

**SKIP WEBER “FRIEND OF THE FIRST AMENDMENT”
AWARD RECIPIENTS**

2023: Sarah Watson, Gretchen Teske and the staff of the Quad City Times were honored for their work this year following the collapse of a 6-story apartment building that killed three people and seriously injured another. Their work provides a case study of the important role top quality local journalism, fueled by information mined from public records, plays in informing people about events and issues in a community. Sarah and Gretchen did an outstanding job of digging through public records for information city leaders have not been eager to share — information about actions, or inaction, by city building code enforcement employees and by the building owner and his contractors in the weeks and days before the collapse. Their reporting unearthed complaints from tenants about deteriorating conditions in the building leading up to the collapse. They found documentation of independent construction experts’ concerns that were expressed to city employees about the quality of the stabilization repairs that were underway on the building immediately before the collapse.

2022: Rick Morain, a second-generation Jefferson newspaper owner, led the Iowa Newspaper Association’s government relations committee for many years, working in Des Moines and Washington, D.C., on issues affecting the media. During his service on the Iowa Public Information Board, he often reminded board members of the Legislature’s intent behind the sunshine laws — that ambiguity in the construction or interpretation of the public meetings law should be resolved in favor of openness, and that free and open examination of public records is generally in the public interest, even when it causes inconvenience or embarrassment to public officials or others. **Kathleen Richardson** is recognized for the legacy she built during her time on the faculty at the Drake University journalism school, where she was a professor and the dean, during her leadership of the Iowa FOI Council for 15 years, and as one of the original board members appointed by Gov. Terry Branstad to get the new Iowa Public Information Board up and running as a non-judicial, free resource and referee on the state’s public records and public meetings laws. She has trained countless government officials and citizen groups on Iowa’s sunshine laws. And at the Iowa FOI Council, Kathleen succeeded the organization’s founding executive, the legendary Herb Strentz, when he retired. **William Tubbs**, the longtime editor, publisher and owner of the North Scott Press in Eldridge, was honored for his many years of editorial advocacy for the importance of public meetings and public records in our democracy. He led efforts by Iowa journalists 30 years ago to persuade the Legislature to change Iowa’s public records statute to require state and local governments to make public the details of settlement agreements governments signed to

resolve pending or anticipated legal disputes. Bill eloquently made the case that it was wrong to deprive the tax-paying public of access to the details of these disputes and legal agreements.

2021: Sara Anne Willette, an Ames researcher, for her unceasing efforts to make her Iowa Covid Tracker website an indispensable resource for parents, journalists and other Iowans who want to know the status of the Covid disease and vaccinations in each of Iowa's 99 counties. Her website grew out of widespread public concern with the lack of up-to-date and historic data on the state's public health website. Her site, with its maps and charts, makes school district data available for both students and employees — helping to address the public appetite for information about the status of the disease in their schools. **Sara Konrad Baranowski**, the editor of the Iowa Falls Times Citizen, for her dogged scrutiny of Iowa's official Covid statistics during 2020, when the disease was spreading across the state. Through her analyses, she was able to document how state public health officials were weeks, and sometimes months, behind in adding positive Covid case outbreaks to the state's website. As a result, some outbreaks at long-term care centers were taken down just days after the outbreaks became public. **Zack Kucharski** executive editor of the Gazette, for being one of the state's most respected voices for better government accountability, through his leadership in guiding Gazette reporting efforts on issues involving city government, area schools, and the University of Iowa. He also led the joint reporting project last year that Iowa newspapers undertook to examine access to videos recorded by law officers. Kucharski also is one of the media coordinators appointed by the Iowa Supreme Court to handle the logistics of journalists' use of cameras and live-streaming of proceedings inside eastern Iowa courtrooms. **Erin Jordan**, a reporter for the Cedar Rapids Gazette, for her use of Iowa's public records law to gather documents for important investigative projects, including water quality in Iowa, access to police videos, the use of "seclusion rooms" in some school districts, and the lack of transparency in some contracts involving University of Iowa Hospitals.

2020: State Representative **Ako Abdul-Samad**, for being a champion of citizens putting their rights into action – through their religion, their freedom of speech, and through their right to peaceably assemble and petition government for a redress of grievances; **Chief District Judge Patrick Grady** of Cedar Rapids, for his longtime work to ensure Iowa's program allowing journalists to use cameras, computers and other digital devices in courtrooms remains a model for other states, especially during the Covid pandemic; and the late **Iowa Chief Justice Mark Cady**, who was instrumental in broadening the Iowa Judicial Branch's Expanded News Media Coverage program to allow the media to livestream court proceedings and blog from inside courtrooms, and for making Supreme

Court proceedings more accessible by scheduling oral arguments in locations around Iowa.

2019: Trevis Mayfield, editor/publisher of the Maquoketa Sentinel Press, for his strong news coverage, editorials and public-records lawsuit after an OWI prosecutor was let off with a misdemeanor ticket after drinking and driving; **Brian Cooper**, executive editor of the Dubuque Telegraph Herald, who, for 30 years, has been one of Iowa's leading advocates for the importance of public access to government records and meetings, and **Gina Colbert** of Columbus, Ga., whose persistence and passion have made her an outstanding advocate for the importance of public access to law officers' body camera videos – a role that began in 2015 when a Burlington police officer accidentally killed her daughter, Autumn Steele.

2018: Dave Busiek, news director for KCCI-TV for 29 years, for his work on behalf of the Iowa FOI Council and for his leadership in working with the Iowa Supreme Court on access for electronic media in Iowa courtrooms; **Rita Bettis Austen**, legal director for the ACLU of Iowa, for her articulate and effective voice in our state on issues affecting free speech and freedom of the press, and **Ann Wilson, Doug Burns and Jared Strong** of the Carroll Times Herald for their unwavering commitment to the First Amendment, including Strong's authoritative account of a local police officer accused of preying on teenage girls while on duty.

2017: Michael Gartner, Pulitzer Prize winner, former editor of The Des Moines Register and Ames Tribune and former president of NBC News, for his body of work, and **Ryan Foley**, Iowa City correspondent for the Associated Press, for his skillful use of Iowa's open records law.

2016: Art Cullen, Storm Lake Times editor, and **Steve Delaney**, editor-publisher Burlington Hawk Eye, for pushing for access to public records in the face of local opposition

2015: Chris Mudge, Iowa Newspaper Association executive director

2014: Randy Brubaker, Register managing editor (posthumously)

2013: Iowa Public Television general manager **Dan Miller** and University of Iowa law professor **Arthur Bonfield** (body of work)

2012: U.S. District Judge **Robert Pratt** (for body of work and encouraging photo and video coverage of federal courts)

2011: State Sen. **Pam Jochum** (Dem., Dubuque) for her support of FOI

issues

2010: Jim Lewers, executive editor, Iowa City Press-Citizen, for pressing University of Iowa for openness

2009: Bill Monroe of the Iowa Newspaper Association and **Marty Ryan**, lobbyist for the Iowa Civil Liberties Union, for their body of work

2008: Retiring Justice **Jerry Larson** of the Iowa Supreme Court, a leader in expanded media coverage of Iowa courts

2007: Citizens of Riverdale, Iowa, for pressing local government for access

2006: Keith Luchtel, Iowa Newspaper Association and Iowa Broadcasters Association lobbyist, and retired broadcaster **Jack Shelley**, for their body of work

2005: Clark Kauffman, investigative reporter for the Des Moines Register, and **Arlen Nichols and Mark Gannon**, who sued the Iowa State University Foundation for access to records

2004: Herb Strentz received NFOIC “Heroes of the 50 States” award

2003: Geoff Greenwood of KCCI-TV, a longtime EMC coordinator, and **Rox Laird**, The Des Moines Register, for their body of work

2002: Michael Giudicessi, Des Moines attorney, and **Saul Shapiro** and **Nancy Raffensperger** of the Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier, for their lawsuit over access

2001: Mark Bowden, Cedar Rapids Gazette, and **Randy Evans**, The Des Moines Register, for organizing the state’s first “access audit”