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Writer/Contact: **John F. Greenman**, 706/542-1081, jgreenma@uga.edu

UGA awards McGill Medal for Journalistic Courage to Chauncey Bailey Project reporters

Athens, Ga. – Four reporters associated with the Chauncey Bailey Project will be honored by the University of Georgia for journalistic courage. Thomas Peele, Josh Richman, Mary Fricker and Bob Butler will receive the McGill Medal for Journalistic Courage on Wednesday, March 24, at the UGA Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication.

“Peele, Richman, Fricker and Butler’s reporting was truly courageous,” wrote *Oakland Tribune* editor Martin G. Reynolds in his nomination. “A reporter was killed and they continued and expanded his work despite obvious dangers.”

The reporter was Chauncey Bailey, editor of the *Oakland Post*, who was murdered in 2007 while investigating black Muslims and their Your Black Muslim Bakery, headquartered in Oakland, Calif. The man charged with Bailey’s killing told a court he was ordered by the group’s leader to murder Bailey “to stop this story.”

The four reporters wrote more than 100 stories about the group, the murder, and the police investigation. Reynolds wrote, “Their reportage forced the indictment of the group’s leader on murder charges for ordering the assassination.”

Peele and Richman are reporters for *The Oakland Tribune*/Bay Area News Group. Peele is an investigative reporter whose work focuses on government malfeasance and corruption. A 25-year veteran of newspapers on both coasts, Peele has won four national reporting awards. Richman covers state and federal politics. He reported for the *Express-Times* in Easton, Pa. for five years before joining the *Oakland Tribune* in 1997.

Fricker and Butler are independent reporters. Fricker retired in 2006 from the *Press Democrat* in Santa Rosa, Calif., where she covered business. She is the author of the New York Times best-selling book, *Inside Job: The Looting of America’s Savings and Loans*.

Butler’s career in broadcast journalism began in 1981 when he was hired by KCBS in San Francisco. He has reported about economics, politics and disasters throughout the U.S. and from Brazil, Europe, Namibia, Tanzania and Senegal.

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286 Oconee Street, Ste. 200N • Athens, Georgia 30602-4999 • (706) 542-8083 • Fax (706) 542-3939

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McGill Medal, page 2

The McGill Medal is named for Ralph McGill, the late editor and publisher of the *Atlanta Constitution*. McGill was regarded by many as “the conscience of the South” for his editorials challenging racial segregation in the 1950s and 1960s.

“To win an award that memorializes the work of Ralph McGill is a high honor,” said Peele. “He was a courageous newspaperman and, more importantly, a courageous American.”

McGill “showed us that we can make a difference if we stand up to cruelty and injustice,” said Fricker. “That’s what dozens of Bay Area journalists did when Chauncey Bailey was murdered.”

More than 30 reporters, editors and producers are involved in the Chauncey Bailey Project, as are more than 50 others as photographers, researchers and fundraisers, according to the project’s Web site.

Richman and Butler said they were honored and humbled by the award.

Richman said he didn’t think their work amounted to journalistic courage. “We simply did what we had to do after a friend and colleague was slain for his work,” Richman said. “If a story dies along with the journalist, the journalist died in vain; letting that happen was never an option.”

Peele, Richman, Fricker and Butler were selected from 15 journalists nominated by reporters, editors and producers from across the U.S. Nominees were to be “working U.S. journalists whose careers have exemplified journalistic courage.”

The selection was made by the 2009 class of McGill Fellows, undergraduate and graduate students chosen for academic achievement, practical experience and leadership.

“The McGill Fellows were impressed by their continued courage in the face of obvious dangers,” said Devora Olin, the McGill Fellow who researched the nomination. “They persevered in bringing justice to Bailey and uncovering the underground activities of the bakery.”

The McGill Medal is the latest development in the growth of the McGill program at the UGA Grady College.

For 31 years, the McGill Lecture has brought significant figures in journalism to the UGA to help the university honor McGill’s courage as an editor. In 2007, UGA added the McGill Symposium, bringing together students, faculty and leading journalists to consider what journalistic courage means and how it is exemplified by reporters and editors. And, last year, the first McGill Medal was awarded to a U.S. journalist whose career has exemplified journalistic courage.

“All of this is for a single purpose: to advance journalistic courage,” said John F. Greenman, Carter Professor of Journalism. Greenman and Diane H. Murray, the Grady College director of public service and outreach, oversee the McGill program.

MORE

McGill Medal, page 3

The McGill Medal is funded by the McGill Lecture Endowment. Contributors include the Gannett Foundation and the Knight Chair in Health and Medical Reporting.

For more information about the McGill program, see www.grady.uga.edu/mcgill, contact Greenman at 706/542-1081, jgreenma@uga.edu or Murray at 706/542-5038 murrayd@uga.edu

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