Hall of Fame to induct six outstanding journalists June 1

By Marcia Cady
Hall of Fame Committee

Six outstanding journalists will be inducted on Saturday, June 1 into the Omaha Press Club Journalists of Excellence Hall of Fame. Three of the honorees spent their entire journalism careers in Omaha.

Ann Pedersen, director of strategic communications and public relations at OBI Creative and former assistant news director at WCCO in Minneapolis and WOWT in Omaha, will emcee the 11th annual ceremonies.

The 2019 inductees are:

Joni Ballion – Joni got the television bug in Minnesota as runner-up to Miss Downtown St. Paul when the woman who held the title was too shy to do interviews. Joni was one of only two women at that time to graduate from the Brown Institute of Broadcasting in Minneapolis and began her first on-air job at KJAM Radio in Madison, South Dakota. In 1966 she became the “Women’s Director” at KMA Regional Radio in Shenandoah, Iowa, doing a 30-minute talk/call-in show. Three years later she moved to television and KMTV in Omaha, hosting a daily, half-hour live interview program, “Conversations.” Joni interviewed stars, politicians, coaches and Johnny Carson during the program’s run from 1969 to 1981. She followed her distinguished career in journalism with an equally outstanding career in marketing Omaha city events. She is a past president of the Omaha Press Club (1982). Joni and her husband, Vern Wood, met at KMTV in 1971 and were married for 44 years until his death in 2015.

Ben Gray – Ben spent his entire journalism career at KETV, Channel 7. While at KETV, Ben produced and hosted the longest running public affairs show in the history of Omaha television, “Kaleidoscope,” which was on the air for 30 years. During his long career Ben won numerous local, regional and national awards as a talk show host, journalist and photographer. Ben was elected to the Omaha City Council in 2009 and re-elected in 2013 and 2017. He represents the northeast quadrant of the city and is currently council president. Ben and his wife, Freddie...

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May Forum will discuss state learning standards

Learning standards, particularly in American history and civics, have been a hot topic in the Nebraska Legislature.

At the OPC Noon Education Forum on May 16, Nebraska Education Commissioner Matthew Blomstedt and several State Board of Education members will explain the standards process for public school students, which differs from the controversial Common Core Standards that many people assume are used in Nebraska.

The speakers also will comment on teacher certification and recruitment at a time when the importance of having teachers who look like the students they teach becomes more and more pertinent. As classrooms across the state become more racially and culturally diverse, the need for greater diversity of schools’ faculties is a growing challenge.

In addition to Dr. Blomstedt, those scheduled to speak at the OPC Forum include John Witzel, president of the State Board of Education, and board members Lisa Fricke and Deborah Neary.

The program will run from noon to 1 p.m., with lunch service beginning at 11:30 a.m. The price is $17, and non-OPC members are welcome. Call 402-345-8008 for reservations.

Sellout anticipated for Tom Shatel Face event on May 16

By Tom O’Connor
Communications Committee

The “Face on the Barroom Floor” event on May 16 for Omaha World-Herald sports columnist Tom Shatel is shaping up to be an historic night at the Omaha Press Club.

After a huge groundswell of phone calls to the club was triggered by a brief mention of the Face event in one of Shatel’s columns, the Press Club was forced to put a hold on taking any more reservations – as the formal invitation had not even been sent out.

“It will no doubt be a sellout event,”
J. Gray, have a blended family of seven, with 12 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

**Walt Kavanagh (posthumous)** – Walt was the voice of radio news in Omaha for 42 years. He grew up in a south Omaha Irish Catholic family. After graduating from South High School in 1940, he went to Creighton to study broadcast journalism. World War II intervened, however. He served three years in the Army in ground infantry and as a paratrooper and spent 12 months in occupied Germany. Walt came back to Omaha to finish his degree and marry his wife, Joan. They were married for 46 years and had three daughters and a son. Walt’s first broadcast job was at KFJB in Marshalltown, Iowa. He came back to Omaha to work for KOWH and eventually to his radio home, KFAB, where he broadcast for 39 years and became the news director. School kids loved Walt because his was the voice that announced schools were closed. Walt retired in 1992 and received many awards during his long career, including the Society of Professional Journalists - Journalist of the Year, a lifetime achievement award from the University of Nebraska at Omaha’s Department of Communications and his “Face on the Barroom Floor” in 1992. Walt died in 1998.

**Mike McKnight** – The original “one-man band,” Mike graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and started work at WOWT in Omaha months later. He’s been there ever since. Mike ran the station’s state bureau in Lincoln for 10 years and since the ‘90s has been the station’s investigative reporter. One of the perks of his long tenure has been working as a Husker football sideline photographer, including the national championship seasons. Mike has received numerous awards during his 40 years in television, including honors from the Associated Press, the Nebraska Broadcasters Association, a regional Emmy and Nebraska News Photographer of the Year. Mike has been married to his wife, Carla, for 32 years. They have two sons. Mike is currently a member of the Omaha Press Club board of directors.

**Carrie Murphy** – A college internship at KMTV turned into a 34-year broadcasting career in television news reporting, producing and management. Carrie credits her college adviser, Joe McCartney, and KMTV News Director Mark Gautier for giving her the opportunity to work in her hometown. She is the recipient of numerous local, state and national awards for news, documentary and public affairs reporting, including two Iris Awards, presented by the National Association of Television Program Executives for outstanding local television programming. Carrie has served on many community boards and committees, including the Omaha Press Club board of directors. She is a graduate of Omaha Burke High School and the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Carrie currently serves as Omaha Club will call those people on the waiting list who will be able to attend.

The Press Club hopes to finalize the guest list by Friday, May 10.

During his nearly 30-year career at the World-Herald, Shatel has become a must-read for thousands of sports fans. When you couple his popularity with an all-star group of roasters, Villamonte said it’s easy to see why the Face event is expected to draw an overflow crowd.

The roasters include:
- Scott Frost, the current Nebraska football coach;
- Tom Osborne, the legendary Husker coach who won three national titles during his tenure from 1973 to 1997;
- Emcee – Andy Kendeigh has been sports director for KETV (Ch. 7) since 2010;
- Lee Barfknecht, who just retired last year after a 39-year career as a sportswriter/columnist for the World-Herald; and
- Damon Benning, a running back for the Cornhuskers from 1992 to 1996 who now is co-host of the popular radio program “Sharp and Benning in the Morning” on KOZN-AM, 1620 The Zone, as well as a sports analyst for the Big Ten Network, NET Television and Cox Communications.

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**Hall of Fame, continued from Page 1**

Mayor Jean Stothert’s deputy chief of staff/communications.

**Kent Warneke** – Kent started his newspaper career at the Omaha World-Herald in 1982 as a reporter, copy editor and editorial writer. He joined the Norfolk Daily News in 1987 and serves as editor and vice president to this day. Under his direction, the Daily News has won the World-Herald’s Community Service Award for daily newspapers more than 10 times and the Nebraska Press Association’s Sweepstakes Award the past two years. Kent has served on numerous civic boards, including Faith Regional Health Services, the Norfolk Area Chamber of Commerce, the Humanities Nebraska Foundation and the Nebraska Press Association. Kent was inducted into the Nebraska Journalism Hall of Fame in 2012. He attended the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. Kent is married to Susan, and they have two children.
A journey from junior high to the Barroom Floor

‘Face’ fun with Warrens draws big crowd

By Don Summerside
Communications Committee

From the king and queen of Horace Mann Junior High to the “Face on the Barroom Floor.” Those are titles that bookended the long history of professional leadership and community service by Thomas and Aileen Warren.

Thomas has been president and CEO of the Urban League of Nebraska since retiring as Omaha police chief 11 years ago. Aileen is assistant vice chancellor for business and finance and director of human resources at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

The two, married for 34 years, were saluted and roasted as Face No. 160 on April 13 before a full house of friends and admirers at the Omaha Press Club. The Warrens are the first African American couple to be recognized as a Face on the Barroom Floor.

Emceeing the festivities was Brenda Council (Face No. 62 in 1995), sister of Thomas Warren and a sharp roaster as well.

As Council put it, Aileen and Thomas, a couple since those junior high days, have succeeded in their “mixed marriage. She’s a North High Viking; he’s a Tech High Trojan.”

Brother Thomas, Council noted, is the youngest of the four Warren children. “Mom was suspected of having a tumor before her pregnancy was correctly diagnosed,” Council said. “So we called him Tommy the Tumor when we were kids.”

The grown-up Thomas? “He’s so tight his shoes squeak,” Council said. (“I call it being fiscally responsible,” Thomas retorted. “I’m frugal.”)

Leading off the roasters was Douglas County Treasurer John Ewing, a Horace Mann classmate of Thomas and Aileen. “I’ve known Tommy since we were 6 years, and I’ve known Aileen since junior high.”

At Horace Mann (now King Science Center), the three were competitors for top geography student in the ninth grade, and Ewing said he finished No. 1. However, Thomas and Aileen might declare themselves the long-term winners.

As Ewing later added, “Tom and Aileen started studying together to try and beat me in geography and eventually started dating, so I’m actually responsible for them getting married.”

Roaster Jason Hansen, senior vice president at American National Bank, has been a Warren friend and close observer during his service on the Urban League board. Hansen drew laughs with his description of the Thomas Warren scowl and the Warren “awkward smile.”

Roaster Ivan Gilreath, CEO of Boys and Girls Clubs of the Midlands, had a dart or two for Aileen Warren. “She’s a sweetheart, but she hates to be hugged.” (Not so, replied Aileen. “I’m not against hugging; I’m against hugging you!”)

Jessica (Jay) Warren-Teamer, one of the Warrens’ three children, anchored the lineup of roasters with jokes about her parents’ reluctance to abandon old technology (“No CD player in the new car was a big disappointment”) and her mother’s sleeping habits (“in bed by 8!”).

The “Face on the Barroom Floor,” created by artist Jim Horan, depicts Aileen Warren in running shoes, a nod to her jogging workouts and marathon experiences. Pictured with Aileen, UNMC human resources director, are the “resources” – doctors, nurses and other employees.

As Urban League CEO, Thomas Warren is pictured in his customary white shirt while holding a police shield from his previous career. Behind him is a Morningside College Mustang, his alma mater, and Thomas running for a touchdown in his No. 22 jersey.

And the last words from the honorees?

Thomas Warren: “You guys went easy on my wife.”

Aileen Warren: “We love Omaha.”
Townley will host book-signing event

By Hunter Samuels
Communications Committee

J
oin the Omaha Press Club in celebrat-
ing Wendy Townley at her book sign-
ing featuring her latest work, “Letters
to Barley: Personal Stories My Dog Should
Know.” On Tuesday, May 21, Townley will
host a meet-and-greet from 4:30 on Tues-
day, May 21 at the OPC. At 5 p.m., she’ll
do a book reading and Q&A followed by a
book signing at 5:30 p.m.

“Letters to Barley” follows Townley’s
debut book, “Nerdy Thirty,” and is a
collection of anecdotes addressed to Barley,
Townley’s West Highland White Terrier,
with topics ranging from faith and family
to personal trauma, along with some light-
hearted fun. They are letters to a dog, after
all.

Townley is a Nebraska native and
became the youngest editor-in-chief of the
University of Nebraska at Omaha’s student
newspaper, The Gateway, in 1998. She
served on the Omaha Press Club board of
directors from 2007-2011, including a year
as the board and club president in 2010.

For the last five years, she’s been the
executive director of the Omaha Public Li-
brary Foundation. Townley is also current-
ly vice president of the Omaha Press Club
Foundation board of trustees.

Tickets for the book event are $10 each
for admission, and $20 for admission plus
a copy of the book. Townley
will be donat-
ing a portion
of book sales
to the OPC
Foundation. Call 402-
345-8008 for
tickets.

Forum crowd gets zoo update

Dennis Pate, director of the Henry
Doorly Zoo and Aquarium, gave
the March Noon Forum audience an
update on developments and im-
provements. Among the highlights:
the development of the Asian High-
lands, the new Daugherty Education
Center, and parking improvements
made possible by acquisition of the
Rosenblatt Stadium property.
The Presidential Advisory Commission on shows voter impersonation is a rare crime. Because significant independent research work in the Legislature and civic engagement to advance voting rights through advocacy and election officials, heard first from Cartier, which included stateutory to minorities, the poor and elderly. Fraud are weighed against being discriminatory to minorities, the poor and elderly. But Evnen said Nebraska should deal with voter fraud before it becomes a problem. "We have to have confidence in the integrity of our elections, because it is the linchpin of democracy," he said. The voter ID issue, he said, hinges on two basic questions that must be asked and answered: "Are you eligible?" and "Are you who you say you are?" He said a recent Gallup poll indicated 81 percent of Americans — and 77 percent of minorities — support voter ID laws. In addition, every state surrounding Nebraska except Wyoming has stronger voter ID laws. "Allegations of voter suppression are greatly exaggerated. I'm here to count votes, not suppress them," Evnen said.

By learning this year what has and hasn't worked in other states, including legal issues, Evnen hopes to present a well-researched approach to the Legislature for approval within the Constitution. And he believes it can be done without great expense: the U.S. Census Bureau reports that 98 percent of Nebraskans of voting age already have a valid driver's license or state ID at the Department of Motor Vehicles. Of the remaining 2 percent without an ID, it's unclear how many of them want to vote, he said.

Forum hears both sides of voter ID issue

By Anne Walsh
Communications Committee

Is requiring voter ID at the polls necessary to safeguard the integrity of Nebraska's election results, or is it an unnecessary, expensive and bureaucratic infringement of constitutional rights?

Offering their perspectives at a recent Noon Education Forum were two Lincoln attorneys: Robert Evnen, Nebraska's secretary of state, and John Cartier, director of voting rights for Civic Nebraska.

Citizens present identification when they register to vote in Nebraska, but no ID is required at the ballot box except for some first-time voters. However, some 35 states require IDs or enforce other requirements at the polls. Several state electoral law changes have ended up in court, as efforts to address voter fraud are weighed against being discriminatory to minorities, the poor and elderly.

Forum attendees, which included state and election officials, heard first from Cartier. Though Civic Nebraska, Cartier works to advance voting rights through advocacy work in the Legislature and civic engagement.

He said voter ID laws are unnecessary because significant independent research shows voter impersonation is a rare crime. The Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity, established after allegations of widespread fraud during the 2016 presidential election, produced no evidence to corroborate those claims. Nebraska itself has never recorded an instance of voter impersonation fraud.

Cartier said voter suppression is the No. 1 threat to the integrity of elections nationwide. Despite the 15th Amendment granting the right to vote, he said, state lawmakers have a long history of disenfranchising non-white voters through literacy tests, poll tax, complicated rules and "good character" clauses. Strict voter ID laws represent the latest link in that chain of voter suppression, he said, as those from poorer economic backgrounds struggle with the expense and bureaucracy of providing documentation to acquire voter IDs.

But Evnen said Nebraska should deal with voter fraud before it becomes a problem. "We have to have confidence in the integrity of our elections, because it is the linchpin of democracy," he said.

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Submissions for the June issue are due on or before May 20.

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

Mon, May 27
Memorial Day; club closed

Sat, June 1
Hall of Fame Awards Dinner
5:30 p.m. non-host social
6 p.m. dinner and awards
$50 OPC members, $60 non-members

Fri, June 14
College Baseball Championship Opening Ceremonies Fireworks Buffet
6:30 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.
Adults $22 and children $12 (age 3-10)

Sat, June 15
Father’s Day Steak Grill
5:30 p.m. – 9 p.m.
Adults $25 and children $14 (age 3-10)

Thu, June 20
Noon Education Forum
Missouri River flooding

Fri, June 21
KFAB and OPC Wine Dinner
Scott Voorhees host
6 p.m. hors d’oeuvres, 6:30 p.m. dinner

Hours of Operation

LUNCH
Monday - Friday
11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.

BAR
Tuesday - Saturday
4:30 p.m. to close

DINNER
Thursday - Saturday
5:30 p.m. to close

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.

Sunday, May 12
Mother’s Day Brunch
Two seatings at 10 a.m., 12:30 p.m.
Adults $22 and children $12 (age 3-10)

Monday, May 13
Club closed in observance of Mother’s Day

Thursday, May 16
Noon Education Forum
“Nebraska Education Standards”
$17

Thursday, May 16
“Face on the Barroom Floor”
Tom Shatel
5:30 p.m. social, 6:30 p.m. dinner
$60 OPC members, $70 non-members

Tuesday, May 21
“Letters to Barley” book signing
Wendy Townley meet-and-greet, 4:30 p.m.
Book reading, 5 p.m.; signing 5:30 p.m.
$10 hors d’oeuvres ($20 includes book)