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America Strikes Back published April 18, 2012, won first place in the Kansas Press Association’s Awards in Excellence for feature writing by L&T Publisher Earl Watt. The L&T won a record 17 first-place plaques in this year’s competition. L&T staff will travel to Topeka in May to see if their placings combined will win the overall Sweepstakes Award, which goes to the best newspapers in Kansas. L&T graphic

17 firsts set record

L&T staff report The Leader & Times earned 43 awards from the Kansas Press Association’s Awards of Excellence contest and set a record for the most first-place finishes in the paper’s history. The Leader & Times earned 17 first-place awards, topping the 16 earned in 2004. The awards were balanced between news and advertising. Nine first-place awards went to advertising while eight went to news.

Some of the advertisers who were recognized with the first-place ads included Central Christian Church’s “October Baby,” Willow Tree’s “If the Club Doesn’t Fit,” The Flower Basket’s “Tuxedo Help 911,” Cherry Berry’s “Franchise,” Keating’s “John Deere Clothing,” and Ratliff Construction, all designed by Composing Manager Trevor Feldhausen, and Mary’s Certified Travel’s “Destinations from Alaska” designed by Publisher Earl Watt.

The advertising representatives that participated in the contest included Lora Hershey, Ron Davis, and David Hershey along with Denasa Rice and Melissa Hilton in classifieds.

Two online ads designed by Watt also garnered first place including Mosaic’s motion ad and Little Caesar’s “Now Open.”

The first place awards for news included work done by Watt including Best Feature Story for

“America Strikes Back,” a feature on the new Doolittle Raid exhibit at the Mid-America Air Museum, Opinion Column Writing, Best Sports pages, Best Sports Story for a story on the 10-year-old’s Cal Ripken state championship, and Best Environmental Portrait for a photo of Mary and Joseph in the dinner theater, “Follow the Star.”

Managing Editor Larry Phillips earned first-place honors for Best Environmental story on wind turbines and Best Story/Picture Combination for the “Mighty Samson.”

Reporter Keeley Moree claimed a first place for Best News Photo for “These little piggies” after a semi tipped over and spilled hogs along U.S. Highway 83.

Six advertisements that received second place in the Daily Division 1 category included Squeaky Clean’s “I Promise,” El-Kan in health care, Hooker Equity in Agriculture, and Terror on Hill Street’s “Haunted House,” all designed by Feldhausen. Watt received second for Garrett Love’s “Voice and Vision” political ad, and the staff was recognized with a second place for the advertising special section for the Kansas Sampler.

Phillips received three second-place finishes for his investigative story, “Dust-up in Beaver,” the environmental story, “Fracking,” and story/photo combination for “Amazing Grace.”

Watt also received three second places for sports column writing, sports photo for Britton Abbott’s stiff arm, and for environmental portrait for “Knott remembers personal struggles.”

The staff was recognized for three second places including Best Use of Photos, Editorial Pages and Best Newspaper Website.

The staff received five third-place awards in advertising.

Composing ad designer Tasha Booth was recognized with third-place finishes for Flooring America’s “4 Hour Sizzlin’ Sale,” Squeaky Clean’s “I Promise” campaign, and Jury, Farrar and Associates online ad.

Feldhausen received two third-place awards for The Garden Spot’s agricultural ad and Bisteca Steakhouse’s “Grand Opening.”

In the editorial division, Watt received three third place awards for a political story on “A break from the Beltway,” headline writing and sports photo for Joel Mettlen’s slide into second base.

Moree took third for her series on overcrowding at schools and her online news video, “Semi spills pigs.”

Reporter Robert Pierce took third for his agricultural story, “Water means life.”

The contest was judged by publishers, editors and journalists in the Wisconsin Press Association.

“I am very proud of the work produced by the Leader & Times staff,” Watt said. “Former Publisher Jim Elsberry set a standard here 23 years ago to produce excellence, and every day that is what we strive to do. We believe we have the best story to tell, because it is your story. We are proud to produce award-winning ads so that our local businesses get the best messaging.”

Members of the staff will travel to Topeka May 3 to receive the awards at the annual KPA Convention.

“While it is humbling to be recognized for the work we do, the true judges are our subscribers,” Watt said. “We work for you each and every day to provide you the news that is affecting our lives right here on the High Plains. We provide the facts on the front page and the opinions on the Editorial page that reflect our community’s values and preferences. This is my home town. I care about Liberal and feel fortunate to have the job of providing the information that helps us all make our community the best it can be.”

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