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By David Horowitz



Dominic Di Palermo (Carrie Pratt/WKU Student Publications)

A Western Kentucky University photojournalism student became one of 75 contributors at the Chicago Tribune to garner the 2026 Pulitzer Prize in local reporting for coverage of immigration enforcement's siege-like operation in Chicago.

Senior photojournalism student and Tribune intern Dominic Di Palermo photographed for the publication's series in its final article, "64 days in Chicago: The story of Operation Midway Blitz."

He's the first WKU student to garner a Pulitzer Prize win while still enrolled as an undergraduate, according to WKU Director of Student Publications Chuck Clark. Two other program alumni, the Tribune's Armando Sanchez and the Washington Post's Jabin Botsford, also had Pulitzer wins — Sanchez, for the same submission as Di Palermo, and Botsford, for helping cover federal cuts by the Department of Government Efficiency.

Di Palermo credited the journalism department's strong emphasis on intimate storytelling and his experience at the WKU Herald for helping prepare him. A standout experience, he added, was coordinating photographers during coverage of Kyle Rittenhouse's speech at Western in 2024.

"I want to thank all the journalists, editors, photographers at the Chicago Tribune for teaching me all they did in helping me learn through such a complicated situation," Di Palermo said.

"And I just want to thank all the people at Western Kentucky University: my fellow students, my professors, the student publication staff and students there. Because they all helped contribute to me getting this internship and ultimately being a part of this crazy award that we won as a team."

He recalled the intensity of the Chicago coverage:

The protesters on either side, emotionally charged as they expressed opposing sentiments on immigration enforcement.

A girl named Eli, 5 years old, sitting in detention with her parents, later photographed in a plastic tarp at an airport.

Adriana Rivera, who lived with her husband Rodríguez Bellos as undocumented immigrants in the U.S. saving for their children as they built lives in Chicago — before Bellos was deported, and Rivera followed to reunite with him in Mexico.

He recalled Rivera as she was driven to the airport, and her parting ways with her friend.

“I can’t imagine trying to leave your whole life behind,” Di Palermo said. “But it was her hope she was going to see her husband in Mexico, and just her happiness and joy that she got from him, and the fact they were trying to work it out together was something to hold onto. And I’ll never forget that,” he said.

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