**First Amendment is focus of new Press Club event**

**By Bridget (Weide) Brooks**
Communications Committee

Freedom of the press is a central tenet of a democracy, and the Omaha Press Club is hosting a new event in April that celebrates the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

Former Sen. Chuck Hagel, a military veteran who worked as a radio newscaster and talk show host in Omaha while finishing college, will be the speaker and honoree at the inaugural Omaha Press Club “First Amendment Night: Celebrating Newsmakers and News Media” on Saturday, April 18 at the club. Hagel was also an entrepreneur before running for the U.S. Senate in 1996. He later served as secretary of defense in the Obama administration.

OPC President Tom Shatel is spearheading the new event, which he sees as a networking opportunity for current members of the media as well as a “homecoming” for veteran news personnel, an opportunity to “bring the press back to the Press Club.”

**Othello Meadows III will be next ‘Face on Barroom Floor’**

**He’s been a leader in revitalization of North Omaha**

**By Tom O’Connor**
Communications Committee

Othello Meadows III is on a mission.

As president and CEO of Seventy Five North Revitalization Corp. and owner of The Meadows Group, Meadows has established himself as a community leader by making the revitalization of North Omaha a driving force in his life.

For his efforts, Meadows will be honored on March 21 as the Omaha Press Club will make him its latest “Face on the Barroom Floor.”

"Othello has accomplished great things in North Omaha," said Roger Humphries, chair of the Face on the Barroom Floor Committee. "He has truly made a difference in our community. We couldn’t be more pleased to recognize him.”

Meadows’ story is a compelling one.

**Noon Forum will discuss public transit’s future**

**By Jason Rose**
Outreach coordinator for Metro Transit (Omaha) service, will address short- and long-term public transportation plans for the metropolitan area at the Noon Education Forum on Thursday, Feb. 20.

ORBT (Omaha Rapid Bus Transit), featuring upgraded buses and upgraded bus stops, is coming to Omaha this fall. It will serve the central Omaha corridor of Dodge Street and downtown Douglas Street between Omaha’s Old Market district and Westroads Mall.

These specially designed buses will run every 10 minutes during rush hour. They will have a special lane and traffic lights will stay green longer to allow for less stopping. Stations will offer level boarding, real-time arrival information, bike parking, Wi-Fi connectivity and the ability to purchase tickets at the station with a smart card or phone.

The OPC 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 or email Christine at opcchristine@gmail.com. Non-Press Club members are welcome.

KFAB’s Gary Sadlemyer will emcee, and OPC legends Jim Fogarty and John Prescott are contributing musical entertainment to the event.

The night will begin with cocktails at 5:30 p.m., followed by dinner and Hagel’s remarks at 7 p.m. A dessert bar will follow.

Tickets are $75 each, with a portion of the ticket price benefiting the Omaha Press Club Foundation Inc., a 501(c)(3) organization that supports journalism scholarships and education. The OPC Foundation has awarded more than $40,000 in scholarships to journalism students at Creighton University, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

To reserve your spot, RSVP online by April 13 at http://bit.ly/OPCFirstAmendment or call 402-345-8008. Validated parking for members will be available in the Central City Garage.
Creighton Prep High School in 1994 and was one of the star players on the basketball team that won the Class A state championship. He earned a full-ride scholarship to play NCAA Division I basketball at East Carolina University, where he was a three-year starter for the Pirates.

Meadows earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from ECU in psychology, then went to North Carolina Central University School of Law in Durham for his law degree. Before returning to Omaha, Meadows operated his own law firm, Orthello H. Meadows, P.C. in Atlanta, where his practice focused on criminal defense, family law and general civil litigation.

After nearly 15 years, Meadows returned to Omaha to run a nonpartisan voter registration drive that registered more than 10,000 new voters in the eastern part of the city prior to the 2008 presidential election.

The tremendous response inspired Meadows to stay in his home community and eventually take on the arduous task of trying to revitalize North Omaha, an area that had seen decades of decline.

Initially, he served as executive director the Omaha Workforce Collaborative, a nonprofit housed at the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, designed to restructure the workforce development efforts of the metropolitan area.

He then launched Seventy Five North, a nonprofit community development agency dedicated to investing in high-quality, mixed-income housing, education and community wellness for families, seniors and young professionals. The corporation’s name was inspired by Highway 75, which runs through North Omaha. The agency is located at 2112 N. 30th St.

Meadows started by focusing on the Highlander neighborhood, located less than a mile from downtown Omaha. The 2009 demolition of Pleasantview Homes – a 300-unit public housing project – opened up 23 acres of contiguous land. The community surrounding Pleasantview Homes had begun to deteriorate, leaving wide swaths of vacant land and condemned homes in the Highlander neighborhood. As disconcerting as these conditions were, they also represented opportunity. It meant the decaying housing and vacant lots surrounding Pleasantview could be acquired at reasonable prices, which would allow for development to take place on a greater scale.

By the end of 2012, Seventy Five North owned 36 acres of contiguous land and an additional 55 lots surrounding the former Pleasantview site.

In its initial phase completed in 2017, Seventy Five North developed 101 housing units in the Highlander area – a mixture of row houses, townhouses and apartment homes. Each unit includes granite countertops, stainless steel appliances and a washer/dryer. The units feature 30 different configurations and a contemporary design. Amenities include new streets, infrastructure, utilities, a neighborhood park and a pool.

A key addition to the Highlander neighborhood was creation of The Accelerator, a 65,000-square-foot building and outdoor space. The Accelerator houses a variety of organizations aimed at connecting the community through education, engagement and enrichment.

Seventy Five North is partnering with AIM High Test Prep to increase the number of students in North Omaha prepared for college entrance exams.

“We believe everyone deserves the opportunity to go to college and want to level the playing field for students who lack access to test prep materials, calculators and exam timers,” Meadows said. “The ACT Test Prep course will allow students to master test-taking techniques and review for the ACT exam.”

Strong partners such as the Urban League of Nebraska, the Charles Drew Health Center and Salem Baptist Church have allowed Seventy Five North to flourish.

In addition, Meadows owns and operates The Meadows Group, a neighborhood redevelopment consulting firm that focuses on helping communities meld the complexities of real estate development into strategies that engage and empower the communities in which they exist.

Meadows serves on several boards in the Omaha area. He and his wife, Tulani Grundy Meadows, have two sons, Garvey and Gibran. Grundy Meadows is a social sciences professor at Metropolitan Community College.

First Eustice scholarship to be awarded

By Bridget (Weide) Brooks
OPC Foundation Board of Trustees

More than $12,500 has been raised toward the endowment of a new scholarship honoring longtime Omaha Press Club board member and volunteer Susan Eustice, and the first Eustice scholarship will be awarded by the OPC Foundation this year.

Eustice, the spokeswoman for the Salvation Army’s Western Division, died in May 2019. She was a past president of the Omaha Press Club (2012), co-chaired the Communications Committee for 17 years with her mentor and friend Judy Horan, and also served on the Face on the Barroom Floor Committee.

Fundraising will continue toward making the Eustice scholarship a permanent addition to the scholarships awarded annually to students at Creighton University, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the University of Nebraska at Omaha. A minimum of $35,000 is needed to permanently endow a scholarship.

In 2019, the foundation awarded 14 scholarships and three fellowships totaling $39,000 in honor of local journalism legends like Howard Silber, Floyd Kalber, Jim Denney and Judy Horan. The generosity of donors allows the foundation to provide communication majors with a $2,500 scholarship towards their education as they pursue careers in radio, television, print, public relations and new media.

Recipients of the 2020 scholarships will be honored at the OPC Foundation Scholarship Banquet on Friday, April 24 at the club. The recipients of the OPC Career Achievement Award and the Journalism Educator Award will also be honored. In addition, the foundation’s honorary awards will be presented to students at Creighton University, the University of Nebraska at Omaha. A mini-scholarship of $1,000 is needed to permanently endow a scholarship.

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If you are interested in contributing to the Eustice scholarship, visit www.opc-scholarships.org. Donations can be made online through the site, or checks can be made payable to the Omaha Press Club Foundation and mailed to P.O. Box 4842, Omaha NE 68104.
In journalism, expect the unexpected

Flood a life-changing experience for victims – and producer of NET documentary

By Sherry Bale
Communications Committee

It was an Omaha Press Club full house at January’s Noon Forum to see NET-TV News Senior Producer Bill Kelly screen and discuss his “And the Floods Came,” a gut-wrenching — yet hopeful — documentary about the historic 2019 Nebraska flood and all the lives, businesses, livestock, crops and more that laid in its wake.

Kelly and his team paint an intimate and heartfelt chronicle of what happens to ordinary people in extraordinary times. What could be a numbing and defeating natural disaster to many, part of the documentary lovingly portrays everyday people pulling themselves up by their bootstraps with tenacity and grace when facing the impossible.

The documentary was made despite many roadblocks. For example, as with much of the news media and first-responders (not to mention FEMA, the Red Cross and other relief organizations), the flood was so all-encompassing and devastating that it took Kelly’s production team an excruciating 10 days from the time Spencer Dam broke to reach affected small towns.

“I thought we were going to do a recovery story going in,” said Kelly. “But when people saw our cameras, they thanked us for being there — which rarely happens to news media — and then they wanted to contribute their personal stories, pictures and videos that documented the flood’s onslaught as it happened.”

Kelly said 53 individuals and entities shared their experiences in the piece, “which indicates how storytelling is changing from ‘one voice’” to a harmony of many.

Kelly added that producing the documentary changed him personally and professionally. “What affected me the most was experiencing first-hand how these communities and everyday people rose to the occasion — particularly after they came to the realization that the cavalry wasn’t coming as it normally does after most environmental storms. They were going to have to fend for themselves. To see everyone, and I mean everyone, do their part to help further recovery and rebuild is a remarkable thing to see as a journalist and as a citizen.”

Because of the experience and the relationships Kelly's team formed with the people in the distressed areas, he plans to revisit them to hold round-table discussions with residents and produce an update. “The flood of 2019 isn’t over yet. There’s a lot of work to be done.”

“And the Floods Came” originally aired on NET and is available via online streaming at netnebraska.org, pbs.org or on YouTube.

March Forum to feature Rudy Smith’s photo book

“The Black Experience Through the Lens of Rudy Smith,” a book that highlights the late Rudy Smith’s photojournalism experience in North Omaha, will be released at a Noon Forum on Thursday, March 19.

Smith, a longtime photographer with the Omaha World-Herald, died Dec. 5 after a short illness at the age of 74. Photo selections for the long-planned book were completed while Rudy was in hospice. His wife, Llana, assisted him in the selections as he gave her a thumbs up or down on his choices.

Llana and Kristine Gerber, book editor at the World-Herald, will take the Noon Forum audience on a journey through the years explaining how Rudy’s photographs were collected and compiled.

One of Rudy’s memorable quotes was: 

“I always knew whatever I shot was for historical purposes. When it’s history, that moment will never be revisited again. Words can describe it, but images live on forever, just like freedom marches on.”

The OPC forum will run from noon until 1 p.m., with lunch service beginning at 11:30 a.m. The cost is $17 and non-OPC members are welcome.

Books will be available for purchase.
As the colors turn from golds and silvers of the holidays, red and green are on their way with Valentine’s Day and St. Patrick’s Day around the corner.

Feb. 14 is on a Friday this year, which makes Valentine’s a great date night. The Omaha Press Club menu features multiple mouth-watering choices. Call soon as the first reservations get the best window seatings. My personal favorite courses are the lobster bisque appetizer followed by the rack of lamb entrée. But, you also can’t go wrong with the traditional beef dishes, filet mignon or prime rib, the encrusted salmon and the cute puff pastry chicken.

If you cannot make Date Night work in February, March brings Irish poetry and food on the 12th and the quarterly Winemaker’s Dinner on the 13th to chase the winter blues.

“Dinner with an Irish Poet” will feature Desmond Egan, who has published more than 20 collections of poetry, plus an Irish stew and salad.

As for the Winemaker’s Dinner, make the night out memorable for your sweetheart or a group of friends. The dinner pairs a wine with each course (except the sorbet to cleanse the palate).

Our Lenten dining specials start on Ash Wednesday, Feb. 26, and continue on Fridays up until Easter. The chef will be bringing in fish options delivered fresh to our door and specials to accommodate everyone’s appetite. Just when you think we are only known for beef here in Nebraska, our fish will compete with the fish fries around town without the long lines, fried fish guilt and beer spilled on you. Do not get me wrong: I love a good fish fry. But to change it up, don’t forget about us.

PARKING REMINDER: Parking changes are in effect both day and night, with the OPC now validating only at the Central City Garage directly west and across 17th Street from the First National Bank building. Parking at the DoubleTree Garage is no longer being validated. Daytime parking at Central City is on floors 1, 2, 3 and 7. Evening parking spots start at stall 143 and continue up to the top floor.

The validation process is the same as before: Bring your parking ticket up to the club and receive a ticket stamped PAID to use at the garage gate while exiting.

Entrance to the bank building and OPC after business hours is also new. Both the Central City tunnel under 17th street and the 16th and Dodge Streets entrance are locked from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. Getting in is simple: push the “call” buttons on the black boxes at the entrances and say, “Omaha Press Club.” For special evening events and private parties, the doors will be unlocked.

- Christine Villamonte
OPC Restaurant and Events Manager
By Tom Shatel
OPC President

It’s an honor to be president of the Omaha Press Club. I love this place. From the first time I walked in, back in 1991, I’ve thought it was one of the gems of Omaha. I will not take this task lightly.

Now, about that campaign promise of free beer and wings . . .

Would you settle for getting more traffic into the Press Club in 2020? More exposure to a younger audience?

Those are my two goals for the following year and I’m optimistic. The past year was tough. Under the leadership of Steve, Christine and President Jeremy Maskel, we got through. Omaha is an ever-changing entertainment and dining market.

New pockets of districts with bars and restaurants continue to pop up. Some make it, some will not. The Press Club is in the middle of all this, a place with proud tradition, but a hidden diamond in many ways among the competition.

Going forward into the next decade, I feel the key to survival and growth is to expand our events. The Press Club must become a place where folks want to bring their events – small, medium and large.

Along those lines, I’m thrilled to announce a new big event for 2020: The OPC First Amendment Night.

It’s scheduled for Saturday night, April 18. It will be an event honoring the commitment to the First Amendment by local media, politicians and newsmakers. Our first honoree is Sen. Chuck Hagel.

The event will include a cocktail hour and dinner followed by a program, led by emcee Gary Sadlemyer of KFAB. He’ll introduce our guest. Then, after a short speech, we’ll head to the bar for dessert and drinks and a lot of fun stories.

This event is open to the public, but I expect it to be a place where current and former media members and politicos – and fans of both – reunite each year to celebrate something very near and dear to us all: Freedom of the Press.

My other priority in 2020: Get the younger generation up that elevator to the 22nd floor.

How do we do this with so many options available in Omaha? Maybe all we have to do is just be ourselves.

At our recent January board meeting, I told the story of my oldest daughter. Sarah, a high school senior, had friends over to our house one night before Christmas. They retreated to the basement.

Soon, I heard a curious sound: The 10 or 12 high school kids were all singing songs from Queen, Neil Diamond and Frank Sinatra. When I asked her why, she said they think old stuff is cool.

Also, I might add, all three of my daughters are always asking to go to the Press Club. I took them to my “Face” event last May and they loved it.

What I’m thinking is, we need to get the generation of Millennials up to the club. The Press Club is so unique in Omaha; it’s one of the few places that show the history of the city. We might be so old we’re hip!

The OPC board and committees are currently brainstorming for new events and ways to get younger professionals to the club. Please feel free to pass along any ideas you have, also.

Now, let’s go have some fun!
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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.

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

WE’RE ONLINE! READ YOUR OPC NEWSLETTER AT omahapressclub.com