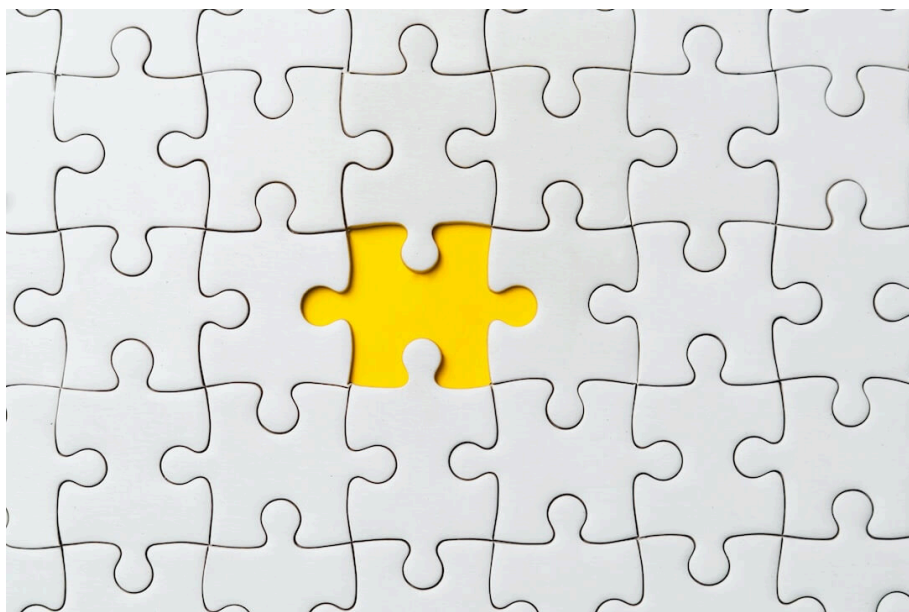


# Once again, for-profit metro papers are rare among the Pulitzer winners

**With the exception of the Houston Chronicle, this year's Pulitzers largely left legacy metro papers behind**



(Shutterstock)

By: [Rick Edmonds](#)

May 5, 2025

Continuing [a trend of recent years](#), for-profit metro newspapers were conspicuously absent among the Pulitzer Prize winners [announced Monday](#). The sole exception was the Houston Chronicle, where four journalists shared the prize for editorials exposing dangerous railroad crossings near a middle school.

The Baltimore Banner, a three-year-old nonprofit digital startup, did win the prize for local reporting in partnership with The New York Times for coverage of the fentanyl crisis in the city.

Another staple of Pulitzer rosters in years past — small, feisty papers that punched way above their weight on a big story — were absent altogether. Instead, the prizes were dominated by the giant staffs of national papers and wire services, with national magazines and specialty digital sites filling out the list.

Seven entries honored as finalists were from regionals, including two from The Boston Globe and two from the Houston Chronicle's sister Hearst paper, the San Francisco Chronicle.

What made the Houston Chronicle package of editorials a winner?

The judge's citation described the editorials as "a powerful series on dangerous train crossings that kept a rigorous focus on the people and communities at risk as the newspaper demanded urgent action."

The first piece in the submission focused on how students on their way to school often crawled under or climbed over stalled freight trains. One of the four-person team was visual journalist Sharon Steinmann, and the editorial was paired with her photos showing middle school students doing just that.

It all seemed like an accident waiting to happen, and it did six months later, as a high school student died trying to sprint in front of a train, occasioning four more editorials deploring the preventable tragedy and calling for action.

Editorial board members had been tracking the problem over several years. They went to see for themselves the scene in the morning when students were trying to avoid

tardies and sat in on a meeting where students gave a presentation to railroad executives.

By April of this year, Union Pacific, the Houston Independent School District and the Texas legislature all had taken remedial action — including planning a pedestrian bridge over the tracks where the student was killed.

That flurry of activity was too late to include in follow-up pieces as part of the entry, but Pulitzer rules allow for submission of “supplemental” material. Pulitzer judges often gravitate to coverage that results in change as opposed to just laying out a problem.

Lisa Falkenberg was one of the writers and, at the time, opinion editor (she has since switched to become a senior columnist). Her collaborators included deputy editor Raj Mankad and senior editorial writer Leah Binkovitz. This is the third Pulitzer Falkenberg has won on her own or as part of a team. The editorial group took the top prize in 2022 and was named a finalist the next year.

The Chronicle’s win bucks two current trends. The more obvious one is that national powerhouses continue to prosper, growing news staff or keeping it steady. Regional papers and smaller ones are under intense financial pressure, and rounds of staff cuts have been the norm for the last two decades. That doesn’t wipe out capacity for investigative work or response to a natural disaster or other breaking local stories, but big commitments of resources become increasingly rare.

At the same time, opinion sections have been cut back and reconfigured. Chains like Gannett, with many others

following their lead, have been especially focused on cutting back or even discontinuing editorials. The idea is that research shows readers don't like to be told what to think, and prefer reader opinion and community dialogue if they look at such content at all.

That makes crusading editorial projects like the Chronicle's a throwback.

In a similar piece last year, I noted that swings in the pattern of what kind of outlets win Pulitzers have not been common; the big guys one year, smaller ones the next. Advance Local's Al.com won twice in 2023, but there were no regional newspaper winners in 2024 and just the one in 2025.

Maybe regionals will surge back with multiple wins sometime in the near future. But it is hard not to conclude that for the ultimate prize honoring the best of journalism, the parade has moved on.