

**DAVE PYLE NEW JOURNALIST AWARD**

**Johnnie Phillips** began as sports editor of the Steele County Times in August 2021 as a recent graduate of the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul. While the Steele County Times is a small, but thriving weekly newspaper located in rural Minnesota, Phillips found himself in an ideal situation to grow his career as a sports journalist. He ended up with one of the greatest mentors journalism could offer—Deb Flemming, a 30-year editor of daily and weekly newspapers around the country.

Little did Phillips know, but he also walked into a situation where he would face adversity shortly after starting his career. After getting six solid months of mentoring from Flemming, she suddenly died from a fast moving cancer in March 2022. It left us all shell shocked and saddened to lose such a wonderful leader and true journalist.

But this is only the start of the story of what Phillips has been able to offer readers of the Steele County Times. Armed with the knowledge and direction he obtained from Flemming in those few short months, Phillips quickly rebounded to excel and prosper as one of the brightest young journalists I have ever known.

Phillips has a positive attitude and tremendous writing and photography abilities that serve him well in his role of covering four high schools in our coverage area. He writes weekly feature stories, games recaps, sports column and takes photos of multiple games throughout the week. His work speaks for itself and offers many of techniques Flemming was able to teach him before she passed away. In addition, he coordinates and produces three special sports tabs throughout the school year for the various sports seasons. He has become an instant sensation with our readers.

No matter what assignment Phillips is given, he does so with enthusiasm, passion and hard work, which are sometimes rare qualities to find in young people. He also offers a love for print journalism.

In my humble opinion, Phillips is one of the brightest young journalists that the profession offers and will flourish as he continues his journalism career. He made Deb Flemming proud as she took great pride in mentoring someone who was eager to learn to improve and be the best possible. Journalism is in great hands with journalists like Johnnie Phillips!

Respectfully,

Rick L. Bussler

Publisher

Steele County Times