

Echo is best in its class

The staff of the *Haliburton County Echo* has once again secured the respect of their peers in the Ontario Community Newspaper Association.

The paper won 11 provincial awards in the OCNA's annual awards competition, including best newspaper in its circulation category.

"From eye-catching photographs to solid writing to strong editorial pages, the *Echo* has what it takes to stand out from the pack," says the panel of three judges in the general excellence category for newspapers with a circulation between 3,500 and 6,499.

The Bracebridge Examiner came in second while the Parry Sound North Star was third.

Former reporter Lance Crossley had a clean sweep of the writing awards, winning a first, second and third.

His series on the challenges facing young mothers came first in the hard-to-win best features series category.

The judge said that Portraits in Childcare was a "compelling and thorough series. Pegged to a news story about federal cut-backs in daycare, the comprehensive look at various forms of childcare includes stunning photographs [by Casey Lessard], clear, organized writing and crisp design, supplemented by a forum discussion to close the series. Excellent work."

His features on the housing shortage in Haliburton County won him a second in the best investigative news story category. "A common news topic is taken to the investigative level," the judge says. "Along with personal accounts to provide the human interest angle, a host of sources is tapped to provide a detailed look at the issue. A comprehensive piece of work."

Crossley's touching profile of Jeff Currie's life after a car accident won him a third-place finish in the best feature category. "Simply excellent writing," the judge says. "A profoundly mov-



Echo staff members were in Niagara Falls over the weekend to accept their awards from the Ontario Community Newspaper Association. From left are: former reporter Lance Crossley, who came first, second and third in different writing categories and was given an honourable mention as Reporter of the Year; editor Martha Perkins, who won two writing awards; Rick Shaver, the new OCNA president; Casey Lessard who came in second as Photographer of the Year and won a first prize for his high school prom photo; and columnist Steve Galea, who came in second in the humour writing category. The *Echo* was also named the best newspaper in its circulation and won two third place awards, one for best news coverage (for its stories on last August's tornadoes) and one for best front page.

Tradition of excellence continues at the *Echo*

ing story of a quadriplegic's journey overflowing with brutal, honest emotion."

Rounding out this perfect trifecta for Crossley was an honourable mention for Reporter of the Year.

Echo editor Martha Perkins won two writing awards. "First place goes without reservation to Martha Perkins of the *Haliburton County Echo*," says the judge of the best health and wellness story. "Martha's in-depth story focused on local political response to hospital wait times in the week leading up to the federal election. The story engaged readers on a personal level by retelling the situation of a woman waiting on one list while bumped to the top of another and pushed candidates and healthcare professions to answer tough questions about policy change. Writing and research were exemplary in this story of major importance to the community."

Her review of Murray Schafer's opera at Haliburton Forest last August earned her a second-place finish in the arts and entertainment category. Perkins "does a great job enticing the readership both to attend Palace of the Cinnabar Phoenix and to open themselves to opera. Vibrant, original photos complement lively, exuberant text."

Photographer Casey Lessard also won two awards, including a top-three rank in the Photographer of the Year award.

"Casey Lessard's photo of the girls dancing barefoot at their high school prom captured a spontaneous slice of life that showed what the essence of photojournalism is about," says the judge in awarding Lessard first place in the best feature photo category for newspapers with a circulation less than 9,999. "It is rare to see a newspaper showcase this type of photograph prominently on the front page."

The Photographer of the Year award is open to all weekly newspapers in Ontario and Lessard's second-place finish put the *Echo* in amongst some of the largest circulation newspapers.

The judge said his "style of photography shines with candid moments that capture everyday life. His work shows an understanding of natural and artificial light and when to use it appropriately."

It was a team effort in trying times that won the *Echo* a third-place award in the best news story category for its coverage of last August's tornadoes.

"The *Echo* reporters [Martha Perkins, Greg Hoekstra and Bryn Weese] dug up lots of detail about the event and captured the emotions of the people involved. The photographers [the reporters with Casey Lessard leading the way] provided some excellent images that supported the words. The paper played the story well, giving it the prominence it deserves. This is another example of a newspaper doing a great job covering a breaking story."

Steve Galea came second in the Humour Columnist of the Year award. "Not only are Steve Galea's columns reliably funny – he's a repeat winner in this category – he seems to consistently find new, kooky ways to delight his readers with his off-beat view of the world. By poking fun of himself, the male species and even lovers of rhubarb, among others, he demonstrates his keen observation skills and his great gift for lively, stylish writing."

Among newspapers with a circulation less than 9,999, the *Echo*'s March 20 edition came third in the best tabloid front page category.

Echo editor Martha Perkins says that "What pleases me most about the awards is that they recognize it takes a team to produce a quality newspaper week after week. Our staff is not only dedicated to the community they serve but they pay attention to all the small details that go into making the paper lively and informative. It requires hard work by everyone at the newspaper and the staff pulls it off week after week. The reporters and photographers might be the public face of the newspaper but behind the scenes there's a strong core of talented, dedicated people."