

Kansas Sunshine Coalition for Open Government
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Capital-Journal fights for open government

Extraordinary efforts win Sunshine award

The Topeka-Capital Journal has been in the forefront of the movement for open records and open meetings for decades. That's why the Capital-Journal is a 2009 winner of the Above and Beyond Award from the Kansas Sunshine Coalition for Open Government.

Most recently, "the Capital-Journal did a great service to the people of Kansas by taking on the powers that be in the Schools for Fair Funding case," said Doug Anstaett, executive director of the Kansas Press Association and Sunshine Coalition board member.

Schools for Fair Funding was bankrolled by 19 public school districts in Kansas. It raised about \$3.2 million to press a lawsuit against the state over school funding, yet tried to keep its contributors secret. "Solid reporting indicated just how ludicrous it was that a publicly funded agency was claiming some sort of privilege to spend taxpayers' money while remaining free of public scrutiny," Anstaett said.

The 2007 settlement of the case by the school organization resulted in a \$12,500 contribution to the Sunshine Coalition for public education on open government.

But that's only one of the Capital-Journal's efforts. "Repeatedly over the last 30 years, the newspaper has led the state in protecting the policy of open government," said Mike Merriam, a Topeka media lawyer who represents the Coalition.

Two other examples cited by Merriam:

County commissioners attempts to keep settlement agreements in lawsuits secret from the public were defeated by the C-J in Osage, Anderson and Wyandotte counties. And the investigation into practices at the Shawnee County Corrections Department was opened to the public after the paper's suit to achieve that goal.

This is only the third Above and Beyond award given by the Coalition (now located in the Elliott School of Communication at Wichita State University) since its founding in 1999. The Lawrence Journal-World won the first award in 2006. The Wichita Eagle also was honored this year.