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October 11, 2006

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Newspaper Interns Honored by Texas Daily Newspaper Association

Austin – Editorial interns who worked at the *Houston Chronicle* and *The Dallas Morning News* this past summer are winners of the **2006 H.M. Fentress Award**. The award is jointly sponsored by Cox Enterprises and the Texas Daily Newspaper Association.

Winner **Natalie Torentinos**, a *Houston Chronicle* summer intern, will receive \$250 and a plaque. Runner-Up **Matthew Haag**, who interned at *The Dallas Morning News*, will receive \$100 and a plaque.

“Natalie Torentinos had a fun summer, and so did her readers,” said the judges, who found it “harder than usual” to choose a winner from this year’s entrants.

Chronicle Pop Culture Editor Syd Kearney, in nominating Torentinos, wrote that readers “expressed their approval and delight in phone calls and e-mails” in response to Torentinos’ two-month series of features dubbed “Stuff We Made the Intern Do.”

“Natalie performed as a clown with the Ringling Brothers & Barnum Bailey Circus, piloted a hot air balloon over the East Texas countryside, learned to polka dance and sweated a day out as a member of the 11th Texas Cavalry in a Civil War skirmish reenactment,” involving much work outside the usual 9-to-5 intern hours and on weekends, Kearney said. “In addition to showcasing Natalie’s writing and reporting skills, the project provided a two-month spotlight on the *Chronicle* features department as each of the stories was given billboard treatment on Page 1A.”

Torentinos pushed for a well-rounded newsroom experience during her summer internship, Kearney said. “She made it a point to get to know editors, reporters and artists in other departments, and she even asked for the opportunity to work alongside the *Chronicle*’s seasoned cop reporters.”

Torentinos is a graduate of the University of Delaware where she was on the Dean’s List each semester and edited the university newspaper *The Review*.

Runner-up Matthew Haag hit the ground running this summer at *The Dallas Morning News* as an online intern at the paper’s web site DallasNews.com. Haag was required to finish stories quickly and update them often in a hurried pace that rarely slowed.

Haag showed a keen sense for spot news, according to DallasNews.com Senior Editor-News Linda Leavell. “Tenacity was a hallmark of Matthew’s work,” she wrote in her nominating letter. “If he didn’t find enough sources, he’d go back on the street. In covering a suspicious death, he peeked into a car parked in front of the deceased’s home for clues and drove to several locations in search of his roommate. He tracked down a woman who was present when her husband was shot during a carjacking. He located the aunt of a young man who had been killed and learned that he had just been hired that day for his first job.”

Haag was part of the team covering the Dallas Maverick’s run through the NBA finals, rising early to talk to people camping out for tickets in order to profile wild, hard-core fans and partnering on related sports and business stories centering around the NBA team’s success.

When asked to write features, “he clearly showed a touch with the written word,” Leavell said. “Among his gems: a piece about how parents use technology to keep in touch with their kids at summer camp and a spot enterprise offering from the filming of the TV show *Prison Break*.”

After shooting photos and watching how video and animation was being used to enhance stories, Haag said, “These are all things that my professors at the University of Missouri said would be the future of newspapers. But my internship proved them wrong: the future is now.”

The judges put it this way: “Matthew Haag serves new approaches with old-fashioned excellence.”

The H.M. Fentress Award was named for Texas newspaperman Harlon M. Fentress who was influential in Waco’s business development and owned newspapers in Waco, Austin, Lufkin and Port Arthur. The Fentress papers were purchased in 1976 by Cox Enterprises based in Atlanta, Georgia.

TDNA was founded in 1921 and is a statewide trade association of daily newspapers in Texas. The association has played a major role in protecting the right of the media to report the news, it works to strengthen journalism education in the state’s colleges and universities, and it provides a wide range of services to newspapers throughout Texas.