Jeff Zeleny will be next "Face on Barroom Floor" on Sept. 27

CNN's Washington reporter is one of most prominent journalists to hail from Nebraska

By Tom O'Connor
Communications Committee

Jeff Zeleny is one of the most accomplished journalists to come from Nebraska. For nearly two decades, Zeleny has traveled across the country and around the world covering the Bush, Obama and Trump presidencies.

His resume includes four of the most prestigious places in the news business—CNN, ABC News, The New York Times and the Chicago Tribune. And, oh yeah, he also won a Pulitzer Prize.

Zeleny, who currently serves as CNN's senior Washington correspondent, will add another notch to his resume on Sept. 27 when he comes to the Omaha Press Club to become the 162nd “Face on the Barroom Floor.”

“I'm truly honored to receive this recognition from the Press Club,” Zeleny said. “I've always been a news junkie, so I'm quite aware of the significance of being a 'Face on the Barroom Floor.' I'm working on lining up my roasters right now, and I'm really excited about coming to Omaha. I have no doubt it's going to be an entertaining evening.”

A native of Exeter, Neb. (population 544), Zeleny grew up on the family farm about 60 miles west of Lincoln. He graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where he studied journalism and political science. While

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Tri-Faith leaders will address July 18 Forum

Omaha's Tri-Faith Initiative is a unique and ambitious project in the field of interfaith relations. It brings together into permanent residency a synagogue, church, mosque and interfaith center on a 38-acre campus in the middle of America's heartland.

The initiative is made up of three Abrahamic faith groups who have chosen to be in a relationship together as neighbors on one campus, committed to practicing respect, acceptance and trust. The three members are of the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic faiths: Temple Israel, Countryside Community Church (UCC), and The American Muslim Institute.

On Thursday, July 18, the OPC Noon Education Forum will hear from four leaders of the Tri-Faith Initiative. They are:

• Wendy Goldberg, interim executive director and co-founder of the initiative.
• Cantor Joanna Alexander from Temple Israel.
• The Rev. Dr. Christine Alexander, associate minister at Countryside Community Church.
• Imam Mohamad Jamal Daoudi, with the American Muslim Institute.

The program begins at noon and continues until 1 p.m. Lunch, at $17 per person, is served beginning at 11:30 a.m. Call 402-345-8008 for reservations. Non-Press Club members are welcome.

OPC Hall of Fame inducts 2019 honorees

Six Journalists of Excellence were honored on June 1 as 2019 inductees in the Omaha Press Club Hall of Fame. From left are Ben Gray, Carrie Murphy, Mike McKnight, Joni Baillon, Kent Warnke and Kristin Slyhuis, who accepted for her late grandfather, Walt Kavanagh. For additional photos of the honorees with their presenters, turn to Page 2.
JONI (JOAN) BAILLON

Joni Baillon received her award from her brother, Jeff Baillon. Joni graduated from the Brown Institute of Broadcasting in Minneapolis and began her career in radio in South Dakota and Iowa, then moved to television and KMTV in Omaha, hosting a daily, half-hour live interview program, “Conversations.” Baillon followed her distinguished career in journalism with an equally notable career in marketing Omaha city events. She is a past president of the Omaha Press Club.

BEN GRAY

Ben Gray received his award from Greg Rhodes. Ben spent his entire broadcasting career at KETV. He produced and hosted the longest-running public affairs show in the history of Omaha television, "Kaleidoscope," which was on the air for 30 years. He won numerous local, regional and national awards as a reporter and photographer. Gray was elected to the Omaha City Council in 2009 and re-elected in 2013 and 2017.

WALT KAVANAGH

With Gary Sadlemyer presenting, Kristin Slyhuis received the award for her late grandfather, Walt Kavanagh. Walt, an OPC “Face on the Barroom Floor,” was the voice of radio news at KFAB in Omaha for 42 years. His first broadcasting job was in Marshalltown, Iowa. He moved to KOWH in Omaha and then to KFAB, where he eventually became news director. Kavanagh retired in 1992 after an award-filled career and died in 1998.

MIKE MCKNIGHT

Mike McKnight received his award from Brian Mastre. Mike, known as the original “one-man band,” 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. Mike is currently a member of the Omaha Press Club board of directors.

CARRIE MURPHY

Carrie Murphy received her award from Travis Justice and Mayor Jean Stothert. Murphy’s college internship at KMTV turned into a 34-year career in reporting, producing and management. Carrie credits her college advisor, the late Joe McCartney, and the late KMTV news director, Mark Gautier, for giving her the opportunity to work in her hometown. Carrie currently serves as Stothert’s deputy chief of staff/communications.

KENT WARNEKE

Kent Warneke received his award from Allen Beermann. 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. He plans to retire this summer. Kent was inducted into the Nebraska Journalism Hall of Fame in 2012 and received the Nebraska Press Association’s Master Editor-Publisher Award earlier this year.
Mother Nature still rules the Missouri Basin

Kevin Grode of the Army Corps of Engineers: “None of our decisions could give the relief that was needed.”

By Anne Walsh
Communications Committee

They’re damned if they do and damned if they don’t. Under public and political scrutiny following the recent Missouri River Basin flooding, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers faces long odds in successfully balancing flood protection with several other congressionally mandated water requirements.

“The Corps is ‘Army strong,’ but Mother Nature is formidable and undefeatable,” said Kevin Grode, reservoir regulation team lead for the Corps’ Northwestern Division, who described the complexities of managing the nation’s longest river to Noon Education Forum attendees on June 20.

The Corps of Engineers maintains six dams in Montana and the Dakotas and a downstream levee system to regulate winter-spring runoffs, while also supporting navigation, hydropower, irrigation, recreation, water supply and quality, and fish and wildlife.

But many of the basin’s upper tributaries are uncontrolled, including the Big Sioux, James and Nishnabotna rivers, as well as most of the Platte River. And that’s where, from March 13-22, a combination of heavy rain over snow-covered, still-frozen ground turned Nebraska into a flooded parking lot. The misery continued with precipitation levels in Wyoming, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas and the Dakotas far above average through the spring, with Kansas recording its largest-ever monthly rainfall in May.

“We do not enjoy breaking records, but we did with peak stream flows in March, April and May,” said Grode. “None of our decisions could give the relief that was needed.” The result was billions of dollars of damage in property and farmland.

Preventing a repeat is challenging. Without being able to forecast the weather, Grode said historical records dating back to the late 1800s indicate a wetter climate over the last several decades. With the reservoirs’ capacity peaking, the Corps is being forced to release water through still-saturated areas. “If it rains 10 inches in Montana, it’s going to affect you in Missouri,” he said.

Other than fixing what already exists, Grode said other controls are being studied — but dams and reservoirs displace water, so which communities could be affected and who would bear the expense? He added that the Corps of Engineers is working to ensure the most current and relevant information is available to federal partners, congressional representatives, the media and public, so people can make the best decisions possible during weather events.

Goodbye to Jeanie Campbell

Friends and family gathered at the Press Club on June 18 for Jeanie Campbell’s retirement reception. Campbell served as the club’s accountant for 22 years, handling the monthly billing statements that go to members. Family members pictured from left are daughter Christina Lethcoe, Jeanie, husband Floyd, granddaughter Danielle Cosier and daughter Faith Cosier.

Photo by Gary Willis

FACE ON THE FLOOR, continued from Page 1

at UNL, he was editor of the Daily Nebraskan and played trumpet in the Cornhusker Marching Band.

He interned at several newspapers during college, including the Wall Street Journal. After graduating in 1996, Zeleny took a position with The Des Moines Register, where he covered state politics and the Iowa caucuses.

He joined the Chicago Tribune in 2000 as a metro reporter and was a member of the reporting team that won a Pulitzer Prize for documenting gridlock in the nation’s air traffic system. He then served as national political correspondent for the newspaper, covering the 2004 presidential campaign and the George W. Bush administration.

In 2006, Zeleny was hired as national political correspondent for The New York Times. He covered Barack Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign and his first years in the White House. He also covered Congress and Obama’s re-election in 2012.

Zeleny’s next post was for ABC News, where he was senior Washington correspondent from 2013-2015.

For the past four years, Zeleny has worked for CNN. He covered the 2016 campaign, his fifth presidential election, then served as the network’s senior White House correspondent with a focus on President Trump’s pivotal role in the 2018 midterm elections.

As CNN’s senior Washington correspondent, he is currently covering the 2020 presidential campaign.

JEFF ZELENY – “FACE ON BARROOM FLOOR”
WHEN: FRIDAY, SEPT. 27
(RECEPTION – 5:30 P.M.,
DINNER – 6:30 P.M., ROAST – 8 P.M.)
COST: $55 – OPC MEMBERS;
$65 – NON-MEMBERS
RSVP: CALL THE OMAHA PRESS CLUB
AT 402-345-8088. MEMBERS CAN CHARGE TO THEIR OPC ACCOUNT.
NON-MEMBERS NEED TO PROVIDE CREDIT CARD INFORMATION.

Photo by Gary Willis
A MESSAGE FROM THE MANAGER

Our annual break is coming. From July 21 to Aug. 12, the club will be closed, with a reopening on Tuesday, Aug. 13, for regular business hours.

Annual closings are part of a private club’s normal schedule. As we are a city club (social membership only—food and beverage) with no pool, golf course or tennis court, we close in the summer while country clubs close in the winter after the holidays (January and February).

If you would like to look into booking space at the club, please reach out to me by email at opcchristine@gmail.com or phone, as our space will not be available for events during our break. A reminder: For an Omaha Press Club member, there is no rental fee, a potential savings of up to $1,500 for most memberships. If you have booked, expect an email or phone call as a reminder to get your planning submitted before we reopen. We already have many rooms booked for the fall.

Reciprocal Clubs – If you have never used your OPC membership at a reciprocal club, keep in mind what a benefit it is. Whether close to home or farther away, dining at private clubs is a perk in our membership.

Call the individual club (see the list on Page 5), indicate you are an Omaha Press Club member and make a reservation with date, time and number of guests. Double check their dress code, as some clubs are more formal than others. If you have lost your OPC card, call our office for a replacement before you travel. We can also provide an introductory letter.

Unlike at the OPC, where you can just sign your ticket after the meal, reciprocal clubs require immediate payment with cash or credit card. Keep in mind: our membership only reciprocates for dining and social visits, so no pool, golf course or tennis.

My family and I enjoy reciprocal clubs when traveling (pack some business casual clothes) for a meal and experience. And I hear much feedback from members on their experiences. For example, one of our members visits Des Moines multiple times a year (business outings) and loves the short trip for a quick getaway.

Remodeling – This year the updates and improvements will again be in the OPC kitchen. The director will give more details when we return.

-Christine Jones Villamonte
Restaurant and events manager

From Wendy to Barley to Roger


A wine time was had by all

Sellout crowd at the KFAB Gourmet Club and OPC Wine Dinner hosted by KFAB’s Scott Voorhees was treated to a fabulous meal complemented by an excellent variety of wines. Pictured from left are Voorhees, OPC Restaurant and Events Manager Christine Villamonte, and wine representative Ryan Thompson.

Shatel Lunch Series returns on Aug. 29

He’s back... No, it’s not Freddy Krueger. It’s our own favorite sports columnist Tom Shatel.

The popular Shatel Lunch Series will return on Thursday, Aug. 29 with Shatel providing a sneak preview for the upcoming college football season and how things are looking for the Nebraska Cornhuskers.

“Expectations are pretty high for Scott Frost’s second year as head coach,” said Shatel, who was honored as the Omaha Press Club’s 161st “Face on the Barroom Floor” on May 16. “It will be a perfect time to discuss the upcoming season. I look forward to seeing a good turnout, and I encourage people to spread the word. These lunches are always a lot of fun. I’d like nothing better than to fill the Press Club.”

Lunch will be served beginning at 11:30 a.m. with the program starting around noon. Lunch will include hamburger steak, mashed potatoes and gravy and a dessert. Cost is $17. The event is open to the public. Call 402-345-8008 to make your reservation.

From Wendy to Barley to Roger


A wine time was had by all

Sellout crowd at the KFAB Gourmet Club and OPC Wine Dinner hosted by KFAB’s Scott Voorhees was treated to a fabulous meal complemented by an excellent variety of wines. Pictured from left are Voorhees, OPC Restaurant and Events Manager Christine Villamonte, and wine representative Ryan Thompson.
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