RichmondConfidential

Richmond Confidential reporter Reis Thebault wins Society of Professional Journalists award

Reis Thebault will graduate from UC Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism with a focus on print and audio reporting. Photo courtesy of Reis Thebault.

By Nuria Marquez Martinez Posted October 24, 2017 2:06 pm

The Northern California chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists awarded former Richmond Confidential reporter Reis Thebault the 2017 Excellence In Journalism Award. The accolade, announced this week, was for his investigations into the "fraud, corruption and legal woes" of the city's medical marijuana industry.

As a health, science and environmental reporter, Thebault's stories focused on pay-to-play schemes, illicit messages sent by an Richmond Police Department officer, and hidden sales at marijuana dispensaries in the city.

Thebault credits the help he received at the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism from investigative reporter and lecturer Tom Peele, who he worked closely with in examining court documents and reports. Along with Peele, he acknowledged the Richmond Confidential staff, and specifically his editor, Elena Conis.

"It speaks to the good work that Richmond Confidential did last year," he said. "We all pushed each other to do better work and to take on more ambitious reporting."

The idea to follow this line of reporting came from an offhand comment that county Supervisor John Gioia made to the newsroom about certain lawsuits surrounding dispensaries in Richmond. Thebault decided to look into those lawsuits which led him to a string of public documents and court reports that eventually became this series of stories.

"It was tough to know when to stop reporting," Thebault said. "More court documents have filed. There's still a lot left to report."

Thebault is now reporting on the pharmaceutical industry's influence in Washington and working on his Master's thesis, which will cover the impact of California's cash bail system on Fresno County's low-income population and communities of color.