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***Columbian* Reporter Honored with First Annual 'Mental Health Reporting Journalism Award'**

YAKIMA – Scott Hewitt, a journalist with *The Columbian* daily newspaper in Vancouver, was awarded the first annual Mental Health Reporting Journalism Award presented by The Washington State Coalition to Improve Mental Health Reporting at the 2010 Behavioral Health Care Conference “Partnering for Recovery” held this week in Yakima.



Hewitt’s feature “Sufferer, Survivor, Advocate” appeared on the front page of the Sunday, April 18, 2010, issue of *The Columbian* and outlined the personal recovery story of a Camas woman, Melanie Green. Hewitt reported on Green’s journey through mental illness and frequent hospitalizations to wellness and her work in the community to help others start life anew while living with mental illnesses.

“The article gives a realistic account of recovery that is moving and informative,” says Ann Christian, C.E.O. of the Washington Community Mental Health Council who served as one of three judges for the contest, adding that public misunderstanding of mental illness is a huge issue.

Other judges included: Roger Simpson, Ph.D., founding director of the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma with the University of Washington Department of Communication and professor of journalism ethics and reporting, and Cindy Adams, Customer Services Coordinator with Greater Columbia Behavioral Health in Kennewick, who represented people with psychiatric disabilities. The top three entries were then put in front of the 250 state-wide members of the Washington State Coalition to Improve Mental Health Reporting for a final vote to determine the winner.

“So many media portrayals of people with mental illness paint them as being violent or not able to recover, which is as far from the truth as you can get. Sensationalistic headlines or language that puts fear in the minds of the public about what mental illness does to a person is common,” says Christian, commenting that fear creates road blocks for housing, jobs and relationships which are essential for recovery to happen.

“We’d love to see a day when there is no discrimination against people with mental illness, that they are treated equally to someone with cancer or diabetes when sharing they have a mental illness. Exemplary reporting is one way to start setting a higher bar for sharing accurate information with the public and creating bridges for understanding that eventually will better serve the individual, but also will help people move off

public assistance to serve their communities through productive employment. Scott's coverage of Melanie Green's journey clearly shows that transformation."

The goal of the annual contest is to reward journalism that seeks to improve the public's understanding of mental illnesses and reflects even-handed and unsensationalized reporting about mental illnesses.

Hewitt's feature was chosen from 40 print and broadcast stories submitted to the contest from radio, wire service and newspapers from across Washington state. Television, trade and other media organizations were also invited to submit entries.

"I'm truly honored to be the first recipient of this wonderful and inspiring new award," said Hewitt, who joined *The Columbian* in 1997 and currently covers neighborhoods and social services.

"It shouldn't come as a surprise that people who face mental health problems aren't a special, segregated group - they are all of us. Yet stigma persists, and many people who open a newspaper to a mental health story expect to read about inexplicable disaster and defeat," said Hewitt. "What has been surprising and a blessing to me - both professionally and personally - has been learning and sharing some truly inspiring stories of survival, courage, recovery and triumph.

"I'm grateful to Melanie Green for her willingness to tell her story - and tell it again and again in multiple interviews - and I'm grateful to all of you for the life-affirming work you do. I'm glad to be the messenger when the message is one of hope and recovery," said Hewitt when accepting the honor, which included a \$500 cash award.

The Washington State Coalition on Mental Health Reporting, which was created and funded by the state's five-year Mental Health Transformation Project, works to support journalists in their efforts to report on mental illness by providing reporting guidelines, sources and factual information.

For more information, go to www.mentalhealthreporting.org

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