Fund for Investigative Journalism

JANUARY 2018

FIJ diversity fellow receives prestigious journalism prize

Jaeah Lee, a member of FIJ's inaugural class of diversity fellows, received the first American Mosaic Journalism Prize for her previous reporting and writing on gun violence.

The award includes a $100,000 cash prize and recognizes Lee for work published by California Sunday Magazine, Vice and Mother Jones.

Lee is currently completing her FIJ/Schuster Institute diversity fellowship project.

Reminder: The next deadline to apply for a grant is Monday, Feb. 5. FIJ will award up to $10,000 for each grant, which can be used by freelance and independent investigative journalists for travel, acquiring documents and other reporting expenses. A select number of grant recipients will also be assigned mentors.

Deadlines for two additional 2018 application rounds have also be set for May 7 in the spring and September 24 in the fall.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MONTH

FIJ/Schuster Institute diversity fellow continues to shine light on juvenile incarceration

Zerious Meadows, center, spends time with family after his release from the Macomb Correctional Facility near Detroit. (Photo by Lisa Armstrong.)

FIJ/Schuster Institute diversity fellow Lisa Armstrong continued her investigation into how the United States incarcerates juveniles. In a piece for The Intercept, Armstrong looks into the case of Zerious Meadows, who at 63 was recently released from the Macomb Correctional Facility near Detroit. He spent 47 years behind bars. Armstrong noted that Michigan has the second-highest number of juvenile lifers in the country. A 2016 court decision gave the approximately 1,500 people who were sentenced before 2012, like Meadows, a chance at release.

Hurricane Harvey wreaked havoc on the Texas Coast in the waning days of August, dumping more than 50 inches of rain in parts of the Houston area. The storm flooded thousands of homes and killed more than 80 people. The Texas Tribune, in collaboration with Reveal and ProPublica, investigated recovery efforts and found deep problems caused by repeated flooding in overbuilt areas of Houston and a tangle of conflicting priorities when it comes to aiding private developers and individual homeowners. Months after Harvey, some displaced families remain in limbo. The lack of statistical data, including the true extent of personal financial ruin, could deepen the woes of many homeowners who could fall through the cracks because of daunting layers of government bureaucracy. The series also documented the dilemma of competing priorities between public flood-control projects and private loss.

Investigators have found more than a dozen buildings encompassing nearly 1,000 homes whose sewage was running into Coney Island Creek via an illicit connection. (Photo by Adi Talwar.)

New York City is threaded with heavily polluted waterways, like the Gowanus Canal, Newtown Creek and the Bronx River, where sewage and chemicals sometimes make the water dangerous to even touch. An investigation by City Limits shines light on an under-covered element of the city's ongoing violation of the Clean Water Act: raw sewage from homes and apartments pumped through illegal pipes into waterways, and industrial chemicals dumped down storm drains or leaked onto waterfront land. Dozens of times each year, monitoring devices pick up high fecal bacteria counts, but the city often cannot find their origin. WNYC recently featured the investigation by City Limits.

InsideClimate News delved into the regulatory record of the energy company Hilcorp, a Houston-based firm that has kept a low profile despite being one of the country's largest privately held oil and gas producers. As Hilcorp makes plans to drill in the Arctic, InsideClimate reviewed thousands of pages of government documents and conducted interviews with industry experts and watchdogs. The investigation by InsideClimate portrays a company that critics say prioritizes an aggressive expansion in Alaska while repeatedly falling short on safety and environmental protection.