American Bar Association honors area media

The Morning Advocate, WBRZ-TV Channel 2 and the Louisiana State Penitentiary’s magazine “The Angolite” all have been recognized for outstanding reporting by the American Bar Association.

WBRZ was one of six television winners of the Silver Gavel Award for its documentary, “I’ll Drink To That,” which outlined problems in the state’s Alcohol Beverage Control Office. The report was by John Camp.

The Morning Advocate was winner of a Certificate of Merit for noteworthy contributions to public understanding of the American legal system for its series of stories on District Attorney Bryan Bush.

The Advocate reported Bush could not account for thousands of dollars in special investigations funds and also questioned purchasing and political practices within the office.

The stories prompted Attorney General William Guste to form a task force that concluded Bush could not account for more than $14,000 in public funds and that there was evidence of several crimes.

A grand jury investigation followed lengthy legal wrangling. Before the grand jury finished its work Bush announced his retirement for medical reasons and relinquished the office to the control of former U.S. attorney Cheney Joseph and also agreed to plead guilty to a misdemeanor.

The stories were written by reporters Mike Dunne and former reporter Yvonne Campbell, now chairman of the Louisiana Board of Pardon.

The Advocate was one of 10 merit winners. Five newspapers were awarded the Silver Gavel Award.

The Angolite was recognized with a Certificate of Merit for its story about long-term prisoners at the state’s main penitentiary. The was no Silver Gravel given in the magazine category.

The other magazine noted with a certificate was Barron’s National Business and Financial Weekly.

The Angolite story was written by Associate Editor Ron Wikberg. The cover story began retelling the plight of James “Black Mattie” Roberston, who began serving a rape sentence in 1948 and had become the man confined longest at the penitentiary. Monday, Roberston was moved to a halfway house in preparation for release.

The ABA chose the winners from a field of more than 400 entries representing 286 media organizations.

“This year’s entries again demonstrate that many media organizations continue to educate the non-legal community to the workings of the legal system,” said Stuart H. Shifman of Springfield, Ill., chairman of the standing committee on Gavel Awards.