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info@washingtoncog.org
6351 Seaview Ave NW
Seattle, WA 98107-2664
Phone: 206.782.0393 FAX: 206.623.4474

NEWS RELEASE

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Washington Coalition for Open Government

6351 Seaview Avenue NW

Seattle Washington 98107-2664

www.washingtoncog.org

Phone: (206) 782-0393 Fax: (206) 623-4474

The News Tribune, The Seattle Times, an open government proponent, a whistleblower, and a prolific records requestor all to be honored by the Washington Coalition for Open Government.

Seattle---The Tacoma News Tribune, Seattle Times contributing writer and WCOG Board member, George Erb, and The Seattle Times will receive top honors this fall at the 10th Annual Madison Andersen Awards Breakfast. The organization will also present two Key Awards given to persons or organizations that have done something notable for the cause of open government within the past 12 months.

The Tacoma News Tribune will receive WCOG's top honor when the paper is presented the James Madison Award for exceptional dedication to the First Amendment and the cause of open government. The award will be presented at the organization's 10th Annual Madison Andersen Awards Breakfast on Friday, September 18th at the Washington Athletic Club.

"TNT has been a consistent, energetic, and generous supporter of open government in Washington for many decades. Their relentless pursuit of public records to hold government officials accountable for their actions – and lack of action – including TNT's devotion of scarce resources to enforcing the PRA and OPMA in the courts, has been invaluable to the citizens of Pierce County and throughout the state." – Toby Nixon, President, WCOG

George Erb, an adjunct instructor of journalism at Western Washington University and a contributing writer to such publications as the National Law Journal and The Seattle Times will be honored with the organization's James Andersen Award for extraordinary efforts to advance the efforts of the Washington Coalition for Open Government. Erb, a longtime member of WCOG's Board of Directors is also a member of the state Bench-Bar-Press Committee. He was editor of the Puget Sound Business Journal for nearly eight years, during which time, the Business Journal won numerous national awards and was a 2010 finalist for a Pulitzer Prize. For 30 years he worked as an editor and a reporter at daily and weekly newspapers, all in Washington State. Erb has a bachelor's degree in history from Hanover College and a master's degree in journalism from the University of Oregon. In addition to his work on the Coalition's Revenue Committee, Erb is building the organization's audience on social media.

“As one of the founders of Washington Coalition for Open Government, George has given thousands of hours of service to the cause of government transparency and accountability. His work as liaison to the Society of Professional Journalists, and most recently his taking the lead to manage WCOG’s social media presence, have raised our profile among the news community and driven awareness of our mission to a new level. We’re grateful for his continuing service.” ---Toby Nixon

WCOG is also pleased to announce the first annual Kenneth F. Bunting Award will be presented to a team of reporters with The Seattle Times for their series on lead poisoning and contamination at gun ranges in Washington State and around the nation. The groundbreaking series “Loaded with Lead” made extensive use of public records to inform the public of this serious health hazard.

“Ken was a champion of open government and transparency. He would have been very impressed with this series that relied heavily on access to public records. He also would have great admiration for this team of very talented reporters who doggedly pursued those records in the face of roadblocks and denials. This is a great example of how important it is to stand up to public officials who want to deny us records we are entitled to.”---Juli Bunting, WCOG Communications Director and widow of Kenneth F. Bunting

The Award will be presented to Christine Willmsen, Lewis Kamb, Keith Ervin, Justin Mayo, and James Neff.

Key Awards will go to Pierce County Deputy Prosecutor, Steven Merrival who filed the first of several whistleblower complaints against Prosecutor Mark Lindquist in May. Merrival’s complaint exposed that Lindquist has evaded the Public Records Act by instructing other prosecutors and staff to not create documents of questionable actions and decisions and by using personal electronic devices and text message in an effort to avoid producing public records.

A Key Award will also be presented to Tim Clemans, the computer programmer and prolific records requestor now working for the Seattle Police Department in their efforts to make video recordings available to the public as quickly as possible.