By Russ Pankonin
The Imperial Republican

The Imperial Republican repeated this year as one of the three winners of the Omaha World-Herald's (OWH) Service to Agriculture award.

The award was presented by OWH Publisher Terry Kroeger and Gov. Dave Heineman during last weekend's convention of the Nebraska Press Association (NPA) in Kearney.

The Republican's entry once again focused on the paper's news coverage and editorial voice on the continuing water issues in the Republican River Basin.

The entry also highlighted other ag coverage during 2008.

The Republican received the award for weeklies under 2,500 circulation.

The Aurora News-Register, published by Kurt and Paula Johnson, won the other weekly award for papers over 2,500 circulation.

The Kearney Hub won the daily division.

The Republican has also won the same prize for its water coverage in 2004, 2005 and 2007.

Twelve awards in newspaper contest

The Imperial Republican won 12 awards in this year's Better Newspaper Contest. The contest was judged by the Missouri Press Association.

Judges awarded the Republican four first place awards, three second place awards and five third place awards in the Class C competition. This includes Nebraska newspapers from 1,501 to 2,499 circulation.

Efforts taking first included the newspaper's new web site, in-depth writing on the water issue by Russ Pankonin, an ad designed by Chris Fidler and Karen Hayes, and a signature page on Veterans' Day by Chris Fidler, Karen Hayes and Jana Pribbeno.

Second place awards included news writing by Jan Schultz on the fluoride vote issue, a sports congratulations signature page by Fidler, Hayes and Pribbeno, and an ad campaign for Mid-Plains Community College by Fidler and Hayes.

Third place winners included the Father's Day reader contest by Pribbeno, Fidler and Hayes, a computer weather graphic by Fidler, spot news coverage by Jan Schultz on the school bomb threat, a sports feature photo by Russ Pankonin and the paper's sports pages.

Other award winners

Two other Johnson Publications newspapers earned awards in the contest, as well.

The Wauneta Breeze earned a total of 29 awards in the Class A division for papers with circulation under 1,000.

The Breeze also finished as the runner-up in Class A awards.

The Grant Tribune-Sentinel earned a pair of awards in the Class C contest.

Pankonin finishes service to NPA

This year's convention concluded Pankonin's tenure on the board of directors for NPA, serving as its past president. This completes 14 years of board service to the association.

Pankonin began his service to the press association, joining the board of the Nebraska Press Advertising Service, in 1995. He served as its president during 1998-1999.

He then joined the NPA board, serving as president in 2007-2008.

Ted Gill, publisher of the Ravenna News, took over the NPA presidency during last weekend's convention. He succeeds publisher Mark Rhoades of Blair.