OPC announces new Excellence in Media Awards

By Chris Allen
OPC Committee Chair

Long hours crafting a message and attention to detail to make everything right is often its own reward. But the Omaha Press Club gives you a chance for recognition beyond a warm and fuzzy feeling.

The old Excellence in Journalism Awards have been renamed Excellence in Media to reflect the multi-discipline nature of the competition.

Journalists and public relations specialists are invited to submit their work at the OPC website starting Jan. 2, 2015. The deadline for submissions is Feb. 15.

News categories in television and radio include spot news, feature, documentary and sports. Best video (TV) and best audio (radio) will also be awarded.

Newspaper categories are the same but substituting investigative for documentary. There is also a photo category.

Public relations awards will be for publication, media kit and social media outreach.

There are two categories for magazines: cover and cover story.

And website awards will be given for best news and best PR.

The television and radio categories will be broken into two market sizes. Newspapers will be divided into daily and weekly categories. All PR submissions will compete together.

All of the categories will also include a student division.

The dinner for award winners is June 6. Full details can be found at the OPC website after Dec. 15.

Journalists of Excellence Hall of Fame CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

Nominations are now open for the selection of inductees for the 2015 Hall of Fame. Nominees may be living or deceased and must have made notable contributions to broadcast, print or new media journalism. They must have shown exceptional leadership, courage or contributions to the news industry.

They will have worked in the Omaha area during their career, or they may have had a reasonable career in the area before going elsewhere.

Your Name ___________________________ Phone Number ___________________________

I nominate (name) ___________________________ ☐ Check here if the journalist is being nominated posthumously.

Tell us why the person should be inducted into the OPC Journalists of Excellence Hall of Fame. Use separate sheet

Pleased submit by March 6, 2015, to the Omaha Press Club Hall of Fame Committee, 1620 Dodge St., 22nd Floor, Omaha, NE 68102

SANTA BRUNCH

Sunday, Dec. 14 • Two Seatings: 10 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.
Price: Adults $20 • Children $10
You are invited to bring a new, unwrapped toy to donate to The Salvation Army

For Reservations, Call 402-345-8008

BUFFET

Roasted Salmon
Baked Ham with Maple Whiskey Sauce
Chicken Crepes Supreme
Baked Tilapia Florentine
Sweet Potato Flan
Garlic Whipped Potatoes & Gravy
Seasonal Vegetables
Build-Your-Own-Omelet a la Carte
Multi-Topping Belgian Waffle Bar

Salad Display, including Salmon Chaud-Froid & Fresh Fruit Fondue
Fresh-Baked Pastries, Tortes & Cheesecakes
Chocolate Driscoll Strawberries
Deep Dish Apple Strudel with
Brandied French Vanilla Ice Cream
Spiked French Vanilla Egg Nogg

DESSERT CHOICE

Cherries Jubilee, Brownie à la Mode, Blackstone Cheesecake

LIVE MUSIC BY SOLDIERS OF SOUL

FOR RESERVATIONS, CALL 402-345-8008

OPC NEW YEAR’S EVE

DECEMBER 31, 2014 @6PM

$40 for members, $50 for non-members

HORS D’ŒUVRES

Continental Cheese & Fruit Displays

BUFFET

OPC Famous Thunderbird Salad with Sauté Toppings
Peruvian Clam Chowder
Prime Rib of Beef Au Jus & Chantilly
Chicken Marsala
Sautéed in a sweet Marsala Wine with Mushrooms and Bordelaise
Blackened Tilapia
Topped with a Black Bean & Corn Salsa and Lemon Buerre Blanc
Dauphine Potatoes & Brandied Carrots

DESSERT CHOICE

Cherries Jubilee, Brownie à la Mode, Blackstone Cheesecake

LIVE MUSIC BY SOLDIERS OF SOUL
Spellman roast has a sweet flavor

By John Melingagio
Committee Member

The Nov. 14 “Face on the Barroom” floor event at the Omaha Press Club 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, Nebraska, 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 longtime community leader as an “episode of Sesame Street, wrapped in a donut riding a unicorn.”

That respect for the Omaha by Design director was abundantly clear in the diverse, full-house crowd. Susan Ogborn, president and CEO of Food Bank of the Heartland and former Greater Omaha Chamber co-worker, said Spellman is not deserving of a typical roasting. “She 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.”

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

Longtime friend Kate Dodge, president of NEI Global Relocation, relayed comments from Weber, UNO chancellor emeritus and president of the Omaha by Design board of directors, who could not attend the roast.

Dodge noted that Weber said Spellman’s University of Nebraska-Lincoln adviser “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.”

Instead, Spellman majored in charm. “Connie’s the only person Del knows 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,” said Dodge. “She is the proverbial iron fist in the velvet glove.”

Dodge said it probably would be easier to do a roast of Mother Teresa. Connie’s children told me she’s pretty awesome, but not completely perfect. Friends call 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.”

Jeffries wrapped the roast with the story of Spellman getting tough with the electronic billboard lobby. “We had this thing locked down. Instead, it turned into a disaster. When it comes to kicking butt and taking names, Connie, you truly suck.”

With that came the unveiling of the 143rd Face on the Barroom Floor by artist Jim Horan. The drawing depicts Spellman holding a “smart building” in one hand and a tree ready for planting in the other. In the background are many of the projects Spellman has 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 said: “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 added: ‘I love the work. It’s always working together that has made the difference. Let’s keep working together.”
Forty years after the first burst of Fresh Aire, Omaha’s Music Man is still bursting with fresh energy and projects. As two companies of Mannheim Steamroller conduct their 30th Christmas tour – this one numbering 75 cities and 95 concert dates – Chip Davis continues to write, compose and conduct.

2014 is a special year for Davis and Mannheim Steamroller, the No. 1 seller of Christmas albums. A new milestone album, “Mannheim Steamroller 30/40,” celebrates the 30th anniversary of the first Christmas album and the 40th anniversary of the first album in the Fresh Aire series. The new album is available in three formats: a 16-track CD of Christmas and Fresh Aire music, an “Ultimate Edition” three-disc set of 50 tracks, and a vinyl set containing 16 tracks on two 12-inch discs.

A bonus on “30/40” is a vocal by Davis’ 15-year-old daughter, Elyse, whom Davis calls “a great singer.” (Chip hastened to add that his other two children -- Kelly, 23, and Evan, 18 – also are talented musicians.) Elyse sings “Greensleeves,” the traditional English folk song, which Chip freshens with a Latin percussion.

Twenty-five years ago, Davis became the Press Club’s 42nd Face on the Barroom Floor. But his involvement with the Press Club predated the Face event of July 1989. Chip played the drums and conducted the OPC band during the gridiron show’s Peony Park run in the 1970s.

“I remember those days well,” Chip said of the mid-’70s when his ascent to fame and fortune began with bread company commercials for the “Old Home Fill’er Up and Keep on-a Truckin’ Café” and continued on to the 1975 hit song “Convoy” and 1978 movie of the same name.

But what would prove to be the most momentous event for Davis during those years was his 1974 formation of Mannheim Steamroller. Since Davis started his own record label, American Gramophone, also in 1974, to market the first Fresh Aire album of “18th century classical rock,” Mannheim Steamroller has sold 40 million albums, 28 million in the Christmas genre.

As a result of neck and arm surgery for injuries suffered in a car accident several years ago, Davis no longer plays with the bands. “But I can conduct,” Chip said. So while the Steamroller bands are crisscrossing the nation, Davis is spending December in Florida, conducting an Orlando Symphony version of Mannheim Steamroller at Universal Orlando Resort.

In his “spare time,” Davis, 67, continues to write and to compose – most recently a song for a horse and a book for young adults.

Show horses perform to music, and he decided that his Warlander show champion, Storm Shadow, should have a customized Chip Davis composition instead of the random tunes played during competitions.

Davis’ new book (he has written several for children) is “The Wolf and the Warlander.” The book is based on reality (the animal population on Chip’s 150 acres north of Omaha includes Warlander horses and two timber wolves), with a journey into the fantasy world of animal relationships.

What’s next? Perhaps a Mannheim Steamroller PBS special (Davis is in negotiations), with the possibility that it could be staged in Omaha’s Orpheum Theater.

After decades of albums and concerts, there appears to be no end in sight for the popularity of a Mannheim Steamroller Christmas. As Davis told an interviewer: “At Christmas time, people want to listen to something that is familiar in their lives. It’s comforting to hear something from your childhood – kind of like comfort food.”
Husker legend Davison attracts largest crowd ever for Shatel series

You might call it Tuesday afternoon quarterbacking.

Whatever you call it, there was plenty of discussion at the Shatel Lunch Series on Nov. 18 following Nebraska’s 59-24 shellacking by Wisconsin. The gathering produced the largest crowd ever for the three-year lunch series.

Omaha World-Herald sports columnist Tom Shatel was joined by Matt Davison, former split end for Nebraska (1997-2000) and current football and basketball announcer for the Huskers.

Both had opinions on why the Huskers continue to come up short in big games.

“There’s something that doesn’t allow us to persevere in the face of adversity,” Davison said. “You have to be able to score points in college football – 180 yards isn’t going to get it done. You have to find something you are great at and hang your hat on it.”

Shatel’s take: “When things get tough, they don’t push back. They don’t know how to react. It’s something that’s inherent in the program. The faith and trust in what you are doing – that’s not in this program.”

After Nebraska jumped out to a 17-3 lead, there was great optimism in the announcers’ booth, Davison said. But when the Badgers bounced back to take a 24-17 halftime lead, he said, “I don’t think anybody thought we could win.”

Wisconsin ran at will against the Huskers, racking up 581 yards, including an all-time NCAA single-game record of 408 yards by Melvin Gordon.

“We needed more guys in the box,” said Davison, noting that the Badgers only gained 46 yards in passing. “I wish we would have gone into our goal-line defense (and dared them to pass).”

He said Nebraska has a solid front four and secondary but is short at linebacker. “We don’t have Lavonte David anymore,” lamented Davison, who is best known for “The Catch” he made in 1997 against Missouri when he hauled in a ricocheting pass in the final seconds to force overtime.

Looking back in Husker football history,

Davison said the biggest thing Nebraska needs is “a difference-making quarterback.” This was something that all the best Nebraska teams possessed.

A Tecumseh, Neb. native, Davison said offensive coordinator in football is one of the toughest jobs in all sports. “You have to think two or three plays ahead, even two or three series ahead. That’s what Tom Osborne could do. He was such a rare person as a coach.”

Former Husker quarterback Scott Frost is one of Davison’s best friends. Frost, who is offensive coordinator for the Oregon Ducks, uses the expression, Davison said, that you “need to keep a calm mind in chaos.”

Other nuggets from the lunch included:

- Shatel: “ESPN doesn’t talk about Nebraska, because they haven’t done anything. More people (reporters) come to see Tim Miles (Husker basketball coach) than the football team. That can change. We just need to win a couple big games.”
- Davison: “Tight ends are irrelevant to our program. They are not a weapon.”
- Shatel: “Nebraska’s talent is pretty good. It’s good enough to win the West Division of the Big Ten.”
- Davison: “We’ve never established an offensive line. It’s time to get our offensive line set.”
- Davison had strong praise for the Husker men’s basketball program. “It’s a joy to be around the entire staff. It’s nice to go on the court and know we can win.”
- Davison predicts that Shavon Shields will have a “huge year” for the Husker basketball team.

Chatelain to speak at Dec. 16 Shatel Lunch

The next Shatel Lunch Series will be held at noon on Tuesday, Dec. 16. Dirk Chatelain, Omaha World-Herald sports reporter and Husker beat writer, will be the guest.

Shatel will undergo knee replacement surgery in January, he said, and will take January and February off to recover. He hopes to return in March for his first Press Club lunch of the new year.

The Shatel lunch costs $12 and is open to the public. To RSVP, call 402-345-8008 or email opcjeanie@gmail.com.

Reservations must be accompanied by an OPC member number or credit card for non-members. A 24-hour cancellation policy applies.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S NOTE

I am not a fan of the weather at this time of the year, but I do enjoy the holidays and all the gatherings with friends and family. The Omaha Press Club is the perfect hangout to do just that, and we have plenty of happenings to choose from. Make a reservation for the Santa Brunch or New Year’s Eve or just stop by for a cocktail on your way home from work.

Don’t forget about a holiday lunch treat with a friend or family member. If you have not had a chance to see the new Agnew Room, it’s a good time to check it out. Members are becoming acquainted with the room, and it’s really getting to be a favorite gathering place.

Past presidents quizzed

This year’s Past Presidents Dinner was well attended. The chef gets a choice on what to prepare for this dinner each year, and Chef Barry Brewer made a Mediterranean chicken dish that was stuffed with Kalamata olives, feta cheese, artichoke hearts and Roma tomatoes -- very tasty.

All who attended got to participate in a quiz for a prize. It resulted in a tie between Jim Fogarty and Tom O’Connor. A tiebreaker question gave the victory to O’Connor. Try your luck with the quiz (answers at end of the column). Only one person had the correct answer for the treasurer question, and one person got the railings question correct.

1. Who was the OPC president when the Villamontes were hired?
2. What was the first Face event that the Villamontes worked?
3. Who was the youngest board president?
4. How long has First National Bank had a representative as board treasurer?
5. When was the Spiro Agnew Face unveiled, and by whom?
6. How many signature pledges for membership were gathered for collateral for the building loan for the restaurant in 1971?
7. For many years the restaurant had railings that were a part of a demolished landmark in Omaha. Where did the railings originate?
8. What Face event attracted the largest crowd to the Press Club?
9. What OPC-sponsored Face event at any venue drew the highest attendance?
10. What is the cost of an associate membership?
11. Who was the first president of the modern Omaha Press Club?

Sailors finale next year

The attendance for the Ron Sailors Scholarship fundraiser was lower than in years past. The food was delicious and the students again did a great job. Arturo Valenzuela was the guest chef. He is executive chef for Access 66 catering and has volunteered every year since the first event.

Nov. 6, 2015 will be the 14th year and the grand finale of the Ron Sailors Culinary Extravaganza. More than $100,000 has been raised and dedicated to culinary scholarships, and now $34,000 has been set aside in an interest-accumulating endowment that will finance a scholarship indefinitely.

Happy Holidays,
Steve Villamonte CEC, BS
Executive Director
Omaha Press Club


Quiz answers
Dec. 14: Santa’s Brunch
Dec. 15: Excellence in Media Award information on omahapressclub.org
Dec. 16: Shatel Lunch
Dec. 31: New Year’s Eve Buffet

Closed for Holidays:
November 27 & 28, December 24 at 2:00, December 25 & 26

Jan 2: Excellence in Media Awards now open for entries
Jan. 15, 2015: Annual Meeting at 6 p.m.
Jan 15: Educational Forum: Immigration
Jan 24: from 9 a.m.-Noon Professional Development Seminar “Diversity in Media”
Feb. 15: Excellence in Media Awards deadline for entries
March 6: OPC Hall of Fame nominations deadline
April 1: OPC Show “Fools Rush In”
June 6: Excellence in Media Awards and Hall of Fame dinner

Submissions for the JANUARY issue are due on or before Dec. 20th

ANNOUNCEMENT
Love working with digital Photos? Love the Omaha Press Club? Want a free dinner for two?
Great! We are looking for a volunteer to crop and adjust the remaining 86 Faces (from the Barroom Floor).
Help out the club and we’ll buy you dinner.
Email us at tmurphy@universal-info.com or call 402 345-8008 if this project is for you

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CANCELLATION POLICY:
All reservations must be cancelled 48 HOURS in advance.