

To the selection committee,

I've never had an easier decision to make in my life than this one - to eagerly recommend that Ben Adams be named Journalist of the Year.

I spent 18 years in professional journalism, at publications like the Houston Chronicle and the New York Times, before taking over the storied journalism program at St. Mark's School of Texas. Going from top-tier professional newsrooms to a classroom full of teenage boys had its challenges, but Ben helped make it a smooth transition.

That's because Ben already holds so many of the important characteristics a professional journalist needs to be great. This comes to him naturally, but he also works harder than anyone.

One of my goals in taking over the program was to start up a news website for the school - while the ReMarker newspaper has been consistently a top publication in the country, it was missing that key digital element. I thought this would take me a few years to establish- as you all know, thinking about a newspaper digitally is a big adjustment for a program very dedicated to its tradition. The students had to think about journalism in a different way, the administration had to be on board and the community had to embrace it. In the first few months, as I got to know Ben, I knew he was the student who would start the ReMarker online site.

Ben is not flashy. He's never going to be the student-journalist in the spotlight. He's reserved and thoughtful. He thinks about the big picture.

In a country where so much of our mainstream journalism has become about a journalist's brand or how he or she can argue with other talking heads on prime-time television, there is something so very comforting about a young person like Ben, who is doing exactly what journalists are supposed to do.

Ben tells the story, but never is the story. It's such a simple concept that so many forget. Ben isn't elevating his voice, he is elevating the voice of his community. He is a watchdog who observes and reports. And in doing so, he succeeds in informing his readers.

He knows his audience — a very diverse mix of teenage boys, their parents and alums all over the world. He covers various cultures, ethnicities and people from varied religions. Ben always considers the best way to cover a wide range of perspectives and ideas to ensure fair and balanced coverage. In addition, he is sensitive in considering the female perspective in our coverage, which is commendable at an all-boys school.

While prioritizing serving the reader, Ben also manages to bring his team together to bring the best out of each person. There's a great strength in knowing your weaknesses and using your resources well. While he can take pictures well for spot and daily news, he likely won't ever take the perfect portrait, but he is going to work closely with a photographer who can plan the best visual piece of the puzzle and ultimately create a verbal-visual connection that gives the reader the best possible product.

Because our journalism program has never had a broadcast element, he didn't have all the knowledge and tools in place to add quality video elements by himself when the website launched last September. He did make a point to work with our top students in the photography and film departments and has run several sports videos on our site already. He's also produced a full-length sports documentary which will debut this spring.

Ben singlehandedly opened doors for new types of journalism in the school. Because of him, students who weren't top writers or print designers will have another medium where they can grow and shine. It's truly special that he's been able to do so much for a program that was already in great shape.

I've written recommendation letters for several deserving candidates over the years for this award, but I truly believe no one has ever deserved this more.

You won't get a lot of flash from Ben, but that is what makes him so special. He is everything you want in a journalist — an ethical young man who makes a point to observe and report what's happening around him. He's never trying to steal the show or step into the spotlight. He is making sure to tell every important story around him and does that beautifully.

I can't wait to see what Ben does in his next chapter. He is headed to journalism school at Northwestern next year, where he is sure to grow and learn and leave his mark.

I am so grateful to Ben and the legacy he is leaving at St. Mark's. He has truly transformed the journalism department and incredibly deserves the title of Journalist of the Year.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Jenny Dial Creech
Journalism Director
St. Mark's School of Texas