Surely there’s a movie somewhere with the line, “You shoulda been there.” Well, Friday night, April 22, 2022, you shoulda! Fort Worth SPJ’s 19th Annual First Amendment Awards and Scholarship Banquet played out with vigor and understated elegance at Rolling Hills Country Club in Arlington. Ninety professional journalists, student journalists and their guests attended.

Retired WFxAA-TV sports anchor Dale Hansen strafed the room with “Unplugged”-worthy observations, most of them media related but some very personal, on both the freedom and the obligations of the press. He decried “infotainment” masquerading as journalism, and he blasted efforts to paint the news media as a threat: “We are not the enemy of the American people. We are the American people!”

He spoke in exclamation points. He really wanted more chicken. He said things that begged to be taken home: “You are entitled to your own opinion. You are not entitled to your own facts.”

When it was her go, Texas-based investigative journalist Lise Olsen explored how one determined journalist armed with open records can change the world. She received Fort Worth SPJ’s highest honor, the Open Doors Award. She joins last year’s Open Doors recipient, Jay Root of the Houston Chronicle, and 17 other previous winners.

The chapter presented $14,500 in university scholarships and 18 trophies. All five scholarship winners were there, as were several representatives of finalist entries.

Providing scholarships dates to the chapter’s beginnings in the 1940s. Since 2000 alone, $386,500 has been awarded.

The First Amendment Awards honor exceptional journalism that defends the freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment to the Constitution, furthers the people’s right to know how governments and businesses affect their lives, and champions the powerless and disadvantaged.