Your Omaha Press Club is primed for a healthier, happier new year

By Tom Shatel  
OPC President

Well, that flew by.
Kidding, of course. It’s been a long year for all of us. A tough one.

It feels like my term just began. Did the last year happen? Or was it a bad dream?

It’s over and I’m glad it’s over. The year 2020, that is. Not my term as president of the Omaha Press Club.

It was an honor to serve as president. I’ve been a longtime member, fan and supporter of the OPC. I couldn’t wait for my turn with the gavel.

I had a plan and agenda and several ideas for events. The board was fired up. Steve and Christine were fired up. It was going to be our biggest year.

Of course, Covid-19 had other ideas.

Soon, all of those grandiose plans were steamrolled by the pandemic. My year felt like a big whiff.

By April, the club was like a lot of bars and restaurants and businesses around Omaha and especially in downtown: closed indefinitely and suddenly fighting to survive.

It was a year of challenges, starting with the building. First National Bank sent its employees home to work. They returned some to the office over the year, but most are still at home and expect to be there for a while.

That was a chunk of the OPC lunch business. And with downtown events and concerts canceled, there wasn’t a lot of activity.

That made keeping the Press Club open a frustrating challenge.

The club did it, and it had everything to do with Steve and Christine, the stewards of our great club and tradition.

With the wait staff on furlough, Steve and Christine remained in the office every day.

When the club reopened in late summer, Steve and Christine were a terrific two-person team. Steve cooked the good stuff, and Christine ran the office and reservations and all the other heavy lifting.

They can’t be thanked enough. The OPC is truly a labor of love for them. Their passion saved the day.

I also want to give a huge assist to Brenda Dooley at First National Bank.

Steve and I had a handful of phone conversations and updates with Brenda. We were nervous about our standing, but Brenda made it clear that FNB was sympathetic to our situation.

In our last call with Brenda, she assured us that FNB very much wants the Press Club to survive.

That was a big deal. I could hear a weight off of Steve’s shoulders through the phone line.

Now, we need 2021. We need the pandemic to subside and folks to return, slowly and surely, to outings and dinners.

When will that happen? It’s hard to say. But as I write this, the feeling and hope is that we will get some of our events and crowds back in 2021.

Already, we have some good ideas lined up.

1. One of the good things to come out of the pandemic was the Friday take-out specials. Steve’s fried chicken, prime rib, meatloaf and other good stuff made this a popular staple. This should be a big year for the Friday Family Meals.

Omaha Press Club Annual Meeting will be Jan. 21

Mark your calendars for Thursday, Jan 21, the date of the Omaha Press Club Annual Meeting.

A 5:30 p.m. social featuring complimentary hors d’oeuvres will precede the 6 o’clock call-to-order. The meeting will include reports from the outgoing president, Tom Shatel, and OPC’s executive director, Steve Villamonte, plus the annual reports from committee chairs.

Also on the agenda is the election of 2021 club officers, including:

President: Roger Humphries, Roger Humphries Photography
President-Elect: Hunter Samuels, Ronald McDonald House
Treasurer: Dale Ervin, First National Bank
Secretary: Bridget (Weide) Brooks
Immediate Past President: Tom Shatel, Omaha World-Herald
Board Members:
Angella Arndt, Freelance Writer
Chris Allen: University of Nebraska Omaha
Todd Andrews, The Salvation Army
Allen Beermann, Retired
Woody Bradford, Houghton Bradford Whitted
Bridget (Weide) Brooks, Image Building Communications
Liz Hruska, Nebraska Legislative Fiscal Office
Mike McKnight, WOWT
Robert Meyers, retired public school Educator
Gary Willis, NP Dodge Real Estate

For those who wish to vote but are unable to attend the meeting, a proxy ballot is on page 2. Please mail the ballot to the Press Club or email it to opcchristine@gmail.com.
when he was appointed an associate justice of the Nebraska Supreme Court. The family moved to Lincoln at that time.

White served as an associate justice for 19 years before being appointed chief justice. After retiring from the court, White joined his son, Tom, in private practice in Omaha and continued to practice until his death. His daughter, Michaela, also practices law.


Affectionately known as “Chief,” White loved to travel and visited his favorite country, Ireland, numerous times with family and friends. His travels also took him to Europe, New Zealand, Australia, Mexico and Hawaii.

An avid reader and a huge Creighton Bluejay basketball fan, White could recite many of his favorite poems from memory. In retirement, he faithfully attended the sporting events and school activities of his four grandchildren.

White’s “Face on the Barroom Floor” caricature depicts him standing on a map of Nebraska with Humphrey and Columbus in the background. A scroll of Nebraska law is simplified to, “Do this. Don’t do that.”

Also pictured with White are a trio of governors: Frank Morrison who appointed White to the district bench; James Exon who named him to the Supreme Court; and Ben Nelson who elevated him to chief justice.

Memorials are suggested to St. Francis Church in Humphrey and Creighton University School of Law.
2020: a four-digit number responsible for a year’s worth of four-letter words. One of the four-letter words for dealing with the coronavirus was productive, not profane: work, work and more work.

I believe nothing in life should be taken for granted ever, but the new pandemic world has taught many club members and me that we should try and take every day with a smile. Change comes daily, hourly, even within minutes . . . rolling with the punches and trying to maintain a positive attitude to get through another day whether the sun is shining or not.

As my doctor said, we are not worried about the little stuff like weight gain. Keep taking the vitamins, eat right most of the time, wear your mask and sanitize until your hands fall off.

If you have not been to the club since the COVID shutdowns began in March, the building is pretty quiet as are many other buildings in the downtown area. First National has done a great job keeping us all safe with its emphasis on cleanliness and security. Social distancing is our middle name.

For security purposes, the two available building entrances (the tunnel from Central City parking garage on 17th and Capitol and the entrance on the northwest corner of 16th and Dodge) are locked until you buzz in. Just push the button and say, “Omaha Press Club.”

Once upstairs, I have enjoyed welcoming many age groups to the club, from babies to 101-year-old birthday celebrations.

I get satisfaction from many jobs, but my favorite is disinfecting. And permit me to brag a little: I am pretty good at keeping the 6,000-square-foot facility clean. My mother would be proud of how her training has paid off.

December events

Accompanying today’s column are photos of two December events at the club.

The Santa Brunch had a new spin with a multi-course event that left our diners – including a little boy enjoying his first five-course meal – smiling from ear to ear (buffets are not allowed yet). Chef Steve, you’re still the best, even in this COVID world.

And then there was the wedding reception for Jordan and Anna Sunderman. We planned it very quickly for a small group of family and friends and a makeshift dance floor for just the bride and groom. Yes, dancing is okay if it is a wedding, according to the governor’s restrictions. The newlyweds’ party planner said the OPC club was the best for dealing with restrictions and cleanliness.

We even had a grandparent table to keep everyone extra safe as we made sure to announce when we approached the table. We thank you.

Meanwhile, as we close the books on 2020, special thanks go out to our board and committee members who have been with us every step of the way during a difficult year. Thank you for your support.

And a very special shout-out goes to our curbside volunteers delivering the take-out meals. Rain, wind, cold and snow, they are there.

To all the rest of you, see you in 2021, hopefully enjoying a healthier, more normal year.

Christine Villamonte
OPC Restaurant and Events Manager

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2. There’s talk among the board of having monthly “Press Club Show” meetings, where members and former cast members gather to watch videos of old shows. It’s like a reunion with a movie and food, only monthly. Very cool idea.

3. One of the big disappointments last year was not being able to hold our inaugural First Amendment Dinner. I’d like to see that happen in 2021. As well as the return of “Face On the Barroom Floor” events.

With the proper social distancing restrictions in place, of course. But we need these events back. We need to get people back in the club.

That will be the mission of the Roger Humphries Administration. Roger is a longtime Press Club member, officer and advocate. He will be a terrific president, one of the best. The club couldn’t be in better hands in a crucial year.

I’ll be cheering from the sidelines. It’s been an honor. Steve, keep the chili warm.
2020 - 2021 Officers

**Tom Shatel**
President
Omaha World-Herald

**Roger Humphries**
President-elect
Roger Humphries Photography

**Dale Ervin**
Treasurer
First National Bank

**Bridget (Weide) Brooks**
Secretary
Image Building Communications

**Jeremy Maskel**
Immediate past president
Omaha Public Schools

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**Board of Directors**

(2019-2021)
- Chris Allen
- Kristyna Engdahl
- Mike McKnight
- Liz Hruska
- Hunter Samuels

(2020-2022)
- Allen Beermann
- Woody Bradford
- Bridget (Weide) Brooks
- Roger Humphries
- Gary Willis

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**Communications Committee**

- Cindy Workman • Don Summerside
- Gary Willis • Jennifer Bull • Karen Way
- Tom O’Connor • Anne Walsh • Sandra Tursi
- Bridget (Weide) Brooks • Hunter Samuels
- Lauren Robinson • Todd Andrews • Jon Brooks
- Angella Arndt

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**Committee Chairs**

**Communications**
- Gary Willis, Cindy Workman

**Education**
- Dr. Bob Meyers

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

**Hall of Fame**
- Woody Bradford

**Marketing / Membership**
- Bridget (Weide) Brooks

**OPC Foundation**

- Bridget (Weide) Brooks
  - President
- Josh Bucy
  - Vice President
- Henry Cordes
  - 2nd Vice President
- Steve Jordon
  - Treasurer

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**OPC Newsletter Committee**

- Chris Allen
- Chris Christen
- Wendy Townley
- Mike Holmes
- Howard K. Marcus
- Mike Holmes
- Hugh Reilly
- Joseph Weber

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**Weekly Activities**

**Friday, Jan. 1, 2021**
New Year’s Day
Club closed

**Monday, Jan. 18**
Martin Luther King Jr. Day
Club Closed

**Thursday, Jan. 21**
Noon Forum postponed

**Friday, Feb. 12**
Valentine’s Dinner

**Monday Feb. 15**
Presidents Day
Club Closed

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

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**OMAHA PRESS CLUB STAFF**

Executive Director
**Steve Villamonte** .......... opcdirector@gmail.com

Restaurant and Events Manager
**Christine Villamonte** .. opcchristine@gmail.com

Office ........................................ 402-345-8587
Restaurant .................................. 402-345-8008
Website .................................... omahapressclub.com

**NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE**

- Sandra Tursi .......... Graphics Editor
- Tom O’Connor .......... Proofreader
- Don Summerside .......... Copy Editor

Submissions for the January issue are due on or before December 20.