



Pittsburgh Black Media Federation

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Federation hosts 36th Year of ‘Excellence’ in Storytelling

Vann awards finalists announced, tribute planned for late journalist Elaine Effort

PITTSBURGH (May 5, 2025) — The Pittsburgh Black Media Federation is excited to host its upcoming 36th celebration of the Robert L. Vann Media Awards.

The dinner, “A Night of Excellence,” will mark a special occasion as PBMF moves into its 52nd year of advocating for fair representation of the African American community in the news, working to increase the presence of journalists of color in newsrooms and other media organizations, and recognizing and promoting dignity, excellence and integrity in news coverage.

The event is set for 6 p.m., Wednesday, June 4, 2025, at the August Wilson African American Cultural Center, 980 Liberty Avenue, Downtown, Pittsburgh.

Vann awards finalists for 2025 are announced below. Winners will be announced at the awards dinner.

The theme of the evening, “A Night of Excellence,” is a reminder that integrity and the pursuit of access to information and truth allow journalists to not only report on government corruption, wars on the defenseless, and crimes against humanity, but also on local community heroes, regional politics, the arts, and more.

The evening is also a reminder that journalists must seek the highest standards of fairness and inclusivity in their reporting, recognizing that democracy is multilayered and that journalists must

continue to pursue knowledge and a deeper understanding of communities that are different from their own.

“We want to ensure that stories capture not only the facts, but also the context and nuance of every community. This allows for fair and accurate reporting that follows the truth wherever it leads,” said Deborah Todd, PBMF president.

“And that’s why the Vann awards program is significant — it celebrates journalism that shines a light on truth in local and diverse communities,” she added.

“The Vann awards help us to recognize journalism that goes the extra mile to make sure that marginalized voices and communities are heard and valued as much as those with power and privilege,” said Ervin Dyer, chair of the Vann awards.

“These stories show that all voices are part of the social, political, and economic fabric of the places that we call home,” he said.

All contest entries were published or broadcast between Jan. 1, 2024, and Dec. 31, 2024. Vann’s professional contest presents awards for excellent work in print, broadcast, multimedia, visual presentation, and digital media categories in Western Pennsylvania, Western and Central Ohio and parts of West Virginia.

Judges for this year’s contest professional journalists or communications professionals in New York, Kansas, Texas, Illinois, New Jersey and Missouri.

In addition to presenting the Awards of Excellence, the Vann program will present special honors to four individuals and/or organizations:

THE ELAINE EFFORT COMMUNITY CHAMPION AWARD -- In a tribute to the excellent and pioneering journalism of PBMF founding member, Elaine Effort, two organizations will receive the inaugural Elaine Effort Community Champion Award, named to honor Effort’s dedicated service to community. Elaine Effort passed away in November 2024.

- **Girl Scout Troop #52208** – For years, Elaine Effort worked with young women in the Girl Scouts. Now, Troop #52208, which is located in Wilkinsburg and was founded recently by Natajah Jones, a mother who wanted to provide a safe space for her daughter and other young girls in the community, is being recognized with the Elaine Effort award.
- **Dr. Carter G. Woodson Academy** – an educational and self-development program operated by the Iota Phi Chapter of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity. The academy was founded 12 years ago and teaches young people the importance of knowing their history as way to move into their future. It is also receiving the Elaine Effort award.

LEGACY AWARD -- **Olga George** is the press secretary for the mayor of the city of Pittsburgh, a longtime advocate of New Horizon Theater, an independent producer with WQED, and a former KDKA-TV assignment editor. But another of her most important roles has been her

longtime leadership with PBMF's Frank Bolden Urban Multimedia Workshop, where, for 30 years, she trained hundreds of youths in journalism as a way to help them gain self-confidence and pride in their abilities.

COMMUNICATOR OF THE YEAR -- Emma Alaquiva is an Emmy award-winning film director and photographer. He has worked with some of the world's most notable icons from Harry Belafonte, Dr. Maya Angelou to Questlove and Colman Domingo. In 2023, he was selected to help oversee the film visuals by Roc Nation for Jay Z's ground-breaking exhibit, "The Book of HOV." Most recently, he was appointed by Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro to serve as vice chair of the arts for the commonwealth of Pennsylvania and Alaquiva's philanthropic community impact has been recognized by President Barack Obama. His latest project is a feature documentary film about Black and Brown infant mortality called 'The Ebony Canal.' He is the founder of Pittsburgh's Hip Hop on Lock.

TRAILBLAZER AWARD -- Ciora Thomas founded **Sisters/Pgh** in 2013. It is a Black and trans-led nonprofit that is dedicated to uplifting and empowering transgender, nonbinary, and gender-expansive individuals, particularly those from Black and Brown communities. Sisters/Pgh works to provide housing, safe spaces and to dismantle racism and transphobia so that the people it serves can have productive, prosperous lives. Because of its success in Pittsburgh, it recently created a Sisters branch in Philadelphia.

All special honorees were nominated and voted on by the PBMF Vann committee.

In addition, the evening will also feature a Salute to Point Park University's Center for Media Innovation, recognizing its commitment to exceptional journalism and civic engagement from media organizations local and regionally.

The evening will include an announcement of the student winners in PBMF's Black History Month Essay Contest.

Tickets for the Vann awards dinner may be purchased online at www.pbmf.org until sold out. Tickets are \$25 each for students, \$55 each for PBMF members and \$65 each for nonmembers.

Tickets are limited and no tickets will be sold at the door.

Sponsorship packages may be purchased online until May 17. **Go here for more information:** <https://pbmf.org/make-a-donation>

In 1988, PBMF launched its journalism awards competition named for Robert L. Vann, the legendary publisher of the Pittsburgh Courier. The intent was to honor his personal commitment to journalism and to create a voice for the Black community.

Proceeds from the Vann Media Awards help fund college scholarships for graduates of PBMF's Frank Bolden Urban Multimedia Workshop for teens, as well as professional development programs, international reporting fellowships and other initiatives.

Founded in 1973, PBMF is a nonprofit organization whose members are professional journalists, public relations specialists, and professors and college students in schools of journalism or related programs.

PBMF advocates for diversity in newsrooms, hosts programs that recognize excellent media coverage of minority communities, and trains young people to enter the media industry.

The National Association of Black Journalists named PBMF the professional chapter of the year in 2017. PBMF tied for the title in 2015.

For more information about the Vann Media Awards, contact Dyer at 412-624-4796 or edyer@pitt.edu.

The Pittsburgh Black Media Federation would like to thank its sponsors: the University of Pittsburgh/English Department, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and The Center for Media Innovation at Point Park University.



2025 ROBERT L. VANN AWARDS FINALISTS

EXCELLENCE IN AUDIO JOURNALISM

History/Culture/Arts/Entertainment

- Katie Blackley
90.5 WESA
“The legacy of Pittsburgh housing advocate and community builder Dorothy Mae Richardson”
- C. DeCardy, J. Franzos, T. Murray, Heinz Endowments Staff
We Can Be Podcast – The Heinz Endowments
Rainbow Serpent co-founder Marques Redd is reviving ancient traditions to create the future of art
- M. Falk, M. Haris, S. Lo
City Cast Pittsburgh
The Hidden Racist History of Some Pittsburgh Neighborhoods

Enterprise/Investigative

- Bill O’Driscoll
90.5 WESA
Controversy highlights who gets a voice on Pittsburgh public art
- C. DeCardy, J. Franzos, T. Murray, Heinz Endowments Staff
We Can Be Podcast – The Heinz Endowments
Leah Penniman “Farming While Black” author, Soul Fire Farm cofounder & Heinz Award honoree
- Zachary Gibson
Triblive
Urban Farmers support Pittsburgh’s food deserts

Health/Medical/Science/Environment

- K. Kocinski, V. Siriwardane
90.5 WESA

Dr. Julia Vann turns to air quality, Black infant mortality as new Allegheny County health director

- C. DeCardy, J. Franzos, T. Murray, Heinz Endowments Staff
We Can Be Podcast – The Heinz Endowments
Heinz Award winner and Taproot Earth’s Colette Pichon Battle stands up to climate change inequities
- C. DeCardy, J. Franzos, T. Murray, Heinz Endowments Staff
We Can Be Podcast – The Heinz Endowments
Narrowing the maternal and infant health gap w/ health equity expert Dr. Margaret Larkins-Pettigrew

Public Affairs/Politics/Government/Education

- Jullian Forstadt
90.5 WESA
Pittsburgh group tackles student chronic absenteeism with grandmas, vans and lot of love
- Jasiri X
BlackPittsburgh.com
The Fourth Wall/ This Week in White Supremacy
- Zachary Gibson
Triblive
How to Win Black Voters

News Feature/Profile

- Bill O’Driscoll
90.5 WESA
“Book recalls Pittsburgh’s Mal Goode”
- Susan Scott Peterson
90.5 WESA
New Augmented reality app overlays Pittsburgh’s Black History on present-day East Liberty
- F. Dabeco, M. Falk, M. Haris, S. Lo
City Cast Pittsburgh
Coffee, Corn Dogs and the Latest on Manchester’s Freeman Family Farm

Sports

- Bill O’Driscoll
90.5 WESA
Pittsburgh rapper Fedd the God makes his demolition derby debut
- Brian Batko
Chipped Ham and Football/Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
 - Is Colts’ Anthony Richardson the next QB to crumble under T.J. Watt, defense’s pressure
 - Steelers legend Troy Polamalu talks Resilience Bowl, life after football...
 - What’s at stake for Mike Tomlin, Steelers as NFL season enters home stretch?
- M. Falk, M. Haris, S. Lo
City Cast Pittsburgh
“Why a Pittsburgh Just Official Became Baseball’s best hitter”

EXCELLENCE IN VIDEO JOURNALISM

History/Culture/Arts/Entertainment

- M. Bah, I. Smith & L. Smith
KDKA-TV
"The Missing Links in Pittsburgh’s Underground Railroad"
- J. McGee, R. Minutello
WPXI
"Freedom House"

News Feature

- R. Doss, R. Taylor Jr.
New Pittsburgh Courier
"Courier has exclusive sit-down with Vice President Kamala Harris"
- C. Kunicki, J. McGee, R. Minutello
WPXI
“Moonshot Museum History"
- K. Burkett, J. Harner, D. Iampietro, P. Zalakar
WPXI
"Life Lessons on the Football Field"

Enterprise/Investigative/Documentary

- S. Banfield, D. Clark, A. Coulter, T. Kirkland, C. Stone

WPXI
"Juneteenth Celebration Controversy"

- WPXI News Team
WPXI
"Pittsburgh's Black History"

Public Affairs/Politics/Government/Education

- C. Adele, T. Lawson, J. Mahaffey, L. Rappaport, K. Sorensen
KDKA-TV
"Eye on Voters of Color"
- L. Sylvester, S. Trabant
WPXI
"Kamala Harris Interview"
- M. Schiller & A. Sichi
KDKA-TV
"VOICES of Black Women"

Spot/Breaking News

- D. Catanza, R. Sayer
KDKA-TV
"Pastor held at gunpoint"
- King Jemison
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
"Trump puts Charleroi in national spotlight"

EXCELLENCE IN VISUAL PRESENTATION

Feature Photography

- Sheila Thompson
Freelance - Thompson Creative Images, LLC
"Innovating Equity, Unleashing Creativity - Jessica Merritt"
- Sebastian Foltz
Pittsburgh Post Gazette
"Damar Hamlin takes a selfie with area youth at his youth football camp at George K. Cupples Stadium on the South Side"
- Joshua Franzos

h magazine - The Heinz Endowments
"Kendra Whitlock Ingram"

Sports Photography

- Aimee Obidzinski
Pitt Magazine/University of Pittsburgh
"Coaches Alonzo Webb III and Alonzo Webb Jr. have created a winning family of Pitt's track and cross-country programs"
- Benjamin B. Braun
Pittsburgh Post Gazette
"Icy Reception"
- Alexandra Wimley
Pittsburgh Union Progress
"Imani Christian players lift head coach Khayree Wilson Sr. while celebrating their 78-49 win over Neighborhood Academy"

EXCELLENCE IN WRITTEN JOURNALISM / DAILY

Spot/Breaking News

- Christopher Carter
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
"Allen Greene joins Pitt as new athletic director with a wealth of NIL experience at major schools"
- J. Anderson, J. Geanous, K. Jemison
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
"Haitians in Pittsburgh"
- "M. Guza, H. Lauer"
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
"Pittsburgh police Chief Larry Sciroto retiring amid scrutiny over NCAA basketball referee job"

Sports

- John Santa
Pittsburgh Union Progress
"Pittsburgh native Tariq Francis benefiting from mentorship of Pitt great Brandin"
- Colin Beazley

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

"Playing Overtime: Top basketball recruits Meleek Thomas, Amari Evans forging path to next level outside of Pittsburgh"

- Steve Rotstein
Pittsburgh Union Progress
"With older brother by his side, Aliquippa's Quentin Goode carving own legacy as one of Quips' greatest quarterbacks — but he's not done yet"

News Feature/Profile

- Gretchen McKay
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
"After 30 years on the job, Wholey's parking manager retires on his 90th birthday"
- Josh Ewers
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
"New Point Park University trustee began a firefighter and became a neurosurgeon"
- Maddy Franklin
PublicSource
- Slings and arrows set aside in Allegheny County Jail-based 'Hamlet' workshops"

Public Affairs/Politics/Government/Education

- Jacob Geanous
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
"Charleroi educators, students show unity as community gets thrown into political debate over immigration"
- Laura Esposito
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
"After a lifetime of loss, Braddock mayor sets her sights on rebuilding the borough"
- Megan Tomasic
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
"How an underfunded Western Pa. school district struggles to survive"

Business/Consumer/Technology

- Hal B. Klein
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
"Soulful Taste of the Burgh expands audiences for Pittsburgh's Black food makers"
- Madaleine Rubin

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

"Inside Fourth Street Foods in tiny Charleroi, where workers hail from 41 countries"

- Sono Motoyama
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
"How Cafe on the Corner and its high-energy co-owner nourish a North Side community — body and soul"

Health/Medical/Science/Environment

- Hanna Webster
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
"Assessing the whys behind racial gaps in county overdose death rates:"
- Jordan Anderson
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
"Pittsburgh shelter guiding young people from crisis to independence"
- V. Siriwardane, J. Wiggan
PublicSource
"A generation 'constructed' for tragedy: Older Black men hit hardest by overdose crisis"

Enterprise/Investigative

- J. Cloutier, S. Ocneanu
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
"City of Pittsburgh fails to repair hundreds of broken down and abandoned homes, costing taxpayers millions"
- Jacob Geanous
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
"Nobody wants to leave their house': Evictions jumped nearly 20% in Allegheny County in 2023"
- L. Esposito, H. Lauer
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
"Violence Prevention"

History/Culture/Arts/Entertainment

- Laura Malt Schneiderman
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
"Divine beauty"
- Steve Mellon
Pittsburgh Union Progress
"Hightower's unique pictures of Black life are now part of Pitt's archive"

- Dave Sutor
The Tribune-Democrat
"Black History Month: Civil Rights Act of 1964 Revisited (4-story series)"

Editorials

- Adriana E. Ramírez
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
Editorials
- B. McGinley, R. Spiess
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
Editorials
- Lori Falce
TribLive
"Lori Falce Editorials"

Columns

- Adriana E. Ramírez
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
 - "Her son was lifeless, and the driver drove off"
 - "Race, identity and the college admissions essay"
 - "Two Juneteenths are better than one"
- Brandon McGinley
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
 - "How Pittsburgh Regional Transit lost a customer — me"
 - "In Charleroi, Haitian immigrants are succeeding where America has failed"
 - "On the morning side of the hill: Little League is returning to Pittsburgh"
- Chip Minemyer
The Tribune-Democrat
 - "Addressing what the history books leave out"
 - "From Brooklyn to Puerto Rico ... to Johnstown?"
 - "Teachers make Black History Month promotion 'in-depth' learning opportunity"

EXCELLENCE IN WRITTEN JOURNALISM/NON-DAILY

News Feature

- Maia Williams
Pittsburgh City Paper

"A Duquesne basketball player's activewear line is changing the game for modest dressers"

- Sheila Beasley
Soul Pitt Media and Pittsburgh Media Partnership
"She came back a different person to help people and live well"
- "Marcia Liggett"
New Pittsburgh Courier
"Summers used to be hot, but not like this' -- The extreme heat disproportionately affects Pittsburgh's Black residents"

Public Affairs/Politics/Government/Education

- Hakim Hasan
Black Pittsburgh
"Geographer Jamil Bey Believes Cities Should Be Kind to People"
- Justin Stewart
Pittsburgh City Paper
"Troy Polamalu will return to the 'Burgh for a greater cause"
- L.E. McCollough
NEXTpittsburgh
"Peace and Friendship Farm is growing food and community in the Hill District"

History/Culture/Arts/Entertainment

- Rob Taylor Jr.
New Pittsburgh Courier
"Some 30 years ago, WAMO began 'Juneteenth' celebrations in Pittsburgh"
- David S. Rotenstein
NEXTpittsburgh
"The Aurora Club, another piece of Pittsburgh jazz history, may soon be demolished"
- Kahmeela Adams-Friedson
Pittsburgh City Paper
"A Pittsburgh filmmaker addresses Black infant mortality with help from Viola Davis"
- J. DiPerna, B. Lofquist
Pittsburgh Institute for Nonprofit Journalism
"One hundred years ago today, a Pittsburgh man was executed. He was likely innocent"

EXCELLENCE IN WRITTEN JOURNALISM

Feature

- Cristina Rouvalis
Pittsburgh Magazine
“Pittsburgher of the Year Andrew McCutcheon”
- Ervin Dyer
Pitt Magazine
“A New Program Pairs Biblical Messages with the Science of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy”
- Ervin Dyer
Pitt Magazine
“Father-Son Coaching Team is Keeping Track in the Family”

History/Culture/Arts/Entertainment

- Mercedes Barnette
Johnstown Magazine
"Rap Is Black History"
- Ervin Dyer
Pitt Magazine/University of Pittsburgh
"Alaina Roberts' book takes a fresh look at freedom in the American West"
- Ervin Dyer
Pittsburgh Magazine
"Bringing the Light: The Aurora Reading Club"

Business/Consumer/Technology

- Kristy Graver
Pittsburgh Magazine
"Barrel & Flow is more than just a Beer Fest"
- Kristy Graver
Pittsburgh Magazine
"Booze Crews: Pittsburgh's History is Steeped in the Spirits Industry"
- Ollie Gratzinger
Pittsburgh Magazine
"The Soil Sisters: The Hilltop Gardeners"

Public Affairs/Health/Education

- Amy Whipple
Pittsburgh Magazine
"What Makes People Sick or Healthy?"
- "April Johnston"
Pitt Magazine/University of Pittsburgh
"What if ... we could remove roadblocks for rural students?"
- Joyce Gannon
h magazine - The Heinz Endowments
"The Keys to Success"