted an essential government function and seems to have improved the overall quality of the Attorney General’s office.”

Excellence in opinion journalism (Greater Minnesota): The *Morrison County Record* and Tom West are the winners of the award for excellence in opinion journalism in Greater Minnesota for “Every county resident should be saddened by Tuesday’s events” published June 29, 2008. In this piece, Tom West discussed Gordon Wheeler’s hearing against the county board. He expressed that all citizens have the right to refute our elected government officials and court system, and that we should be collectively upset when this basic liberty is unjustly dismissed in an unfair hearing.



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Premack judges in this category said: “This article makes you want to read more columns by Mr. West. It exposes deep, thoughtful and compelling issues that are relevant, timely and essential. West took a local tragedy and made the reader think about the issue in a larger context.”

Graven Award: The Graven Award winner is Brad Swenson. Swenson started working at the Bemidji Pioneer in 1980 as county reporter and later served as news editor and political editor. He was acting managing editor for a short time, then managing editor for about nine years. He now serves as political editor and opinion page editor while continuing to cover Beltrami County. No politician comes to Bemidji without making sure they meet with Brad. He grew up in Duluth, graduated from UMD and spent a year at the Forest City Summit in Iowa before coming to Bemidji.

The Premack Public Affairs Journalism Awards Board gives the Graven award each year to members of the journalistic community whose contribution to excellence in the journalism profession has deserved special recognition. It is named after David L. Graven, a close friend of Frank Premack, who served on the Premack Board until his death in 1991.

Farr Award: The Farr Award winner is Joel Kramer and MinnPost.com. Kramer is Editor and CEO of MinnPost, a not-for-profit startup providing high-quality journalism for Minnesotans on the internet. Before starting MinnPost, Joel spent four and a half years as Executive Director of Growth & Justice, a progressive economic think tank he founded that is devoted to the proposition that Minnesota could simultaneously achieve economic growth and economic justice. From 1983 to 1991, Joel was Executive Editor of the Minneapolis Star Tribune, and from 1992 to 1998 he was Publisher and President. Twice in his career, Joel edited investigative projects that won Pulitzer Prizes. He graduated from Harvard College in 1969, where he served as President of the Harvard Crimson, the college’s daily newspaper.

The Premack Public Affairs Journalism Awards Board confers the Farr Award on occasions when a member of the community has made an exceptional contribution to public affairs journalism. It is named after George A. Farr, a close friend of Frank Premack, who served as chair of the Premack Board for the first 29 years of the program.

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The Frank Premack Public Affairs Journalism Award competition is one of Minnesota's most coveted and celebrated journalism honors. Started after the death in 1975 of Frank Premack, a reporter, city editor and assistant managing editor at the Minneapolis *Tribune*, the competition has recognized Minnesota media doing public affairs journalism in their community or region for more than 30 years. The journalists submitting the winning entries receive a \$250 check, while each of the winning media outlets receives a special citation. The entries are judged by a panel of citizens representing the Minnesota community and public life in the arts, journalism, law, and politics.



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The Premack Public Affairs Journalism Awards Board was established in 1976 to honor the work and memory of Frank Premack, a reporter, city editor and assistant managing editor of the Minneapolis *Tribune*.

The Minnesota Journalism Center is the outreach and professional development arm of the University of Minnesota's School of Journalism and Mass Communication. The center operates on a nonprofit basis serving mass communication professionals, students and educators in Minnesota and the Upper Midwest.

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