‘And the Floods Came’
Noon Forum to feature NET flood documentary

The 2019 Nebraska flood was the costliest in state history. Its unprecedented enormity is captured in a documentary, “And the Floods Came,” recently aired on Nebraska ETV, the state’s public broadcasting service.

Bill Kelly, NET News senior producer, will review the documentary and discuss how it was created at a Press Club Noon Forum on Thursday, Jan. 23.

Using video gathered from mobile phone cameras in the hardest-hit communities, the documentary shows what officials and others experienced in real time as the floodwaters bore down on residents of towns and farms across the state. Heartbreak continues in the flood’s aftermath, recovery is far from complete, and there are fears of renewed flooding this year.

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

Chris Flanery was the lead videographer and editor for the Nebraska ETV documentary.

All validated parking at Central City Garage

Parking garage and evening entrance changes are now in effect for club members.

All validated parking, both day and night, is at the Central City Garage directly west and across 17th Street from the First National Bank building and Omaha Press Club.

Garage entrances and exits are on Capitol Avenue and 18th Street. Parking at the DoubleTree Garage is no longer being validated.

Daytime parking at Central City is on floors 1, 2, 3 and 7, with plenty of space for large events. Nighttime parking spots start at stall No. 143 and continue up to the top floor.

The parking validation process is the same as before: Bring your parking ticket to the club and we will dispose of the original and give you a ticket stamped PAID to use at the garage gate before exiting. If you leave your ticket in your vehicle, no problem; we will still give you a PAID ticket.

Entrance to the bank building after business hours also has a new wrinkle. For security purposes, both the building entrance from the Central City Garage tunnel under 17th Street and the 16th and Dodge streets entrance will be locked from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m.

Getting in is simple: Push the button on the black box near the bank entrance doors and say, “Omaha Press Club.” When you park at Central City, take the elevator down to the tunnel entrance on the first level; the black box is located at the east end of the tunnel. The 16th Street entrance also has a black box on the right side of the door (the handicapped entrance).

The call buttons go directly to FNB’s security to open the doors. For private parties or special evening events, the doors will be unlocked.

Looking ahead to the OPC Annual Meeting on Jan. 16

While “2020” is most often referred to in relation to “hind-sight,” the Omaha Press Club will look ahead at the annual meeting on Thursday, Jan. 16.

A 5:30 p.m. social, featuring complimentary hors d’oeuvres, will precede the 6 o’clock call-to-order. The Press Club will celebrate its 50th anniversary as a rooftop restaurant in the First National Bank building next year, in 2021.

The 2020 annual meeting will feature reports from the outgoing president, Jeremy Maskel, and OPC’s executive director, Steve Villamonte, plus the annual reports from committee chairs. Following the reports will be the election of board members and officers.

Board members on the ballot include: Allen Beermann, Nebraska Press Association; Woody Bradford, Houghton Bradford Whitted; Bridget (Weide) Brooks, Image Building Communications; Roger Humphries, Roger Humphries Photography;
Former OPC ‘Face,’ Hayden Fry, dies at age 90

By Tom O’Connor
Communications Committee

Hayden Fry, the man credited with turning the Iowa Hawkeyes’ football program around, died Dec. 17 in Dallas at the age of 90.

In 1986, Fry was honored by the Omaha Press Club as the 32nd “Face on the Barroom Floor.”

When Fry took over as Iowa head coach in 1979, the Hawkeyes had posted 17 straight non-winning seasons. During his 20 years at Iowa, Fry compiled a 143-89-6 record and a 6-7-1 record in 14 bowl appearances, including three trips to the Rose Bowl.

In addition to Iowa, Fry was a head coach for 11 years at Southern Methodist (49-66-1 record) and six years at North Texas State (40-23-3). His career record was 232-178-17

Hayden Fry

Fry had the mustache. So, as a joke, all of Fry’s roasters showed up with fake mustaches.

In his Face caricature, a player has a rose in his teeth in honor of the Rose Bowls that the Hawkeyes played in under Coach Fry. As an extra special Iowa touch, Horan included Grant Wood’s American Gothic couple in the background of the caricature.

Treasurer: Dale Ervin, First National Bank; and
Secretary: Bridget (Weide) Brooks, Image Building Communications; and
Immediate Past President: Jeremy Maskel, Omaha Public Schools.

For those who wish to vote but are unable to attend the meeting, a proxy ballot is on page 4. Please mail the ballot to the Press Club or email it to opcchristine@gmail.com.

Annual Meeting, continued from Page 1

Jeremy Maskel, Omaha Public Schools; Tom Shatel, Omaha World-Herald; Gary Willis, NP Dodge Real Estate

From the board, candidates for office include:
President: Tom Shatel, Omaha World-Herald; and
President-Elect: Roger Humphries, Roger Humphries Photography; and

Longtime photo-journalist-activist Rudy Smith dies

By Gary Willis
Communications Committee

Longtime photojournalist-activist Rudy Smith, the first black employee in the Omaha World-Herald’s newsroom, died Dec. 5 after a short illness. He was 74.

Rudy and his wife Llana had previously celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary and were planning a cruise with two other couples. Rudy became ill and the plans had to be cancelled.

Smith was a civil rights activist and fought for equal rights at an early age. As a teenager, he organized some of the 1960s’ biggest demonstrations in Omaha. He led protests of the segregation at Peony Park and picketed the World-Herald with the NAACP for not employing any African-Americans.

He was told to apply for a job at the World-Herald and was hired in 1963. He started his 45-year World-Herald career as a newsroom copy messenger but yearned for a better position. He was asked: “Do you know how to work a camera”? He had no idea, but he was a quick learner and his expertise led to many photos that told the story of North Omaha.

While working at the newspaper, Smith also attended UNO and, in 1969, was the university’s first black journalism graduate. Later, he became the first black faculty member in the communications school. Rudy was the recipient of many awards and recognition, including his induction into the Hall of Fame at Central High School and the Journalists of Excellence Hall of Fame at the Omaha Press Club.

Recently, Smith had been working on a book that highlighted his years of photojournalism. He finished it in hospice with the help of his wife. The book, published by the World-Herald, is to be released in February to coincide with Black History Month.

Rudy and Llana had three children, and one son preceded him in death. He is also survived by 16 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren.
PR legend Tom O’Connor calls it a career

By Todd Andrews
Communications Committee

Red Sox fans will tell you he’s the nicest Yankee fan you’ll ever meet. He’s the Omaha Press Club’s 148th “Face on the Barroom Floor.” Plus — he’s pretty darn good at PR, too.

Now, the man they call “T.O.” is retiring after a career spanning nearly five decades in the communications business, 32 years of which were spent at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

Tom O’Connor is indisputably one of the metro area’s living legends of public relations, having been at the zenith of the profession for what seems like forever — all while representing one of Omaha’s most prominent employers.

During his long tenure on 42nd Street, the Oskaloosa, Iowa, native has done it all: he’s hosted a health-focused radio show on KIOS-FM; penned a column (the aptly named “Time Out with T.O.”); served as PRSA president; helmed the OPC’s Face on the Barroom Floor Committee for nearly 20 years; won scores of awards for his PR work; successfully pitched heaven-knows-how-many positive news media stories; and, natch, written approximately 154,623 press releases.

But now, this 24-hour-a-day worker bee who’s conquered an infamously 24-7 business is ready to strike out for the loftier summits of retirement.

“It’s time,” O’Connor says. “I loved my career. UNMC is a special place to me; I really won the lottery when I came aboard.”

That coming aboard happened in 1987. Back then, UNMC was a fraction of the size it is now, but pulsing with potential. Tom had carte blanche from the administration to “tell the Med Center story” far and wide. It would prove to be the perfect match of employer and employee.

“There are so many good stories at the Med Center; it’s just a gold mine,” O’Connor asserts. “I love the people there, the spirit there. The people want to be the best in the world at what they’re doing — and that’s exactly what they are: the very best.”

The ensuing three decades saw UNMC embark on an expansion of historic proportions, with building space more than tripling and philanthropic support skyrocketing.

Advances in medicine and research—developed by UNMC staff—occurred alongside the expansion.

T.O. was there every step of the way to keep the public informed. In the process, he became one of the most beloved media relations pros in the state, always helpful and accommodating to reporters.

“I’m super proud of what’s happened in my 32 years here,” O’Connor says. “I think we created an image around the Med Center to where people know that they’re supporting something that is world-class. If there’s one thing I look back on with a sense of accomplishment, it’s that I was a small part of that team effort.”

As for the next chapter? He plans to play a little more of his favorite sport (“mediocre golf,” as he calls it), recruit new members for the Press Club, and stay active in the Omaha community alongside his wife, Karen.

“She’s not going to let me sit around and twiddle my thumbs,” O’Connor chuckles.

Once he walks out the UNMC door for the last time this month, T.O. will be closing in on the tender age of 70.

“It’s funny,” he says. “You hit 65, and people start asking, ‘When are you gonna retire?—and then you finally do retire, and people start asking, ‘What the heck are you gonna do?’ Well, I’m looking forward to just getting away from the daily grind.”

Indeed. Yankees fan or not, you have to agree: after 48 years and 154,623 press releases, who could blame him?

Shatel Lunch explores CU, NU basketball

By Tom O’Connor
Communications Committee

Bacon cheeseburgers and college basketball made up the menu for the Shatel Lunch Series on Dec. 3.

Tom Shatel, Omaha World-Herald sports columnist, was joined by two of his colleagues — Jon Nyatawa and Chris Heady, the beat writers for Creighton and Nebraska basketball, respectively.

The writers provided a sneak preview of the rivalry between the two schools just four days before they squared off in Omaha (a game won by Creighton 95-76).

Nyatawa predicted that Creighton could finish as high as third or fourth in the Big East Conference “if they get healthy.” Davion Mintz, a three-year starting guard, will miss the entire season while recovering from a high ankle sprain.

The Bluejays were bolstered in mid-December by the addition of Denzel Mahoney, a transfer from Southeast Missouri State.

Nyatawa said “there is no great team in the Big East this year.” He said Villanova and Seton Hall are likely the best teams in the conference, but that neither of them is likely to be much better than a No. 5 seed in the NCAA Tournament.

Heady said new Husker Coach Fred Hoiberg is much different than his extrovert predecessor, Tim Miles. “Fred doesn’t like the spotlight at all,” he said. “He’s kind of a nerd. He likes crossword puzzles and does yoga with his wife.”

This season’s Husker squad is “one of the worst rebounding teams in the country,” Heady said. “They have some issues you can’t fix. It’s kind of like a hangover. The only thing that cures it is time. This year is important …. as long as they see growth.”

Nebraska’s three best recruits — Delano Banton, Derrick Walker and Shamier Stevenson — are transfers who have to sit out this season. Heady predicted they will be the Huskers’ three best rebounders next year.
OPC MEMBER PROXY BALLOT

Members not attending the annual meeting on Jan. 16 may vote by returning the proxy ballot below to reach the Omaha Press Club by 4 p.m., Wednesday, Jan. 15. See instructions below.

OFFICERS

President
Tom Shatel
☐ For  ☐ Against

President-Elect
Roger Humphries
☐ For  ☐ Against

Treasurer
Dale Ervin
☐ For  ☐ Against

Secretary
Bridget (Weide) Brooks

Immediate Past President
Jeremy Maskan

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Allen Beermann
☐ For  ☐ Against

Woody Bradford
☐ For  ☐ Against

Bridget (Weide) Brooks
☐ For  ☐ Against

Roger Humphries
☐ For  ☐ Against

Jeremy Maskan
☐ For  ☐ Against

Tom Shatel
☐ For  ☐ Against

Gary Willis
☐ For  ☐ Against

Officers and board members assume office on Feb. 1, 2020

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. 15.

NOTE: If you plan to attend the annual meeting, do not return this proxy ballot.

PHONE 402-345-8008 FOR RESERVATIONS

Valentine's Day Dinner
Wednesday, Feb. 14, 6 p.m. - 9 p.m.
$120 per couple includes tax & gratuity

Appetizer Choice
Lobster Bisque
-or-
Prime Rib Carpaccio with a Garlic Remoulade

Salad
OPC Famous Thunderbird Salad
Served in a Parmesan Crisp

Entrée Choices
Prime Rib of Beef with Chantilly and Au Jus
Pan-Roasted Rack of Lamb with a Cabernet Jus
Omaha Steak Filet Mignon
Finished with maître d’hotel butter and bordelaise sauce
Sun-Dried Cranberry and Bacon-Encrusted Fresh Atlantic Salmon
Served with a buerre blanc and cranberry gratique
Chicken Villa Encroute
Mushrooms, Onions, Sun-Dried Tomatoes, Fresh Herbs, Mozzarella Wrapped in a Puff Pastry & Sauce Au Poivre

Dessert
A Signature Petit Fours Presentation at the Fireplace

Quarterly Winemaker's Dinner
Friday, March 6, 6 p.m.
Price: $55 members
$65 non-members

Hors d’oeuvres
Antipasto
Wine

Appetizer
Mozzarella Burrata

Salad
Thunderbird With Parmesan Crust
Wine

Entrée
Vitello (Veal) Porcini
Capellini con Gamberi e Arugula
Wine

Dessert
Tiramisu & Biscotti
Wine

St. Patrick's Day Buffet
Tuesday, March 17
11:30 a.m. - 8 p.m.
Members $15

All-you-can-eat
Fresh Corned Beef
Boiled Cabbage
Irish New Potatoes
Dark Rye Bread & Butter

Dessert
Frosted Brownie

$3 Green Beer
A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

By Jeremy Maskel
OPC President

There is no doubt this year has been a busy and challenging one for our management team. From the retirement of our longtime bookkeeper to our executive director learning those processes and finding opportunities to modernize them – all while continuing our club’s normal daily operations, I know the hours were incredibly long.

We already see, though, that the hard work invested will benefit the club each year to come. Thank you, Steve, Christine and the entire OPC staff for that critical effort and accomplishment. I am also very thankful for my fellow board members who not only shared their expertise at board and committee meetings this year, but who spent evenings and weekends in support of those efforts to streamline and modernize the club’s daily work.

I was honored to help introduce the club at “Face on the Barroom Floor” roasts, our Journalists of Excellence Hall of Fame ceremony and more throughout the year. The Omaha Press Club is lucky to have such a devoted group of volunteers who invest time and energy to ensure the success of our events. Their work speaks to the reverence we all have for a space where journalists, newsmakers and our community can gather in support of a free press and informed public.

We have a lot to look forward to in the year to come as Tom Shatel stands for election as president of our board of directors. Tom’s deep appreciation for the club and its mission is obvious. Tom is already working on ideas to build upon the excellent events we host.

I am excited to see what the new year will bring – and I will see you at the club. Thank you for the opportunity to serve that I’ve enjoyed and appreciated each time I visit the OPC.

A MESSAGE FROM THE MANAGER

Welcome, 2020! I am ready for a new year with new outlooks and positive outcomes. For some, 2019 was a difficult year in politics, sports, religion and other areas. These are all things that I do not speak out about at the club! But I always have a sympathetic ear for club members’ personal opinions.

Many arrivals, departures and retirements have occurred as the old year ended and the new year began.

To our First National Bank neighbors from all of us at the Omaha Press Club: Good luck to those who have departed and welcome to the new FNB members. I have known many of the veteran employees for many years, and I wish them well in their new adventures. We are all excited for you! With this in mind, welcome to the new FNB arrivals. If OPC members see some new faces in the club who look lost, please give them a warm greeting.

On the OPC “retirement” front, special thank-yous to:

• Jim Horan, our newly retired “Face on the Barroom Floor” artist, for all the beautiful “Faces” he has left us through the 50 years of the club;
• Tom O’Connor, the longtime Face committee chair (still on the committee, just not the chair); and
• Gary Kerr, leaving after years of service as the Education Committee chair and organizer of the Noon Education Forums.

Thank you for all the years, time, energy, efforts, politics and fun with the club.

Meanwhile, we have openings for volunteers on our committees, which meet monthly. You do not have to be a press person to be a committee member. In addition to the Face and Education Committees, volunteers are welcome in Communications, which produces this newsletter; Hall of Fame, and Membership/Marketing.

See you at the club!

- Christine Villamonte
OPC Restaurant and Events Manager
2019 - 2020 Officers

Jeremy Maskel
President
Omaha Public Schools

Tom Shatel
President-elect
Omaha World-Herald

Dale Ervin
Treasurer
First National Bank

Bridget (Weide) Brooks
Secretary
Image Building Communications

D.C. "Woody" Bradford
Immediate past president
Houghton Bradford Whitted

Board of Directors

(2018-2020)
Allen Beermann
Roger Humphries
Gary Willis
Cindy Workman
Liz Hruska

(2019-2021)
Chris Allen
Kristyna Engdahl
Mike McKnight
Erin Johnson

Cindy Workman • Don Summerside
Gary Willis • Jennifer Bull • Karen Way
Tom O’Connor • Anne Walsh
Sandra Tursi • Hunter Samuels
Lauren Robinson • Todd Andrews

Communications Committee

Cindy Workman • Don Summerside
Gary Willis • Jennifer Bull • Karen Way
Tom O’Connor • Anne Walsh
Sandra Tursi • Hunter Samuels
Lauren Robinson • Todd Andrews

Committee Chairs

Communications
Gary Willis, Cindy Workman

Education
Dr. Bob Meyers

Executive Committee
Jeremy Maskel, Tom Shatel, Bridget (Weide) Brooks & D.C. “Woody” Bradford

“Face on the Barroom Floor”
Roger Humphries

Hall of Fame
Marcia Cady

Marketing / Membership
Bridget (Weide) Brooks,

OPC Foundation

TRUSTEES
Elaine Allen
Chris Christen
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Mike Holmes
Howard K. Marcus
Peggy Rupprecht
Hugh Reilly
Joseph Weber

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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 January 20.

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

Wednesday, Jan. 1
New Year’s Day
Club closed

Thursday, Jan. 16
Annual Board Meeting
5:30 p.m. social, 6 p.m. meeting
7 p.m. hors d’oeuvres

Monday, Jan. 20
Martin Luther King Jr. Day
Club closed

Thursday, Jan. 23
Noon Education Forum
Bill Kelly, NET News
"And the Floods Came"
Noon to 1 p.m.
Lunch begins at 11:30 a.m.
Open to the public – cost $17

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.

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