

Community journalist wins the 2004 Nat Nakasa Award



There were 16 nominations for the seventh Nat Nakasa award for courageous journalism and this year it was a community journalist who scooped the top honour - Buks Viljoen from The Lowvelder in Nelspruit.



The Nat Nakasa award is given annually to a journalist who has shown integrity, reported fearlessly, displayed a commitment to serve the people of South Africa, tenaciously striven to publish despite apparently insurmountable obstacles, resisted censorship, or any combination of these attributes.

Lowveld Bureau Chief of The Citizen and Business Editor of The Lowvelder, Viljoen, partially paralysed in a car accident in 1979, was described as a journalist "of great courage and tenacity".

This year the judges were unanimous in their selection of him as the winner. Their comments include "Fearless." "Just tackles everyone." "Importantly, gets stories taken up by the mainstream media and taken up by the courts." "This is the kind of journalism this country needs."

The first stories in this year's winner's portfolio were headlined: "Racism shame in rugby" and after taking to task SARFU : everyone else connected to rugby, turned to the Mpumalanga municipal manager who was: boss of the Year, who earned R800 000 a year of ratepayers' cash, who employed her husband as a consultant, who spent R7 000 on shoes, ran a shoe shop from her office, and was paid a staggering R129 000 bonus.

All good stuff for the pages of a small newspaper like Nelspruit's The Lowvelder, and brave stuff to publish in a fairly small community.

The prize of R15 000 cash was presented on Saturday at an awards ceremony in Johannesburg. This year's judges were Amina Frense, Govin Reddy, Joe Latakomo and Peter Sullivan, who is chairperson of the Media Freedom Committee of Print Media South Africa.

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