The “Face on the Ballroom” floor event was more of a light grilling with sweet marinade than the typical roasting. That probably has a lot to do with the target, Connie Spellman, the Wahoo, Neb., native who has been placing her stamp on everything Omaha for the last 40 years.

Her chief tormentor and emcee, Omaha attorney and Omaha by Design advisory board member, Rick Jeffries, referred to the director of Omaha by Design as an “episode of Sesame Street, wrapped in a donut riding a unicorn.”

Susan Ogborn, president and CEO of Food Bank of the Heartland and former Greater Omaha Chamber co-worker said that instead of a roast, Spellman “deserves celebrating and hugging and bubble baths and sunshine and grandkids’ smoochy kisses.”

Ogborn described the important things Spellman taught her: Budgets are details, taking credit for accomplishments “bush league” and don’t walk away when irritated but say, “Well, you gotta love ’em.”

Dr. B.J. Reed, vice chancellor of academic and student affairs at the University of Nebraska Omaha (UNO), said Connie made Del Weber, Ken Stinson and Bruce Lauritzen scratch their heads while providing support for Spellman’s efforts. “What they have said this to me on several occasions is “What the hell were we thinking?”

Long-time friend, Kate Dodge, president NEI Global Relocation, provided comments from Del Weber, UNO chancellor emeritus and president of the Omaha by Design board of directors, who could not attend. Weber described Spellman’s University of Nebraska-Lincoln advisor, who “wisely” steered her away from accounting. “To this day Connie thinks that positive cash flow is when people are asked for money, then they give it to her. If they decline, that’s negative cash flow.”

Weber’s notes said that Spellman majored in charm. “Connie’s the only person who could ask Ken Stinson, Bruce Lauritzen and John Gottschalk for $500,000 each for the urban design master plan and be told by each one of them that they wanted to not give her $500,000, but instead $800,000. That’s charm. She is the “proverbial iron fist in the velvet glove.”

Dodge said “Connie’s children told me she’s pretty awesome, but not completely perfect.” Friends called her absent minded and tactful in a way Winston Churchill would describe as the ability to tell someone to go to hell in such a way that they look forward to the trip.”

The Face on the Barroom Floor by artist Jim Horan depicts Spellman holding a “smart building” in one hand and tree ready for planting in the other. In the background are many of the projects she worked on, including the Old Market, Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge, Leadership Omaha, Ak-Sar-Ben Village, UNO’s campus and the Greater Omaha Chamber.

“If Connie had one more project…one more job…one more development, I would have had to leave her Face out of the drawing,” Horan concluded.

Spellman thanked everyone for the special treat, and rather than respond to the remarks, she said, “Instead, I’m going to be so sweet, and kind, and syrupy that they’re just going to be so sorry they ever thought of anything other than, ‘Oh, how could I have said that.’” Then, in typical Connie Spellman sweetness, she said. “I love the work. It’s always working together that has made the difference. Let’s keep working together.”