



By Jan Schultz The Imperial Republican

Coverage of the Julie Hanes kidnapping last August garnered The Imperial Republican the coveted Thomas C. Sorensen Award for Distinguished Journalism from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's College of Journalism and Mass Communications.

Co-Publisher Russ Pankonin and News Editor Jan Schultz, who covered the kidnapping last summer, were recognized at Friday's J Days (Journalism) Awards Luncheon on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus.

It came with a \$1,000 prize provided by the Sorensen family.

A Sorensen Award was awarded to Omaha KMTV Action 3 News Reporter Emily Szink, who was recognized for her stories on the drug "Molly."

Interim Dean James O'Hanlon, informing the Republican of its award, said in a letter, "The College of Journalism and Mass Communications received a huge response to our request for entries this year.

"It was enormously difficult to make a final selection for the award, but two stories rose to the top and will share the award this year."

Sorensen was a former Nebraska journalist who left the state to pursue a career in government service with the U.S. Information Service. He graduated from UNL with a degree in journalism and political science.

During his career, he worked as night editor of the Lincoln State Journal and served as news director and commentator on KLMS radio in Lincoln. He later was an investment advisor.

The Republican's story told of Hanes' ordeal after she was taken by force from her salon by her estranged husband. They eventually came to Imperial, where the incident ended in a cornfield after Hanes was released and Dwayne Lawrence took his own life.

The two reporters were on the scene at the northwest edge of Imperial as close as law enforcement would allow for about six hours.

The pair also attended news conferences throughout that warm Aug. 25 afternoon/evening, and kept Republican readers in the loop during the day-long ordeal with regular website updates.

The Sorensen Award was among several presented at the annual luncheon. Also recognized were accomplishments of UNL alumni in newspaper, broadcasting, advertising and public relations careers.

Jack Payne, who had stints covering Husker and UNO football and was a longtime Omaha WOW-TV broadcaster, was recognized with the Broadcast Pioneer Award.