

The Tyee
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To Excellence in Journalism Award Jury
From David Beers, Founding Editor

The Tyee (<http://thetyee.ca/>) was proud to be named 2007 runner-up for Excellence in the category of Small/Medium or Local Media. We believe we have made much progress since then and respectfully ask to be considered for the Excellence Award this year. While our traffic has grown 25 per cent since last year, to 200,000 unique visitors in our best months, we remain within the Small/Medium category.

At a moment when traditional business and organizational models for news media in Canada are severely stressed, The Tyee offers an alternative: independent, online-only, and dedicated to producing well-sourced investigative and solutions-oriented journalism that is increasingly scarce.

The Tyee, based in Vancouver, British Columbia, is well into its sixth year of providing news and views for BC and beyond. In that time, The Tyee has broken many big stories, provided in-depth analyses about critical issues facing the province and nation, and published viewpoints enriching the democratic conversation.

While we are online, interactive “new media”, we are committed to traditional journalistic practices. Our news and views are clearly labeled so that readers can distinguish one from the other. Our news stories -- paid assignments to trained journalists -- are thoroughly reported with opportunity for comment provided to sources on all sides of issues. Our opinion pieces must be argued on the facts: no rants allowed. Every piece is thoroughly edited and, where required, lawyered.

In the past year The Tyee has added a full-time Legislative Bureau Chief based in Victoria. See Andrew MacLeod’s news features here:
http://thetyee.ca/Bios/Andrew_MacLeod/

We have also added a full-time Investigative editor based in Vancouver. Monte Paulsen’s news features are here: http://thetyee.ca/Bios/Monte_Paulsen/

We now have a young, talented reporter focused on social and political aspects of the 2010 Olympics. Geoff Dembicki publishes most of his reports on The Hook’s Olympics section here: <http://thetyee.ca/Blogs/TheHook/Olympics2010/> You can read his longer news features here: http://thetyee.ca/Bios/Geoff_Dembicki/

We now have a full-time sustainability issues reporter. Colleen McKimmett's contributions are here: <http://thetyee.ca/News/2009/02/26/EnergyZones/>

And we may have the last labour beat reporter in mainstream Canadian journalism. Stories by contributing editor Tom Sandborn, who also focused on health policy issues, are here: http://thetyee.ca/Bios/Tom_Sandborn/

We have added, as well, The Hook, which quickly became one of Canada's top political news blogs as judged by traffic and influence. The Hook was selected as a finalist for this year's international Weblog Awards in two categories and was named Canada's number two political news blog by Robert Jago: <http://rjago.wordpress.com/2009/03/06/canadas-top-25-political-blogs-march-2009/>

You can find The Hook here: <http://thetyee.ca/Blogs/TheHook/> We intended it to model what we call "coopetition." The Hook is edited in The Tyee's offices, and runs not only items by our own staffers and interns, but also free-lancers, and journalists employed elsewhere, including Sean Holman of 24 hours/Public Eye and Frances Bula, who writes for the Globe and publishes her own closely read blog called State of Vancouver. Our goal was to make The Hook a must read for the political set in B.C. and I believe we have succeeded.

We are publishing this year five major investigative or solutions-oriented series funded by donations from our readers. Each writer received a \$5,000 Tyee reporting fellowship, granted by an independent panel of journalism professors. The most recent resulting series was by a school teacher who sought out the best thinking on improving teaching he could find, then wrote about it in an engaging, inspiring way. You can read Nick Smith's series here: <http://thetyee.ca/Life/2008/09/02/TeachInspiration/> And you can read about the Tyee fellowships program here: <http://thetyee.ca/Views/2006/02/19/FellowshipsLaunched/>

This year we pioneered the potential of social media-driven content as well, with our "Green Your Campbell Cash" project. When Premier Gordon Campbell granted every citizen a \$100 rebate for the new carbon tax in B.C., the Tyee created a web site allowing people to propose ways to put some of that collective \$400 million towards various green initiatives. We solicited projects to be posted on our site, and allowed readers to vote for their favourites. Result: 86 projects ranging from solar panels on a school to light rail in the Fraser Valley were submitted, and nearly 18,000 visitors looked at over 50,000 pages. The project gained wide traditional media exposure and "viralled" widely through Facebook and other social media, demonstrating a new model for publications wanting to foster citizen engagement. You can read more about the success of the project here: <http://thetyee.ca/Tyeenews/2008/07/31/CampbellCash/> And can visit the Green Your Campbell Cash site here: <http://contest.thetyee.ca/greengyourcampbellcash/>

In the past year or two, The Tyee has led all local media in reporting on homeless and housing issues in B.C. We donate our content to run in The Megaphone, Vancouver's street newspaper sold by homeless people. In the fall, we co-sponsored what proved to be

by far the best attended Vancouver mayoral debate, drawing more than 1000 for a free event where the two candidates focused solely on homelessness solutions.

These are just a few examples of how, having started from scratch in 2003, The Tyee has become a significant force in the local public arena. We are now clipped and distributed by the BC Legislature's official daily news briefing. And the Vancouver region online community voted The Tyee three "Best of 604" awards for news, politics and multi-contributor content. We edged out the CBC in the "Best Site for News" category. You can read about that here: <http://thetyee.ca/Mediacheck/2008/12/12/ThreeWins/>

Combining Hook items and Tyee features, we nowadays publish at least 50 original reports a week, many times the rate in previous years.

And in April, we will launch a major redesign that provides readers with even more content and ways to share it with others.

We remain quite diverse in our offerings, given that many of our articles are by freelancers who would otherwise be largely shut out of the major media. Our contributors include young and seasoned reporters, academics, creative non-fiction writers, citizens of all ages and ethnic backgrounds with various first-person perspectives – even the premier of B.C. on one occasion (we reprinted his speech on First Nations reconciliation.)

We can point to many in-depth series demonstrating our commitment to comprehensiveness. The one running currently would be Paulsen's "A Home for All" series on achieving affordable housing in Vancouver, a city with the highest cost of housing in Canada. Here's the series so far:

<http://thetyee.ca/Series/2009/02/10/HomeForAll/>

For the criteria of "courage and independence," may I draw your attention to a small sampling of articles we have run on the homelessness issue:

2010: More Homeless than Athletes? (10-part series)

What it will take to provide needed shelter before the Olympics.

<http://thetyee.ca/Series/2007/05/29/HomelessSeries/>

Homeless Hell Hole Below Science World

'Worst' of many 'really rough spots' says city's outreach worker.

<http://thetyee.ca/News/2008/02/21/HomelessHell/>

A City Soft on 'Slumlords'

The Sahotas own crime-ridden, decrepit buildings, but Vancouver hasn't forced them to meet legal standards. A Tyee special report.

<http://thetyee.ca/News/2008/11/10/Slumlords/>

BC's Worst Drug Hotel Is About to Empty Out

The violent hell of Backpackers Inn. Where does it move next?

<http://thetyee.ca/News/2008/03/20/Backpackers/>

How to End Homelessness in Vancouver (2-part series)

Drawn from dozens of experts, critical policy changes and 50 initiatives that could eliminate homelessness in British Columbia's largest city as it inaugurates a new mayor.

<http://thetyee.ca/Series/2008/12/08/Homeless/>

...and also to Andrew MacLeod's close scrutiny of the BC government's attempt to stack a drug policy review panel with pharma firm reps:

Drug Firms' Sway over BC's New PharmaCare Task Force

Most panel members have strong links to drug industry.

<http://thetyee.ca/News/2007/11/28/PharmaTaskForce/>

Pharma Reps Meet in Secret, Craft New Drug Approval Process

Campbell government hosted closed meetings.

<http://thetyee.ca/News/2008/12/01/DrugApproval/>

Fatten Pharma's Bottom Line, Health Ministry Told

Panel wants BC's medicine buys to boost 'economic development' as well as health.

<http://thetyee.ca/News/2008/05/27/PharmaCare/>

Embattled Pharma Review Panel Works Well: Top Scientists

Ministry's push to disband Therapeutics Initiative 'lacks substantive evidence.'

<http://thetyee.ca/News/2009/02/17/PharmaInitiative/>

As evidence of a willingness to "break from the pack" I would invite you to click onto these recent examples of solutions and ideas-driven journalism:

Focus on BC Architecture (9-part series)

Noted critic Adele Weder casts a smart, critical eye on trends in architecture in the province.

<http://thetyee.ca/Series/2008/01/17/BCArch/>

In Search of A+ Teaching (6-part series)

One teacher's quest to learn from the best educators he can find. A Tyee reader-funded series.

<http://thetyee.ca/Life/2008/09/02/TeachInspiration/>

Exploring the Fate of the Fraser River (4-part series)

A Tyee reporter paddles from source to sea, a journey that teaches how the mighty watershed is central to the future of nature and humans in British Columbia.

<http://thetyee.ca/Series/2008/11/19/FraserRiver/>

New Ideas for the New Year, 2009 (10-part series)

The Tyee offers its readers 10 brave new ideas, big and not so big, aimed at making life better this year and beyond.

<http://thetyee.ca/News/2008/12/22/NewIdeas09/>

Regarding balancing “right to privacy and the right to know,” The Tyee is clear with staff and audience that its mission is substantive, non-sensationalistic reporting on public issues. We do not cover crime, tragedy or titillating scandal (although we regularly explore structural or policy issues that provide context for other media’s sensational headlines.) We have never been accused of violating anyone’s right to privacy, and tend to focus our stories on institutions rather than individuals.

Accountability and accessibility: The site offers free access anywhere in the world and provides forums after each article for reader comment. We sometimes do further reporting and make correction based on comments posted. When we make corrections to articles we are clear about having done so.

Creativity and innovation: The Tyee workplace is modeled on the idea of a creative studio rather than a rigid hierarchy. As a result, people are able to pursue their passions while guided by seasoned veterans. The Tyee has become known as a hothouse for young talent, with our interns and staff going on to jobs at The Walrus, The Globe and Mail, Newsweek and elsewhere. And, also as a result, we produce highly innovative editorial.

Example: The 100-Mile Diet, the series by J.B. MacKinnon and Alisa Smith, framed and launched by The Tyee, that became a book, a global phenomenon, and now a TV series.

<http://thetyee.ca/Series/2005/06/28/100Mile/>

These days The Tyee is regularly sought out and cited by people seeking bright spots and new models in a news media landscape that seems to be crumbling before our eyes.

In Chicago, where the two major newspapers are broke, the Chicago Reader weekly posited The Tyee as a possible remedy. You can read that article here:

<http://www.chicagoreader.com/features/stories/hottype/081211/>

The Tyee is named as a bright spot (page 19) in [On Behalf of Journalism: A Manifesto for Change](#), a major report gathering the views of dozens of North America's leading journalists and media scholars. Lead author is Geneva Overholser for the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania.

http://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/Overholser/20061011_JournStudy.pdf

I hope you will agree with me that The Tyee is gaining such attention because, whatever new methods we use to share our news coverage, we adhere to time-honoured journalistic practices, employing them creatively, but always with the aim of achieving excellence.

Thank you very much for your consideration, and if there is anything else I can provide please don’t hesitate to ask. My personal email is dbeers@thetyee.ca and my cell is 778-238-1442.