

## Thabo Bester escape story wins *GroundUp* a Nat Nakasa award

The Nat Nakasa Award for Media Integrity was presented to the news agency *GroundUp*'s journalists, Daniel Steyn and Marecia Damons for their Thabo Bester escape story.



Source: [www.unsplash.com](http://www.unsplash.com)

The Nat Nakasa Awards recognise a special element in journalism – courage, fearlessness, and an unyielding commitment to serving the people of South Africa despite insurmountable obstacles.

### **Courage and dedication**

The award for the Nat Nakasa Award for Community Media went to Anton van Zyl, the publisher of the *Limpopo Mirror* and the *Zoutpansberger*.

Sbu Ngalwa, Sanef chairperson expressed his delight: “Your courage and dedication inspire us all. Courage and bravery are not easy to come by. This year, our distinguished panel of judges has chosen to honour individuals whose work embodies these principles.”

“These awards stand as a testament to the unwavering dedication of journalists who go above and beyond in their pursuit of truth, even in the face of daunting challenges,” he says.

Sanef was honoured to have Justice Zukisa Tshiqi of the Constitutional Court, a member of the South African Women Judge's Association, also involved in various mentorship programs, as its keynote speaker.

Judge Tshiqi said: "The Constitutional Court has recognised that the work done by the journalists is very crucial in our democracy ... journalists contribute in ensuring that there is transparency and accountability in the exercise of public and private power."

The award's sponsor, Gaffar Hassam, group executive – Corporate Affairs, SanlamAllianz, noted, "Sanlam's partnership with Sanef is on its 8th year and continues to grow in recognition of Sanlam's commitment to media freedom."

"Nat's sense of justice was so strong that in his pursuit of truth, he chose exile from his native land, travelling to New York on a Niemann Fellowship, without a passport. Just an exit permit. An exit permit from his country of birth meant he was banished and unable to return home and we will continue to honour his legacy," he told the audience.



Thabo Bester, Costa Titch make Google top search trends

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In their citation Anton van Zyl, the judges remarked, "It is very difficult to operate in the space of community media. There is not that much money to make because advertisers focus on commercial media to reach out to consumers. The challenges remain despite the government having made promises that part of its advertising should go to community media. When a journalist like Anton van Zyl, who is the publisher of the Limpopo Mirror and the Zoutpansberger, continues to make a difference in this space, we need to commend them for the good work."

Those who have worked closely with Van Zyl attest to his generosity in sharing his extensive knowledge with other small community-based publishers. He has been a driving force in the Association of Independent Publisher's sustainability committee.

## Social justice

The judges citation of Daniel Steyn and Marecia Damons reads: "When the Thabo Bester story broke, it was unbelievable. We congratulate *GroundUp's* efforts not to give up on the suspicions that Bester was not dead but living large after escaping from jail. He faked his death. The *GroundUp* stories were so accurate in reflecting the difference that media can make in life. The story touched on bravery as well as social justice.

"Daniel Steyn and Marecia Damons rocked the boat of corruption that happened at Mangaung Correctional Centre, which involved senior officials managing the prison. Since the breaking of the story, the government arrested several officials at the centre for assisting Bester to escape. His girlfriend, Dr. Nandipha Magudumane, (allegedly) assisted him to fake his death and escape from jail. They skipped the country, arrested in Tanzania, and brought back to South Africa and now stand trial.

"We need to applaud Daniel Steyn and Marecia Damons for the sterling work of exposing this prison corruption without fear or favour."

Ngalwa also presented their in-house Stephen Wrottesley Award for honouring dedicated members to community media subcommittee chairperson Dunisani Ntsanwisi. This award is bestowed on a Sanef member who shows commitment, and passion to Sanef.

He was awarded for playing a key and definitive role in Sanef's Community Media Digitisation project, for always putting the issues and interests of community media on the agenda; playing a key role in the inaugural Sanef Indigenous

Languages Seminar and ensuring that the Association of Independent Publishers continues to be an active and relevant organisation.

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