

Bee's Philp wins editorial-writing Pulitzer

By Sam Stanton -- Bee Staff Writer
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Tom Philp, an associate editor of The Sacramento Bee's editorial board, won the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing Monday for a series urging the restoration of Yosemite's Hetch Hetchy Valley.

Philp, 43, choked back tears as he watched for Associated Press news bulletins announcing at 12:08 p.m. that he'd won American journalism's highest honor.

"I still have a hard time accepting this," Philp said as his colleagues and family surrounded him in The Bee newsroom, applauding loudly.

It is the fourth Pulitzer Prize for The Bee and the first the newspaper has won since 1992, when it was awarded two Pulitzers.

The award, which includes a \$10,000 prize, came for "Hetch Hetchy Reclaimed," a package of what the Pulitzer board called "deeply researched editorials on reclaiming California's flooded Hetch Hetchy Valley that stirred action."

Editorial page editor David Holwerk, who has overseen seven Pulitzer finalists in his career, including two winners, told staffers and editors gathered in the newsroom that "in the past two years Tom Philp has won every major award given for editorial writing in American journalism."

Philp, he added, "is one of the best editorial writers working in this country today."

The other finalists in Philp's category were Sebastian Mallaby of the Washington Post, who wrote about the crisis in Sudan; and David Yarnold and Daniel Vasquez of the San Jose Mercury News, who campaigned against unethical behavior at San Jose's City Hall. Yarnold was an editor of Philp's at the Mercury News.

Philp's award was one of 15 Pulitzer Prizes in 14 journalism categories unveiled Monday.

The Los Angeles Times won two prizes, one for public service for its coverage of "deadly medical problems and racial injustice at a major public hospital," the Pulitzer board said,



Tom Philp learns Monday that he's won the top prize in U.S. journalism. Celebrating behind him are, from center, Bee Publisher Janis Besler Heaphy, editorial page editor David Holwerk and deputy editorial page editor Maria Henson.

• [Read the winning series: "Hetch Hetchy Reclaimed"](#)

• [David Holwerk, editor of the Editorial pages, congratulates Tom Philp - Broadband | Low Band](#)

• [Bee Publisher Janis Besler Heaphy congratulates Tom Philp - Broadband | Low Band](#)

and another for international reporting by Kim Murphy for coverage of Russia's struggles to cope with terrorism, recession and political change.

The board awarded another Pulitzer in the same category to Dele Olojede of Newsday "for his fresh, haunting look at Rwanda a decade after rape and genocidal slaughter" there.

San Francisco Chronicle photographer Deanne Fitzmaurice won for feature photography for documenting efforts of doctors to treat a 9-year-old Iraqi boy seriously wounded in an explosion.

Word that Philp was one of three finalists for the editorial writing prize leaked out several weeks ago. Although the names of winners are supposed to remain secret until they are announced, word had spread among the editorial board by late Friday that Philp would win.

Nevertheless, Philp sat nervously at a newsroom computer at noon as the awards were announced in New York and relayed by the AP.

"Will you stop taking pictures of me crying?" he joked to staff photographer Jay Mather, a 1980 Pulitzer winner.

Standing among Philp's colleagues and editors as they waited were his mother, Nell Farr; his son Max, 11; daughter Charlotte, 9; and his wife, Lisa Lapin; and her parents, Larry and Ingrid Lapin. Lisa Lapin, a former Bee reporter and editor, is now assistant vice chancellor of communications at the University of California, Davis.

Philp's editor on the Hetch Hetchy project was deputy editorial page editor Maria Henson, who won a Pulitzer in 1992 at the Lexington Herald-Leader in Kentucky while working for Holwerk there. She called Philp's project a "worthy endeavor."

Bee Publisher Janis Besler Heaphy, standing on a desk in the middle of the newsroom, said the award came for an effort that is "in the best tradition of The Sacramento Bee, McClatchy and American journalism" and stems from Holwerk's philosophy of allowing writers to take chances.

"David has a knack for creating a culture that really inspires risk-taking and excellence," Heaphy said.

James McClatchy, publisher of The McClatchy Co., which owns The Bee, said Philp's strong suit was his "ability to go outside the box, to find stories and situations that needed attention."

Philp, a graduate of Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, came to The Bee in 1992 from the Mercury News.

He began as a reporter in the newsroom, moving to the editorial board five years later to focus on water use and other issues.

Philp said he first contemplated writing about Hetch Hetchy on a plane flight as he looked out at the state's reservoirs and valleys below.

"I was aboard Southwest Airlines heading to Southern California, and as the water writer you like to look at the reservoirs along the way," he said. "I just looked out at Yosemite and Hetch Hetchy and thought, 'How beautiful.' "

Philp said he finally was spurred to tackle the project after reading a Fresno Bee story in December 2003 about a University of California, Davis, study on whether Hetch Hetchy could be drained and restored without damaging San Francisco's water supply.

Hetch Hetchy, which has been dubbed "Yosemite's second great valley," was flooded after Congress approved legislation in 1913 to dam the Tuolumne River and flood the valley upstream.

The measure provided San Francisco with a water supply it has relied upon since 1923.

But a computer model crafted by UC Davis graduate student Sarah Null and faculty adviser Jay Lund provided evidence the dam could be breached and the water held downstream in other reservoirs without depriving San Francisco of any water.

"That was kind of the turning point to think about taking it seriously," he said. "It just took a while to get up the courage to suggest it."

The Bee's editorial page already had voiced its opinion on the matter at least twice before. In 1913, the newspaper supported flooding the valley. In 1987, when Interior Secretary Donald Hodel suggested a study of restoring Hetch Hetchy, Bee editorials "mocked" the idea, Philp said.

The notion that Hetch Hetchy could be drained without harming San Francisco's water supply is highly charged, especially in the Bay Area, where officials have used their clout to scuttle such ideas in the past.

Philp, however, proceeded with a series of editorials and columns so detailed they included long passages from the Congressional Record of the original debate over the 1913 legislation.

Philp's editorials eventually led to suggestions by key legislators that the idea be studied, and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's administration has since agreed to assess the possibility of storing the water elsewhere.

Philp has won numerous journalism awards over the years, including several in 2004 for an investigative series looking into local municipal water boards and questionable spending by officials of the entities.

His awards for that series included a first-place National Headliner Award and the Scripps Howard Foundation's Walker Stone Award, but not, as Holwerk noted, the 2004 Pulitzer.

"He could and should have won the prize last year, but waiting a year is OK," Holwerk said.