Former ‘Face’ Chip Davis wears many different hats

Mannheim Steamroller has sold more than 40 million records, completed 35 Christmas tours

By Tom O’Connor  Communications Committee

A visionary musician and businessman, Chip Davis’s remarkable career has spanned five decades.

At age 71, he’s still going strong, working out of his 150-acre farm outside Omaha. Davis, who was honored by the Omaha Press Club in 1989 as the 42nd “Face on the Barroom Floor,” has indelibly left his mark on the music industry, while wearing many other different hats including entrepreneur, book author, amateur astronomer and philanthropist.

Playing what Davis calls “18th century classic rock,” his six-member Mannheim Steamroller band just finished its 35th Christmas tour performing before sold-out venues around the country. Accompanied by 12-15 local symphony members at concerts, the group has sold more than 40 million records worldwide -- 30 million of which are Christmas albums. It has made Davis the best-selling Christmas music artist in history. Elvis Presley lags far behind with sales of 17 million albums.

“Everyone in the music industry back in 1984 told me, ‘A Christmas album? You can’t do that. Only artists who have run out of ideas ever do a Christmas album,’” Davis said. “But you know me. When someone says, ‘It’ll never work,’ I take it as a personal challenge.”

For many families, the music of Mannheim Steamroller has become a Christmas tradition. “It’s one of the biggest honors that you can possibly have – to be invited into people’s homes through my music and have them integrate me into their Christmas traditions,” Davis said. “I absolutely love it and love being part of their families.”

The music has become like “comfort food” for many families, Davis said, noting that it’s typical for three generations of fans to attend one of Mannheim Steamroller’s concerts.

For Davis, his first big break came in the 1970s when he and ad executive Bill Fries created a series of commercials about a fictional truck driver named C.W. McCall and his waitress girlfriend, Mavis, at the “Old Home Filler Up

World-Herald staffers to discuss news industry challenges

Local newspapers across the country are facing financial challenges in the transition to the digital age. They’ve seen losses of both advertising dollars and print subscriptions, the results seen in layoffs, smaller newspapers and increases in subscription prices.

The Omaha World-Herald has not been immune to these challenges and is working hard to adapt to the industry’s challenges. At a Noon Education Forum on Jan. 17, three members of the World-Herald News Department will offer a look at how they are doing that and what the future may hold.

- Executi Melissa Matczak oversees the day-to-day operations of the World-Herald and Omaha.com and handles recruiting for the newsroom.
- Graham Archer is the newspaper’s digital editor in charge of Omaha.com and the World-Herald’s digital properties.

OPC Annual Meeting on Jan. 17 will look back and ahead

Mark your calendars for Thursday, Jan. 17, the date of the Omaha Press Club Annual Meeting.

A 5:30 p.m. social, featuring complimentary hors d’oeuvres, will precede the 6 o’clock call-to-order. The meeting will include reports from the outgoing president, Woody Bradford, and OPC’s executive director, Steve Villamonte, plus the annual reports from committee chairs.

Also on the agenda are the election of 2019 officers and a vote on a proposed amendment to the club bylaws.

In an effort to make board of directors meetings as productive as possible for the club and its members, President-elect...
and Keep on 'Truckin' Café.' 

The jingles became quite popular and led to the production of the song “Convoy” in 1975. More than 10 million copies of the song were sold, and a movie was made starring Kris Kristofferson and Ali McGraw. For his work, Davis won the Country Music Writer of the Year Award.

Mannheim Steamroller was formed in 1974 and Davis established his own recording company, American Gramaphone Records, to record his first “Fresh Aire” album.

“Fresh Aire was well liked by all the big record companies, but they all turned us down because they couldn’t figure out how to market an instrumental group that combined Renaissance instruments with rock beats,” Davis said. “They said, ‘There’s no category for this. It will never work.’ ”

How wrong they were. Mannheim Steamroller has produced 19 gold, eight multi-platinum, and four platinum-certified records. The “Fresh Aire 7” album won a Grammy Award for Best New Age Recording in 1990.

The group has performed at the White House for three different National Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremonies and appeared multiple times in the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade.

Born in Hamler, Ohio, a small farming community (population 552), Davis has eschewed going to the East or West Coast and remained in the Midwest. “The community atmosphere and values helped shape who I am today,” he said. “The farm boy is still in me.”

He has three children – Kelly, 27, Evan, 22, and Elyse, 19.

Fun Facts – Chip Davis and Mannheim Steamroller

- Davis began his musical training at age 4; wrote his first piece of music at age 6 – a four-part chorale about his dog Stormy; joined the Vienna Boys’ Choir at age 11; played bassoon in the Toledo Symphony at age 16; and sang as a tenor in the Norman Luboff Choir.
- Davis took out a loan to cover the costs of his first Christmas tour. Today the Mannheim Steamroller tour consistently ranks among the top 20 tours in America and is the longest running in the industry.
- Davis is the author of several children’s books and marketed an entire line of food products – some of which come from his own recipes. He also has apparel, gift and other items under the Mannheim Steamroller brand.
- Davis developed a patent-pending music therapy system called Ambient Therapy. It combines music with natural sounds and is being used by the Mayo Clinic, Wake Forest Medical Center, The National Intrepid Center for Wounded Warriors and other medical facilities, including the Chihuly Sanctuary at the Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center at the University of Nebraska Medical Center/Nebraska Medicine.
- Mannheim Steamroller provided onsite technology to capture and record the launch and landing of the space shuttles Discovery and Atlantis. It has been characterized by NASA as the most accurate audio recording of a shuttle launch and landing ever made.
- Davis donated $1 million to his alma mater, the University of Michigan, to help create the Chip Davis Technology Lab in the School of Music, providing students with cutting-edge technology and developments in the music field.
- Active in nature-related causes, Davis donated $350,000 to Fontenelle Forest’s Raptor Recovery Center to enable the building of an eagle mew to hold the first American bald eagle on display in Nebraska.
A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

By D.C. “Woody” Bradford
OPC President

As my term as president ends and I reflect on the last year, the term “teamwork” comes to mind.

The OPC team comprises many parts, starting with administrative and operational groups consisting of Steve and Christine Villamonte, Jeanie Campbell and a kitchen and dining staff that I would rank with the best.

Our board ran smoothly, benefiting from the leadership of the past president, Marcia Cady, and the hard work of “the glue.” Secretary Bridget (Weide) Brooks, who is representative of a group of loyal board members and committee heads. They made my job easy, and best of all they were in place when I got here, stayed and will be here when Jeremy Maskel takes the helm.

Highlights of the year featured the work of Tom O’Connor, whose Face on the Floor Committee brought forward some moments to remember. Former school chums of Cathy Hughes forced her to become like a kid again. Steve Martin gave as good as he got. Mayor Jean Stothert was gracious as she dodged darts from well-planted members of the press. The Kent Pavelka roast was a classic and will be long remembered by all in attendance.

Todd Murphy’s Hall of Fame Committee once again produced some wonderful moments.

The Education Committee under Chair Gary Kerr brought forward election debates that allowed a political novice to show herself as a formidable campaigner. It also offered various forums which featured Dr. Mark Foxall, the retiring head of the Douglas County Corrections Center, and the new Omaha Public Schools superintendent, Dr. Cheryl Logan.

Jennifer Bull guided a revamping of the Communications Committee, which besides making sure the OPC News was published, included closer collaboration with the Marketing/Membership Committee headed by Bridget (Weide) Brooks and Kathleen Al-Marhoon. Speaking of the latter, it was this committee that, with our own staff, created the “Express Menu” presentation to employees at the First National Center and Tower, while also offering a daytime membership. This will increase the use of the facility and create an atmosphere that should increase our membership.

At the same time the Express Menu was being put into place, the club was able to open up discussions with the First National Bank, which led to a kitchen remodeling and significant improvements. I cannot emphasize enough the role the FNB has played in supporting OPC, from its founding to today, with special thanks to Brenda Dooley of First National Bank for her time and consideration.

Finally, I want to extend kudos to Tom Shatel for his terrific Shatel Lunch Series over the years. This year’s lunch featuring Nebraska Athletic Director Bill Moos was truly one for the ages. A sellout crowd and an awesome menu – a big hamburger steak with mashed potatoes and gravy – WOW, which is the word I think sums up the OPC in 2018.

Thanks to all the team members who made it possible.

Happy New Year,

Woody

OPC MEMBER PROXY BALLOT

Members not attending the annual meeting on Jan. 17, may vote by returning the proxy ballot below to reach the Omaha Press Club by 4 p.m., Wednesday, Jan. 16. See instructions below.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>OFFICERS</th>
<th>BOARD OF DIRECTORS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>Mike McKnight</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jeremy Maskel</td>
<td>□ For □ Against</td>
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<td>President-Elect</td>
<td>Melissa Hoeman</td>
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<td>Tom Shatel</td>
<td>□ For □ Against</td>
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<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>Kristyna Engdahl</td>
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<td>Dale Ervin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Chris Allen</td>
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<td>Bridget (Weide) Brooks</td>
<td>□ For □ Against</td>
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<tr>
<td>Immediate Past President</td>
<td>Cindy Workman</td>
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<td>Woody Bradford</td>
<td>□ For □ Against</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Erin Johnson</td>
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<td>□ For □ Against</td>
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<td>Officers and board members assume office on Feb. 1, 2019</td>
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Fax this completed ballot to 402-345-0114 or mail to the Omaha Press Club, 1620 Dodge St., 22nd Floor, Omaha, NE 68102-1561. Absentee ballots MUST be received by 4 p.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 16.

NOTE: If you plan to attend the annual meeting, do not return this proxy ballot.
Happy 2019 to all! If I did not see you in the last couple of months, I hope your holidays were absolutely wonderful. I felt like I blinked and Thanksgiving had become Christmas.

The club was buzzing with red, white and black décor, thanks to the staff. Connie and Michael got most of the credit, so big kudos to them. You can enjoy the decorations for another three weeks until the last holiday party has concluded (the tree will be down on the 2nd though). New Year’s Eve reservations already have started for 2019!

Our annual board meeting will be Jan. 17, and all members are invited. This is a good opportunity to learn more about the committees when the chairs give their annual reports. I will be happy to make introductions to present and past committee members. These volunteers are very special, inspiring people with some great stories to share.

Meanwhile, let’s talk about upcoming special events for all our special members. Valentine’s Day on Thursday, Feb. 14 will offer a multicourse menu. Make sure you reserve your space either online at omahapressclub.com (top right corner) or by calling us. Remember, the first reservations get the best windows.

Our next wine dinner will be Feb. 8, the Friday before Valentine’s Day. This is a food and wine pairing with five courses -- the best deal in town and fun as can be. Many of the wine dinner participants are repeat guests who enjoy the socializing every quarter; the laughter seems never ending.

On March 8, the club will host a local craft beer tasting paired with a chef’s menu that will delight your taste buds. The beer company, Pint 9 Brewing Company, is family-owned and locally invested from Omaha and surrounding areas. The brewery is located in La Vista off Portal Road. We are excited to have the husband/wife duo with us.

Lent is early this year, starting on March 6, Ash Wednesday, and we will feature fish specials every Friday for six weeks.

Hope to see you at the club.

-Christine Jones Villamonte
OPC restaurant manage/events coordinator

PHOTO CREDITS: OMHAPRESSCLUB.COM
A MESSAGE FROM THE MANAGER

Happy 2019 to all! If I did not see you in the last couple of months, I hope your holidays were absolutely wonderful. I felt like I blinked and Thanksgiving had become Christmas.

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-Christine Jones Villamonte
OPC restaurant manage/events coordinator

PHOTO CREDITS: OMHAPRESSCLUB.COM

Quarterly Winemakers Dinner
Friday, Feb. 8, 6 p.m.
$55 members, $65 non-members

**Quaff**
Creamy Shrimp Scampi Dip with Fresh Dill Tortilla Chip Gorgonzola & Paneer

**Appetizer**
Villamonte’s Clam Chowder with a Brie Rusk

**Salad**
Villamonte’s Thunderbird in Parmesan Crust

**Sorbet**
Key Lime

**Entrée**
Pan-Seared Filet with a Garlic & Herb Butter Risotto Pilaf Candied Carrots

**Dessert**
Flourless Tart & OPC Truffle

Valentine’s Day Dinner
Thursday, Feb. 14, 6 p.m.–9 p.m.
$120 per Couple Includes Tax & Service Charge

**Appetizer Choice**
Lobster Bisque with Sherry & Crème Fraiche - or - Crab-Stuffed Shrimp with Garlic Cream Lemon Butter

**Salad**
OPC Famous Thunderbird Salad Served in a Parmesan Crisp

**Entrée Choices**
Prime Rib of Beef with Chantilly, au Jus & Yorkshire Pudding Pan Roasted Rack of Lamb with a Cabernet Jus Omaha Steak Filet Mignon with Maitre d’hôtel Butter & Bordelaise Sauce Pan- Seared Fresh Atlantic Salmon with a Lemon Dill Bearnaise & Sturgeon Caviar Chicken Villa Encroute Mushrooms, Onions, Sundried Tomatoes, Fresh Herbs, Mozzarella Wrapped in a Puff Pastry & Sauce au Poivre

**Entrée Choices**
Pan-Seared Filet with a Garlic & Herb Butter Risotto Pilaf Candied Carrots

**Dessert**
A Signature Petit Fours Display at the Fireplace

Quarterly Beermakers Dinner
March 8, 6 p.m.
$55 members, $65 non-members

**Quaff**
Cape Cod Crab Croustades OPC Artichoke Dip Croustade

**Appetizer**
Beef Wellington with a Portabella Mushroom Madeira

**Salad**
Villamonte’s Thunderbird in Parmesan Crust

**Sorbet**
Key Lime

**Entrée**
Pan-Seared Filet with a Garlic & Herb Butter Risotto Pilaf Candied Carrots

**Dessert**
Flourless Tart & OPC Truffle
Name: Don Summerside.

Age: 79 (and holding!).

Place of Employment: Retired from the Omaha World-Herald.

Number of years as an OPC member: Since time began (actually, since the 1960s when club pioneer John Savage was hosting beer bashes in his backyard).

Favorite books: “To Kill a Mockingbird” (fiction), “In Cold Blood” (nonfiction).

Favorite movie: “Lawrence of Arabia.”

Favorite memory of your career: Responding to the 1975 Omaha tornado with a complete overhaul and hour-by-hour expansion of the World-Herald editions.

Brush with fame: As a 12-year-old autograph seeker in the 1950s, following Bob Hope into a restroom to get his signature!

About your family: Wife, Brenda, retired UNO student adviser; children, Scott and Deb; grandchildren, Tyson and Dylan.

Hobbies: Sports spectating, gardening, reading, travel.

Favorite dish at OPC: Any salmon entree.

Favorite memories at OPC: Press Club Shows at Peony Park, decades of fun with “Faces on the Barroom Floor”

Why should people visit/become a member of OPC: “The best view in town” may be a cliche, but it’s true. Add to that: special-event dining, newsmaker Forums and “Face on the Floor” fun.

Favorite vacation spots: Anywhere near an ocean – Nantucket, Key West, Maui.

Favorite social media app: Twitter’s sports banter.

Santa Brunch has been a delight for decades

Guests attending the Santa Brunch Dec. 9 rediscovered why it’s one of the Omaha Press Club’s longest-running events. A festively decorated club, abundance of food and desserts, saxophonist Steve Thornburg playing holiday tunes and, of course, Mr. and Mrs. Claus, combined to set an inspired seasonal tone. Member Don Summerside remembers taking his daughter to the brunch in 1976, while longtime staffer Michael Fryer recalls working the event the year he joined the club in 1979 — and every year since. The event’s popularity required two seatings, offered at 10 a.m. and noon.

Photos by Anne Walsh.
**2017-2018 Officers**

**D.C. “Woody” Bradford**  
President  
Houghton Bradford Whitted

**Jeremy Maskel**  
President-Elect  
Ralston Public Schools

**J.J. Bartlett**  
Treasurer  
First National Bank

**Bridget (Weide) Brooks**  
Secretary  
Image Building Communications

**Marcia Cady**  
Past President  
Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska

**Board of Directors**

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<td>Jennifer Bull</td>
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<td>Education</td>
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<td>Gary Kerr</td>
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<td>Executive Committee</td>
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<td>D.C. “Woody” Bradford, Jeremy Maskel, Bridget (Weide) Brooks &amp; Marcia Cady</td>
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<td>“Face on the Barroom Floor”</td>
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<td>Marketing / Membership</td>
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<td>Bridget (Weide) Brooks, Kathleen Al-Marhoon</td>
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**Communications Committee**

Susan Eustice • Henry Cordes • Cindy Workman
Howard K. Marcus • Don Summerside
Gary Willis • Chris Allen • Jennifer Bull
Karen Way • Tom O’Connor • Anne Walsh
Sandra Tursi • Hunter Samuels

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| Todd Murphy |
| Hugh Reilly |
| Nicole Lindquist  
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| Peggy Rupprecht |
| Joe Weber |
| Joseph Weber |

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Restaurant  
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Website  
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**NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE**

Sandra Tursi  
Graphics Editor

Tom O’Connor  
Proofreader

Don Summerside  
Copy Editor

Submissions for the February issue are due on or before Jan. 20.

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Friday, Feb. 8  
Winemakers Dinner  
6 p.m. social, 6:30 p.m. dinner  
$55 OPC members, $65 non-members

Thursday, Feb. 14  
Valentine’s Day  
5:30 p.m. start  
$65 OPC members

Monday, Feb. 25  
Noon Forum  
“The National Debt”  
Noon to 1 p.m.  
Lunch begins at 11:30 a.m.  
Open to the public – cost $17

Ash Wednesday, March 6  
Lenten fish specials begin

Friday, March 8  
Craft Beer Dinner  
6 p.m. social, 6:30 p.m. dinner  
$55 OPC members, $65 non-members

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**WE’RE ONLINE! READ YOUR OPC NEWSLETTER AT**  
OMAHAPRESSCLUB.COM

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Are you looking for a perfect party setting? A lunch surrounded by brilliance? A dinner your guests will always remember? Keep the OPC in mind.

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