Meadows event bringing roasters from afar

By Tom O’Connor
Communications Committee

laughs should be plentiful on March 21 when Othello Meadows III becomes the Omaha Press Club's newest “Face on the Barroom Floor.” Meadows, who is president and CEO of Seventy Five North Revitalization Corp. and owner of The Meadows Group, will be roasted by a foursome of colleagues, including three who live in cities outside Omaha.

“Since multiple roasters are from out of town, many people won't be familiar with them,” Meadows said. “I can assure you that this is an all-star group of people, and they won't hold any punches when they roast me. I may need some ‘revitalization’ after they’re done with me.”

The list of roasters will include:

• Emcee – Todd Lieberman, executive vice president, Brinshore Development, Kansas City, Missouri. Brinshore is a real estate company that specializes in the development of residential communities that foster con-
servation, collaboration and affordability.

The company has worked closely with Meadows in his revitalization efforts in North Omaha.

• Said Grundy, Ph.D., assistant professor of Sociology, African-American Studies and Women’s and Gender Studies at Boston University.

• Justin Miller, attorney, Morgan & Morgan, Atlanta. Miller practiced law with Meadows in Atlanta after Meadows started his own law firm.

• Kyle Peterson, chairman and CEO of the Colliers International office in Omaha. Peterson, who also is a college baseball analyst for ESPN, was honored in 2015 as the

March Forum to feature Rudy Smith’s photos

“'The Black Experience: Through the Lens of Rudy Smith,' a book that highlights the late Rudy Smith’s photo-journalism experience in North Omaha, will be displayed and discussed 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, Llama, assisted him in the selections as he gave her a thumbs up or down on his choices. After his death, World-Herald staff completed the book with the help of Smith’s family.

Llama Smith 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 compiled.

One of Rudy’s memorable quotes was: "For some reason, 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 at the forum. “The Black Experience” is also available from owhstore.com and at the World-Herald building.

Membership Changes

Over the past few months, we’ve been sharing information about how club management has been working on updating our 1970s-era billing system to a modern software system. The update has required many hours of data input and lots of volunteer time from board members. We are changing our point-of-sale (POS) system and the bookkeeping system. We have signed a contract with local company Toast for our POS system, and it will integrate with QuickBooks online.

What will this mean for you? Our end goal is to be able to send you your monthly invoices via email instead of through the mail. This will result in significant cost savings (helping keep our membership dues and food prices affordable) while providing more convenience. Eventually, you’ll be able

A message from the executive director

Some big changes are coming to your membership experience with the Omaha Press Club — but before we share those, a reminder: One thing that never changes is the great lineup of events that are hosted at the Press Club each month.

Check out the calendar on page 6 for information about upcoming events, including Dinner with an Irish Poet on March 12, the Winemaker’s Dinner on March 13, a St. Patrick’s Day Buffet on March 17, our Noon Forum on March 19, and our first “Face on the Barroom Floor” of 2020 on March 21. And save the date for the OPC First Amendment Night (April 18), the OPC Scholarship Awards Dinner on April 24, and the Journalists of Excellence Hall of Fame (June 6).

These events are full of great food and unique company with laughter and fun.

Continue on Page 3

See Page 3
By Gary Willis
Communications Committee

Officers were elected for 2020, club operations were reviewed for 2019 and complimentary hors d’oeuvres were enjoyed by those attending the Omaha Press Club’s Annual Meeting on Jan. 16.

Following are summaries of the reports by OPC leaders and committee chairs:

Outgoing President

Jeremy Maskel described 2019 as a busy year for the club. As other OPC leaders confirmed in their reports, there was a lot of transition in both staff and volunteers.

Maskel thanked Executive Director Steve Villamonte for their commitment to the club and their hard work, especially modernizing the workflow.

Maskel also thanked the board of directors who went above and beyond the call of duty to digitize the records. It was repetitive but necessary work. Special thanks went to Gary Kerr and Tom O’Connor, who stepped down from their longtime committee leadership positions. They led the teams -- Education and Face on the Floor -- that bring the most vital OPC events to life.

“Maskel said he was thrilled to welcome new members to the club. “Continuing to tell our story is important,” he said. “A strong, free and respected press is vital. How special is it that we get to carry out that work?”

Executive Director

Steve Villamonte said 2019 was the toughest of his 20-year tenure. The problems started during 2018 with a slower-than-normal fourth quarter that put the club in the red for the year. The club’s longtime bookkeeper retired and was no longer a resource for a software system designed in 1976. “We are currently handling our accounts payable through QuickBooks Online and doing our charges with ACES,” Villamonte reported. “Paperwork was signed for Toast, and we will be running our charges to accounts through Toast.” When complete, most of the bookkeeping duties will be streamlined to a part-time office position.

Marketing & Membership

The goal of the Marketing/Membership Committee is to support the work of all the committees and execute activities and programs to increase membership and utilization of the club. Under the leadership of chairperson Bridge (Weide) Brooks, committee members revitalized efforts to attract more wedding receptions to the club. The committee also is a major participant in planning the Omaha Press Club’s inaugural “First Amendment Night” in April.

Communications

The committee, chaired by Gary Willis and Cindy Workman, met monthly to plan the 11 OPC newsletters. The newsletter now features a color front page. The death of longtime committee chair Susan Eustice was a great loss to the Press Club family. The committee welcomed three new members: Todd Andrews, Anne Walsh and Lauren Robinson. The committee is planning to revive the “Where Are They Now” feature in the newsletter, hopefully quarterly, revisiting previous “Faces on the Barroom Floor.”

Face on the Barroom Floor

Four successful events in 2019 were highlighted by a sellout crowd for Tom Shatel’s “Face” event. After 18 years, Tom O’Connor turned over the chairmanship of the committee to Roger Humphries. And after 164th “Faces,” Jim Horan stepped down as the caricature artist. Words cannot do justice to what Jim has meant to the “Face” events and to the Omaha Press Club. Wayne Sealy drew the caricature of the most recent “Face” – Jim and Todd Murphy. Othello Meadows III will be the 164th Face starting our 2020 season.

Education

The Education Committee meets monthly on the first Thursday of every month to plan the Noon Forum programs. After many years, Gary Kerr turned over the chairmanship of the committee to Dr. Robert Meyers. The 2019 forums covered a wide variety of topics and issues of community interest and importance. Forums included members of the Omaha World-Herald discussing the changing times for the newspaper industry, a forum about voter ID proposals in Nebraska, a book event with “24th & Glory” author Dirk Chatelain and a discussion of the Tri-Faith Initiative. A 2nd Congressional District debate is scheduled for April 2020.

OPC Foundation

More than $41,000 in scholarships were awarded to students at Creighton University, UNL and UNO. These students join a list of more than 400 Omaha Press Club scholarship recipients. The OPC Foundation has set a $35,000 minimum goal to create and permanently endow a new scholarship in memory of longtime Omaha Press Club member, volunteer and supporter Susan Eustice. Two families personally fund scholarships in memory of their loved ones: Omaha World-Herald reporters Howard Silber and Jim Denney. Howard’s widow, Sissy, has pledged her support of the scholarship again in 2020. This year’s Scholarship Dinner will be held April 24, 2019.

Hall of Fame

On June 1, 2019, the Omaha Press Club honored six outstanding Journalists of Excellence: Joni Baillon, Ben Gray, Walt Kavanagh, Mike McKnight, Carrie Murphy and Kent Warrenke. Nearly 200 guests attended the recognition of OPC’s 12th class of Hall of Fame journalists. Marcia Cady has passed the committee chair baton to Wody Bradford. The 2020 Journalists of Excellence Hall of Fame is set for Saturday, June 6.

Incoming President

Tom Shatel stressed how honored he was to be president of the club. He also made it known that he likes to come up with ideas, but is not great at executing them and thus will be seeking the help of his fellow members.

First on the Shatel list in 2020 is a new event that he is spearheading: “First Amendment Night: Celebrating News-makers and News Media.” KFAB’s Gary Sadlemyer will emcee and former Sen. Chuck Hagel will be the speaker at the April 18 event.

Also on the Shatel idea list: He would like to invite journalism instructors from local high schools and colleges to meet with young people to get them interested in journalism.

Shatel thanked Maskel for his OPC presidential leadership in 2019. “It was a tough year, but a big year,” Shatel said, “and Jeremy’s impact will be felt for a long time.”
OPC’s 147th “Face on the Barroom Floor.”

An Omaha native, Meadows graduated from 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.

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

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.

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. 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 the creation of The Accelerator, a 65,000-square-foot building/space. The Accelerator houses a variety of organizations aimed at connecting the community through education, engagement and enrichment.

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

Meadows, continued from Page 1

Three Democratic candidates for Congress from the Second Congressional District will debate the issues April 16 at the Omaha Press Club to see who will face Republican Congressman Don Bacon in the fall election.

• Gladys Harrison worked for 22 years for US West Communications and is the owner of Big Mama’s Kitchen restaurant.

• Ann Ashford is an attorney and human resources professional. Her husband, Brad Ashford, was elected to Congress in 2016 and served one term.

• Kara Eastman, the founder of the nonprofit Healthy Kids Alliance, is running again after being defeated by Bacon in the November 2018 election.

The winner will be decided in the May 12 primary election.

The April luncheon debate is sponsored by the Press Club and the League of Women Voters of Greater Omaha. It will be recorded and televised by WOWT Channel Six. The moderator will be WOWT anchor/reporter Brian Mastre.

The debate 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.

Democrats to debate at OPC in April

Your Omaha Press Club leaders

Omaha Press Club officers for 2020-21 were elected at the annual meeting in January and took office in February. In front, from left: Jeremy Maskel, immediate past president; Bridget (Weide) Brooks, secretary; Tom Shatel, president, and Roger Humphries, president-elect. In back, from left: board members Gary Willis, Kristyna Engdahl, Treasurer Dale Ervin, Woody Bradford, Executive Director Steve Villamonte, Liz Hruska, Allen Beermann and Mike McKnight. Not pictured: board member Chris Allen.
Omaha bus service entering ORBT era

By Sherry Bale
Communications Committee

“In order to compete with other cities in attracting and retaining companies and talented workers, a first-class public transit system is a key component,” said Jason Rose, outreach coordinator for the Omaha’s Metro Transit Authority, during February’s Noon Forum. There, Rose detailed what will be the first step to hopefully broaden the region’s network of rapid transit.

Coming this fall, the Omaha Rapid Bus Transit (ORBT) system will be composed of increased-capacity ORBT buses that will run along downtown Douglas Street and the city’s core route of Dodge Street between the Old Market and Westroads Mall. The system will feature new and improved bus station platforms, Transit Signal Priority technology (green lights for the buses) and dedicated bus lanes.

“ORBT emulates characteristics of light rail for a fraction of the cost,” according to Rose.

The 10 new ORBT buses are 50 percent longer than the city’s current longest bus and have an accordion middle section to better navigate streets. Each bus has three entry or exit doors, an inside bike rack, onboard accessibility for wheelchairs and strollers and free Wi-Fi. To reduce harmful emissions, the ORBT buses run on compressed natural gas.

The buses will stop at the new platforms every 10 minutes during rush hours and every 15 minutes in the evenings. They will operate from 4:30 a.m. until midnight on weekdays.

For express transportation, the ORBT station platforms are spaced farther apart than Omaha’s conventional bus stops. Waiting passengers will be able to track bus arrival times with a phone app, online, and onsite digital displays and audio announcements. The elevated platforms will enable seamless boarding for wheelchairs and strollers.

Eventually, fare payment technology will be upgraded to include smart card and mobile pay options. The largest platform will be a “Park and Ride” facility currently under construction at the Westroads, where there are 90 parking spaces set aside for ORBT riders.

Importantly, with new technology called Transit Signal Priority, ORBT vehicles can send a signal to any traffic light in an intersection to extend green lights to reduce traffic congestion and delays.

Scheduled to be added last, Business Access and Transit (BAT) lanes will be dedicated for public transit vehicles. To expedite downtown travel, they will be located along the right-hand curbs of Dodge and Douglas Streets and east of 30th Street.

Rose said about 1,500 passengers ride the bus along Dodge Street each day, and the Transit Authority anticipates the number to almost double within a year of the ORBT system launch.

During the coming summer, the Transit Authority plans to educate the public on how to use ORBT with an online video, social media and possibly free rides.

For more information on ORBT, including construction updates, go to RideORBT.com.

Face on the Barroom Floor
Othello Meadows III
Saturday, March 21
$55 members, $65 non-members
5:30 p.m. social, no-host bar
6:30 p.m. dinner

Hors d’oeuvres
Assorted Canapés

Salad
OPC Signature Thunderbird

Dual Entrees
OPC Sirloin with Maitre d’Hotel Butter
Chicken Villa Encroute Sauce au Poivre

Dessert
Chocolate Mousse Pastry
Swan Framboise

 Quarterly Winemaker’s Dinner
Friday, March 13, 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

PHONE 402-345-8008 FOR RESERVATIONS

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

Happy St. Patrick’s Day
‘Dinner with an Irish Poet’ on March 12

Celebration of all things Irish at the Omaha Press Club isn’t confined to St. Patrick’s Day this month. “Dinner with an Irish Poet” will be another March highlight at the club.

Desmond Egan will be the headliner at the poetry dinner on Thursday, March 12. Egan, a native of Athlone, County Westmeath, Ireland, has published more than 20 collections of poetry. He also is artistic director of the annual Gerard Manley Hopkins International Literary Festival in Kildare, Ireland.

In addition to poetry, the OPC evening will include a 6 p.m. meet-and-greet with Egan followed by an Irish stew dinner. Tickets are $35 inclusive. For reservations, call 402-345-8008.

Dinner with an Irish Poet Featuring Desmond Egan
Thursday, March 12
$35

Salad
Irish Nicoise Salad

Entrée
Beef Stew over Butter Mashed and Hearty Root Vegetables

Dessert
Chocolate Chip Cookies and Brownies

Former ‘Face’ Chery Griffin
Romance novelist finishing 50th book

When Chery Griffin moved to Omaha in 1981, one of the first things she did was join the Omaha Press Club. It’s a decision she’s still proud of to this day.

The club’s 120th “Face on the Barroom Floor” says she’s made many, many friends in her time as a member and past president, and, of course, she says, “You can’t beat the view.” The best-selling romance novelist and former KETV reporter also was thrilled to be a part of the Press Club Show and Ball for several years as a writer and performer.

Since being enshrined on the Press Club floor in February 2009, Griffin says life hasn’t changed all that much. She’s still living here in Omaha, writing novels, and in fact, will soon be publishing her 50th book under her pen name, Victoria Alexander.

Griffin’s upcoming book, “Legend of Nimway Hall: 1888 – Alexandra,” is a part of a collaborative series with several other authors. The series is set around a magical estate in England, with different authors writing about a different character in a different time period, all weaving together to create a cohesive story.

“Think of it like the Marvel Cinematic Universe of historical romance,” Griffin says the work is a lot of fun, though obviously different than creating a stand-alone novel. In all, however, she enjoys the challenge. She also has designed the covers for the entire series. It’s something she’s done for friends throughout the years, saying the task helps to clear her mind.

In looking back at her ‘Face on the Floor’ event, Griffin feels an odd sense of satisfaction, saying, “It’s very strange to hear other people’s assessment of who you are and what you’ve done. It’s like being at your own funeral.” She added that it was nice to hear such kind words from her friends, colleagues and husband, helping her to realize she had done more and made a bigger impact than she previously imagined.

She also recalls being somewhat surprised at how well her typically quiet husband, Chuck Lenosky, did as a roaster. “He was very funny, and probably a little more insightful than I would have preferred,” Griffin said with a laugh.

Those interested in Griffin’s—or rather, Alexander’s—work can find more information at www.victoriaalexander.com.

Todd-N-Tyler to be honored

Radio personalities Todd-N-Tyler, OPC’s 106th “Face on the Barroom Floor,” have been selected for the Nebraska Broadcasters Association Hall of Fame.

Todd Brandt and Mike Tyler will be inducted Aug. 11 in Lincoln during the annual NBA convention. Todd-N-Tyler have dominated Omaha radio morning show ratings for a more than a quarter-century. They were honored as OPC “Faces” in 2006.
Committee Chairs

Communications
Gary Willis, Cindy Workman

Education
Dr. Bob Meyers

Executive Committee
Tom Shatel, Roger Humphries,
Bridget (Weide) Brooks and Jeremy Maskel

“Face on the Barroom Floor”
Rogers Humphries

Hall of Fame
Woody Bradford

Marketing / Membership
Bridget (Weide) Brooks

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Saturday, March 21
“Face on the Barroom Floor”
Othello Meadows III
5:30 p.m. social; 6:30 dinner
$55 OPC members, $65 non-members

Easter Sunday, April 12
Easter Brunch
Seatings at 10 a.m., 12:30 p.m.
Adults $22, children $12 (age 3-10)

Thursday, April 16
Noon Education Forum
2nd Congressional District debate
Noon to 1 p.m.
Lunch begins at 11:30 a.m.
Open to the public – cost $17

Saturday, April 18
OPC First Amendment Night
5:30 p.m. cocktails, 7 p.m. dinner
$75 includes tax and gratuity

Friday, April 24
Scholarship and Awards Dinner
5:30 p.m. non-host social
6 p.m. dinner and awards
$35 OPC members, $45 non-members

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

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

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.

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Submissions for the April issue are due on or before March 20.