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Dear Judges:

To say these are strange times for our industry is an understatement, but can you imagine coming into the industry under these circumstances as a young, budding journalist?

That's what Bremen Keasey has done. He graduated from University of Wisconsin-Madison in the height of the COVID-19 pandemic – remotely, from his parents' basement in Atlanta, Georgia. He started at the Oshkosh Northwestern's local government watchdog reporter in October 2021, marking his first reporting job out of college. He also entered a remote-working world that looked nothing like the "traditional" newsroom.

When he arrived, he struggled to get to know a brand-new community and find issues that a local government watchdog reporter should cover. Still, he showed up to work every day – often as the only person in the newsroom – and wrote whatever was asked of him, even collaborating with reporters from USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin newsrooms in Appleton and Green Bay on special projects, such as a story on the state of volunteer firefighters in small communities.

He's got a drive for investigative reporting, and it wasn't long before he learned that Winnebago County Board members were resigning en masse before the April election, citing the county executive's "toxic leadership." As you'll find in his local government reporting, he talked to the board members and the executive about how this happened. He also discovered the executive hired an assistant under strange circumstances. He kept digging, and he's since found more information about harassment complaints against the assistant that went ignored by the executive – but that'll be for next year's contest.

Though he's still learning the ropes, his confidence has greatly improved. He's willing to put in the time and energy to make sure he's got the story right, and he's got an eye for storytelling, from hard-hitting pieces to feature stories on a man who lost his eye serving in a war and another man who decided to fulfill his bucket list goal hiking the Pacific Crest Trail after double knee replacement surgeries.

He's also endured a ton of changes during his short time here. When staffing cuts forced us to change our coverage plans, Bremen willingly expanded his watchdog reporting to include Fond du Lac. He dove right in, scheduling meetings with local leaders and getting to know a second community. I'm confident he'll have stories from Fond du Lac to submit for next year's contest.

For all those reasons, I think Bremen is more than worthy of being named a Rookie Reporter of the Year. I certainly see him that way. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Katy Macek, editor