

To the WNA Collegiate Journalist of the Year judges:

Student journalism is a tireless pursuit filled with long nights, early mornings, countless interviews and unmanageable schedules. But the brightest and strongest students are able to push themselves through these circumstances and rise above.

There is no student journalist in the state of Wisconsin who has put more work, time and effort into sustaining and supporting student journalism than Sophia Vento.

Sophia began 2023 as editor-in-chief of *The Daily Cardinal*, the oldest and most decorated student newspaper at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Sophia used her position to highlight hot-button issues, such as organized labor, within the Madison community. She also used her influence to advocate on behalf of student journalists, lobbying the UW-Madison School of Journalism and Mass Communication to provide support and resources to student journalists and writing op-eds about the power of student journalism. Sophia worked countless hours to make the *Cardinal* the best it could be, often staying in the office into the early hours of the morning to make sure copy and layout were perfect, and she was available to her writers, editors and other staff at any hour of the day.

Sophia is as skilled an investigative journalist as she is a leader. As an investigative intern for the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* in summer of 2023, Sophia produced an array of in-depth stories that exposed neglect and wrongdoing in the Milwaukee community. Her investigation into trichloroethylene (TCE) contamination in Milwaukee apartment buildings made frequent headlines, including the revelation that city officials knew a housing site was contaminated with the cancer-causing chemical but chose not to tell residents for weeks. She also ventured into other beats during her time with the *Journal Sentinel* to cover feature stories about Barbie's Wisconsin roots and Uganda-born couple who met immigrant and refugee mental health needs at their clinic.

Returning to UW-Madison in the fall, Sophia assumed the position of editor-in-chief of *Curb Magazine*, an award-winning annual lifestyle magazine produced by UW-Madison students. Within the span of a semester, Sophia led efforts to create a cohesive concept, create stories, fundraise and produce a 64-page magazine from the ground up.

Sophia's character may be her strongest attribute. Sophia is a calming presence and a steadfast leader in any situation, no matter how chaotic. She rises to the challenge and conquers any obstacle in her path. Her wisdom is uncountable, her knowledge is unending and her willingness to learn is infinite.

When something is wrong with copy or layout as the deadline approaches, Sophia is able to work through the pressure and deliver a clean and complete newspaper. When there is a conflict between editors or writers, Sophia can create a positive compromise for everyone.

Without Sophia's efforts, *The Daily Cardinal* and *Curb Magazine* would not be the great institutions they are today. Her leadership provided a pathway for students to create groundbreaking journalism. And, in the midst of the chaos of being editor-in-chief (twice), Sophia managed to conduct several groundbreaking investigations for the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*.

Sophia has put more work, time and effort into journalism than perhaps any other student journalist in Wisconsin. Above all, Sophia has maintained what makes her not only a great journalist but a great person: her positivity. We believe there is no one else more deserving of Collegiate Journalist of the Year than Sophia Vento.

Sincerely,

Drake White-Bergey
Editor-in-Chief, *The Daily Cardinal*

Tyler Katzenberger
Managing Editor, *The Daily Cardinal*