No. 140 John Knicely – February 2014

Not too spicy, not too sweet – just Knicely Done. It was a warmhearted roast fitting for Omaha television's Mr. Nice Guy, John Knicely.

A sellout crowd – including college classmates, golf buddies, fellow church members and professional colleagues – filled the Press Club to see the longtime WOWT anchor honored.

Struggling to find criticism of substance, roasters turned instead to the cosmetic. John Ryan Knicely, a TV anchor at KIRO in Seattle and one of John and Sue's five children, said: “A lot of dads teach their kids how to change the oil in their car or fix the sink. My dad taught us how to apply on-air makeup.”

Then there's the Knicely hair. John Ryan said his father's is “exactly in the position it was in 1975. His secret tonight is exposed: Aqua Net Extra Super Hold.”

John Ryan also said he had a letter from President Obama declaring that his father's six decades of hairspray use had moved Omaha past Los Angeles on the smog scale. But, “Obama” continued, “At the request of the EPA, I have determined it to be worth it. Boy, that hair does look perfect! I hereby decree John Knicely the hairspray czar of the Obama administration.”

The Rev. Les Beauchamp, Knicely's pastor at LifeGate Church, said John can be seen assuming a defensive position when the congregation lifts its hands during services.

Why? “He's trying to avoid getting touched on the hair!”

Other roasters weighing in under the deft guidance of emcee Mary Maxwell were Hall of Fame golfer Susan Marchese, former Omaha Mayor Mike Fahey and Cornhusker legend Tom Osborne.

Said Marchese: “John would love for me to tell you that he's a better golfer than me. But I don't have it in me. I know it's your night, but it's my reputation.”

Fahey: “This is a hard guy to roast. It would have been a lot easier if you were a politician.”

Maxwell: “Pat Persaud, Tracy Madden, Mallorie Maddox – what amazing co-anchors and they're all here tonight. Every one of them wears a dress size that I wore in the third grade and never wore again.”

Speaking via video, Osborne called Knicely a “genuinely good person, rather unusual in the broadcast journalism business and probably a little bit too nice to have his face on a barroom floor.”

“Every night on the news he can recite all the horrible things that have happened in Omaha, and you get the distinct impression that he had nothing to do with it.”

Face on the Floor artist Jim Horan said Knicely's nearly 40 years in television – he is Omaha's longest-tenured anchor – provided a rich target of opportunity for the caricature. Knicely is pictured with his on-air iPad (displaying a tic-tac-toe game) in one hand and a golf club in the other. Surrounding John are some of his John at Work adventures: riding in a stunt plane and a bobsled, skydiving, garbage hauling, and scaling office and TV transmitter towers.

After the Face unveiling, Knicely joined in the cosmic humor by introducing his barber and by poking fun at a prominent Knicely facial feature. “I realized that God has a sense of humor. He plastered that eyebrow on my forehead, and I can't do anything about it. I watch myself on TV and say: Why don't you wipe that smirk off your face?”

Turning serious, Knicely thanked Jesus for changing his life 40 years ago and then raised a toast to “faith, family and friends. Thank you all for being here for this special night.”