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## Journal-World leads open government fight

Fighting for open government is a high priority for many news organizations. But sometimes an individual organization goes above and beyond the call of duty in the name of the people's right to know.

That's why the Kansas Sunshine Coalition for Open Government is making its first Above and Beyond award to the Lawrence Journal-World.

"Above and beyond doesn't quite cover it," says Randy Brown, executive director of the Coalition. "The Journal-World should be an inspiration for open government initiatives by every media outlet and citizens throughout in the state."

The Above and Beyond award will be presented Wednesday, Feb. 15, at 2:30 p.m. at the Journal-World News Center, 645 New Hampshire, Lawrence.

"Newspapers are at their best when they acknowledge their role as surrogate for the people," says Mike Merriam, a media lawyer from Topeka and Coalition board member. "They are the best of the best when they invest their capital, not just their ink, into fighting for open government. Time after time, the Journal-World has come through with its willingness to put principle above profit."

Most recently, the Journal-World has invested tens of thousands of dollars in pursuing open government cases:

-- In the "Lew Perkins case," when Kansas University refused to release the employment records of its new athletic director, the newspaper, along with the Associated Press and the Kansas Press Association, pushed for and won release of the records.

-- The Journal-World filed another open records action to get a copy of a police dispatch recording, which forced the City of Lawrence to play the recording in court and then to release it.

-- The Journal-World joined in challenges to the closed meetings of governor-elect Kathleen Sebelius' BEST teams and to the open meetings violations of the Kansas State Board of Education.

-- The newspaper makes consistent and countless efforts, large and small, either in court or privately, to keep government open at all levels.

"They don't take no for an answer," says Merriam.

The Sunshine Coalition, now based at the Elliott School of Communication at Wichita State University, believes that open government is essential to a democratic society. Only through full and complete access to government records, meetings and public officials can citizens make intelligent and informed decisions about their democracy.

Coalition members help keep the public informed of the abuses of open government and hold elected officials accountable for actions that ignore the public's legal right to truly public meetings and access to government records.