**Dave Pyle New Journalist Award**

Nomination letter for Bria Barton – Travel and Tourism Reporter at the Bemidji Pioneer

By Annalise Braught – Managing Editor at the Bemidji Pioneer

Bria Barton started at the Bemidji Pioneer in August last year as a travel and tourism reporter for Forum Communications. She moved from South Carolina after being given the option to be based out of one of several locations in the state. She chose Bemidji for its scenic location and tourism opportunities. We were happy to welcome her to our team and she’s been a wonderful addition to the newsroom. Much of what she writes is shared throughout all of the Forum papers and reaches people all over the region.

She had a great start with lots of grand ideas and creative ways to cover tourist options in the region in an inventive way. She started a column entitled Trip on a Tankful, where she visits local destinations many have not heard of. Her creativity and fun perspective on things immediately made her stories a hit for all the papers around the company.

Though Minnesota has more to offer as far as tourism goes in the summer months. Bria wrote stories throughout the fall and into winter about a variety of things people could experience close by and a little further from home. From things like fall colors and wagon rides to trying Scandinavian and Norwegian traditions for the first time such as lutefisk and lefse, Bria has done a wonderful job making memories and sharing them with her audience in a way that’s easy for them to try for themselves.

Fast forward to March and the global pandemic hit the travel and tourism industry like a hurricane. As the rest of us were writing hard news stories about how the community was being affected, it was difficult for Bria to find where her beat fit into things all of a sudden. It didn’t take her long to get her bearings and begin to write about how it was affecting resorts, fishing tours, restaurants, hotels, and so much more. These stories hit home for many as their livelihoods became threatened and she found creative ways to touch on the emotions, struggles and hope that arose from the difficult situations.

Her ever willingness to work hard and push through the tougher times are always appreciated. She goes deep, researches more than anyone I’ve ever met, and cares deeply about every single story she writes. She pours her heart into making sure that each story accurately depicts the people and places she is writing about.

I also appreciate that she isn’t afraid to go outside her comfort zone and try new things, and take on more difficult stories if needed. During President Trump’s recent visit to Bemidji, she covered tractor parades, Trump caravans and protests, and did it all effortlessly. She’s got an adventurous spirit that I believe will take her far in the journalistic world and keep her always looking forward to the next task.