



By Russ Pankonin

The Imperial Republican

Co-publishers Russ and Lori Pankonin knew The Imperial Republican would be receiving a general excellence award before leaving for the National Newspaper Association convention last week.

What they didn't know was that they would come home as the top paper in the country for weeklies with circulation of less than 3,000.

The award was announced during the final session of the convention Saturday, which was held in Mobile, Ala.

The Pankonins both said they were overwhelmed by the honor.

"I knew that we had placed among the top three going in but I never dreamed that we would be the overall winner," Russ said.

The general excellence competition considers all aspects of the paper.

These facets include quality of writing, headline language, use of photos and art work, mechanical evidence of craftsmanship and skill in composition, reproduction and presswork, editorial page, front page, family life/living page, sports page(s), advertising design and layout, quality and technique of writing copy, handling of classified and/or reader ads and taste, and treatment of public notices.

Here's what judges had to say about the Republican:

"This newspaper offers great coverage of the community it serves. From people-related features to issue-related hard news, The Imperial Republican has it all. Strong editorial pages offer thoughtful commentary too. Nice job."

Pankonin said the paper has been honored with the general excellence award in the state newspaper contest but has never won the honor at the national level.

"This is indeed an honor that we are truly proud of but it would not be possible without an exceptional staff who takes great pride in their work," he added.

In addition to the Pankonins, other staff members include Jan Schultz, Dana Sorensen, Chris Fidler, Alan Carman, Karen Hayes, Carolyn Lee, Jana Pribbeno and Vivian Berry.

Pankonin also won an honorable mention for an editorial written in November, 2008 entitled "Time to put football light fiasco behind us."