Omaha ‘power couple’ will be recognized on Sept. 23

… Next ‘Face’ event to honor John and Viv Ewing

By Tom O’Connor
Communications Committee

The Ewing name is perhaps best known for J.R. and Sue Ellen Ewing, the power couple on “Dallas,” the hit TV show that ran from 1978 to 1991. But, in Omaha, there is another power couple with the same last name – John and Viv Ewing – and they have left a mark on the community that would make J.R. and Sue Ellen proud.

In recognition of all they’ve done, the Ewings will be honored by the Omaha Press Club on Sept. 23, as they will become the 165th “Face on the Barroom Floor.”

“The Ewings are awesome,” said Roger Humphries, president of the Omaha Press Club and chair of the Face on the Barroom Floor Committee. “They have done so much for our community without seeking a lot of fanfare. We are absolutely thrilled that they are letting us acknowledge them. They are superstars who have truly made a difference in almost every facet of our city.”

The Omaha natives met at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and have been married for 37 years. Their family includes daughters Christina and Alexandria.

Since 2007, John Ewing has served as Douglas County treasurer. In this role, he is responsible for annually collecting more than $1.7 billion in taxes for the governmental entities in Douglas County. The Ewings have been leaders in the community and supporters of many causes, including education, healthcare, and charitable organizations.

In recognition of all they've done, the Ewings will be honored by the Omaha Press Club on Sept. 23, as they will become the 165th “Face on the Barroom Floor.”

Retiring health chief Pour to speak at July Forum

By Gary Kerr
Education Committee

The director of the Douglas County Health Department who led the local effort in fighting COVID-19 will be a Press Club guest in July. Dr. Adi Pour will speak and take questions from our audience at a Noon Forum on July 8.

Dr. Pour, who retired June 30, has been the Health Department director since 2002. Before that, she was the state toxicologist with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services for 13 years. She has been a well-known and respected leader in Nebraska public health circles for decades.

Not so well known by the general public before the pandemic, it was her face you saw almost nightly on TV, advising us how to respond as the scourge got a grip on the local area and around the country.

Join us on Thursday, July 8, from noon to 1 p.m. at the Omaha Press Club to hear Dr. Pour talk about fighting the pandemic and other challenges she and her colleagues have faced during her many years heading up the Douglas County Health Department.

Noon Forum lunch service begins at 11:30 a.m. for $17 per person. The program starts at noon and concludes at 1 p.m.

Non-OPC members are welcome; call 402-345-8008.

Shatel Lunch Series returns on Aug. 18

The popular Shatel Lunch Series will return on Wednesday, Aug. 18, with Shatel providing a sneak preview for the upcoming college football season and how things are looking for the Nebraska Cornhuskers.

The sudden departure of Athletic Director Bill Moos from the Cornhuskers and his replacement is certain to also be a topic for discussion.

Lunch will be served beginning at 11:30 a.m., with the program starting around noon. Cost is $17. The event is open to the public. Call 402-345-8008 or go to omahapressclub.com and click the RSVP button.

Mark your calendar: OPC’s Hall of Fame will induct seven in September

Since 2008, the Omaha Press Club has been honoring the most notable area journalists from both the past and present. Each year our Journalists of Excellence Hall of Fame dinner proves to be an amazing evening.

This year our inductees will undoubtedly create an evening of reverence, but most assuredly generate much laughter and love for their industry friends and family. Those to be honored on Saturday, Sept. 18: Malcolm Adams – KETV, Omaha Star, CBS & CNN Tokyo Bureau, Totown

Continue on Page 2
money is invested back into the appropriate county programs and sanitary improvement districts.

Prior to becoming treasurer, Ewing served as deputy chief of police for the Omaha Police Department for 24 years. In this capacity, he oversaw the Police Services Bureau, which was responsible for the management of the budget, the Detention Unit, Crime Lab, fleet and facilities, research and planning, customer service and other support services.

He also served as commander of the Special Victims Unit, which investigated crimes committed against the most vulnerable members of our community – women and children.

John Ewing earned his BS degree in business administration/criminal justice in 1984 and his master’s degree in urban studies in 1985 – both from UNO. He was named an adjunct professor in the UNO School of Public Administration in 2008. Both the Ewings serve as ministers at Salem Baptist Church in Omaha.

John’s extensive community service includes serving as president of the Charles Drew Health Center (2013-present), 100 Black Men (2016-2017), Girls Incorporated (2006-2012), the Siena Francis House (2001-2007) and the Rotary Club (2016-2017). He also has held key roles with the United Way of the Midlands, the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Midlands, and The Great Plains Black History Museum.

In 2012, Ewing ran for U.S. Congress against incumbent Lee Terry. Since 2013, he has served as a Douglas County Civil Service commissioner.

He has received countless awards, including the Dean Hubert Locke Award from the UNO College of Public Affairs and Community Service, the President Harry Truman Lifetime Achievement Award, the National Community Service Award, Fraser Network, and the NAACP Living Legend Award. In 2010, Ewing was inducted into the Omaha Northwest High School Hall of Fame.

In 2014, the Ewings received the UNO Citation for Alumni Achievement Award for their community service. They are the only couple to receive the award jointly in the more than 70-year history of the honor.

Viv Ewing earned her BS in public administration (1983) and her master’s in urban studies (1986) from UNO and her doctorate in educational communication from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 1990.

Dr. Ewing has a long career in the non-profit sector. Among the organizations she has been associated with are the Salvation Army, UNO Chancellor’s Diversity Council, Great Plains Black History Museum, Salem Baptist Church, the Siena Francis House and Opera Omaha.

Dr. Ewing has worked in leadership roles for major organizations, including PromiseShip, Alzheimer’s Association of Nebraska, Habitat for Humanity, Kroc Center, ConAgra Foods, Omaha Housing Authority, and OPPD. In addition, she has been named vice president for development for Children’s Square.

During her career, she has been CEO of Life Development International Consulting and has mentored a variety of organizational leaders, providing business consulting on executive leadership, fundraising strategy, strategic planning, organizational design, marketing and communication, change management, and team building.

She has been a member of more than 30 boards and committees. These include the University of Nebraska Medical Center Chancellor’s Board of Councilors, UNO Alumni Board, Siena Francis House, Opera Omaha and the American Red Cross. She has been president of the Literacy Center Board and the Hope Center for Kids Guild.

Among the more than 30 community awards and honors Dr. Ewing has received are the Eleanor Roosevelt Lifetime Achievement Award, Woman of the Year Award, Women on a Mission Community Contributor Award, UNO College of Public Affairs and Excellence in Public Service Award, and the Community Service Family of the Year Award from Heartland Family Service.

Dr. Ewing was the 1981 UNO Homecoming Queen and was active in the minority student affairs department and student government. She was a charter member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority for African-American students. Both the Ewings helped start a chapter at UNO for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Dr. Ewing’s motivational book – “Yes, You Can Have Your Cake and Eat It, Too” – is available through major book outlets and retailers.

Communications
Chris Christen – Omaha World-Herald, UNMC
Henry Cordes – Omaha World-Herald
Trina Creighton – KMTV, UNL College of Journalism and Mass Communication
Susan Eustice (posthumous) – Salvation Army Public Relations
Doug Parrott – KETV
Lawrence Youngman (posthumous) – Omaha World-Herald, World War II correspondent

Please call or email the Omaha Press Club to reserve your seat at this year’s dinner. We will start with a cocktail hour at 5:30 p.m. followed by dinner and the induction ceremony. This is always a fun, fast-paced evening with some stories you’ll hear nowhere else and some you may have enjoyed a hundred times!

Whether you’ve been in journalism for 50 years or only five months, the Hall of Fame event is not to be missed. We encourage you to invite your family, friends, and current or past colleagues.

The price is $50 for OPC members and $60 for non-members. Call 402-345-8008 for reservations or email opcchristine@gmail.com or go to omahapressclub.com and click the RSVP button.

Journalists of Excellence Hall Of Fame Dinner
Saturday, Sept. 18, 2021
Member $50 – Non-member $60

Hors d’oeuvres
Assorted Bacon Wraps
Seafood-stuffed Profiterole

Salad
Thunderbird Salad

Entrée
Chicken Piccata
Risotto Pilaf

Dessert
Hazelnut Chocolate Mousse Cup
Blackberry Coulis
KFAB’s Gourmet Club dinner draws large crowd

By Angella Arndt
Communications Committee

Scott Voorhees hosted KFAB’s Gourmet Club wine dinner at the Omaha Press Club on June 11. Approximately 175 diners attended KFAB’s first Gourmet Club event held in about 18 months.

Voorhees was accompanied by KFAB radio personalities Lucy Chapman and "Bird". Voorhees spoke briefly, thanking guests for their support and attendance.

"I think this is the largest Gourmet Club dinner we’ve had," Voorhees commented.

The six-course dinner featured hors d’oeuvres, coq au vin, filet mignon, petit fours and an excellent selection of wines.

Steve, Christine and the team outdid themselves in providing an enjoyable and delectable evening.

Chamber chief draws picture of Omaha’s future

By Angella Arndt
Communications Committee

David Brown, president and CEO of the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce (OCC), provided an overview of projects and initiatives promoting economic development and diversity at the July 17 Noon Education Forum. The chamber partners with Cass, Dodge, Douglas, Otoe, Sarpy, and Washington Counties in Nebraska and Pottawattamie County in Iowa.

Brown emphasized Omaha’s successful philanthropic public-private partnerships. Projects such as Millwork Commons, Creighton University expansion, Midtown Crossing and Aksarben are a few examples of Omaha’s continued growth and development.

The University of Nebraska Medical Center’s (UNMC) Project NExT is a $2.5 billion public-private partnership and Department of Defense project to enhance preparedness for pandemics. Funding includes $1.4 billion from the federal government and funding from the State of Nebraska, the City of Omaha and private entities. Brown says the project is expected to add almost $2 billion to the local economy by 2030 and create 8,700 jobs statewide.

Brown shared that Omaha’s Commitment to Opportunity, Diversity, and Equity (CODE) coalition was created to increase diversity, inclusivity, equity and opportunity in the community’s workforce. “There are about 150 business leaders out in front of this issue,” Brown remarked. This program focuses on addressing racial inequities and social justice.

Brown stated that in 2017, the OCC, in collaboration with other agencies, launched an initiative to identify critical regional issues impacting the future outlook in the coming years.

“We chose a point in the future, Omaha 2040, discussed what we wanted that to look like and what we needed to do to get there,” Brown advised. “The focus is on people, place and prosperity.” Key issues include public transportation for underserved areas such as North Omaha and demographics projecting that Omaha’s population will be 52% non-white in 2040.

“Talent is a big issue,” Brown said. “We need to double our growth rate, keep people here and attract people. And Omaha is not the only community trying to address these issues. It’s the most important economic development a community can have.”

Brown stressed the importance of ensuring the quality of life, quality of living, business growth, and prosperity in the city and state. For example, increasing the number of internships available at businesses impacts students remaining to work for companies.

“Tax-haven cities are our competition,” Brown acknowledged. A comprehensive tax reform strategy has been brought before the Nebraska Legislature. “We need to be more competitive to retain people and businesses.”

Branding the city and state remain essential objectives. “We need to change the minds of people who don’t know what Omaha is,” Brown concluded.

Validated parking at Doubletree

The Omaha Press Club is no longer offering validated parking in the Central City Garage west of the First National Bank building.

Instead, validated parking again is available at the DoubleTree Hotel Garage east of the main hotel entrance. Bring your parking ticket to the club for validation of up to two hours.

Self-pay parking remains available in the Central City Garage.
As most of you know, the club will have our annual summer closing at the end of this month and into August. The club will close the last week of July and the first two weeks of August. That will allow for the staff to take some time off and come back energized for upcoming fall events.

Speaking of events, Tom Shatel will kick off the reopening with one of his Shatel Sports Series luncheons on Aug. 18. He will speak about the upcoming Nebraska football season and more.

We are in for a double treat in the fall as the Face on the Barroom Floor Committee has come up with two events that you will not want to miss: John and Viv Ewing on Sept. 23 and Michael Yanney on Nov. 18. These tickets will go fast, so make a reservation as soon as you can.

The club’s other committees have also been busy with plans of their own. The Hall of Fame will have its annual dinner for seven inductees on Sept. 18. We also have a new event which will likely be an annual event: the First Amendment Night, honoring Sen. Chuck Hagel and Allen Beermann.

You like wine? We have just the event for you: the next Winemaker’s Dinner is scheduled for Friday, Oct. 29.

And just to top things off, we are celebrating the club’s 50th anniversary with dinner on Saturday, Nov. 13. Be sure to check out all the forthcoming details on our website and the newsletter.

*(The Omaha Press Club officially came into existence in 1955. But it had no permanent home until First National Bank erected a 22-story building at 16th and Dodge Streets in 1971. With the financial help of the bank, the club opened its restaurant on the 22nd floor. Gov. J. J. Exon and Mayor Eugene Leahy helped dedicate the new club on Nov. 17, 1971. Soon after, Leahy became the club’s first “Face on the Barroom Floor.”)

As you can see, the club will be busy throughout its anniversary year — and you will be, too, when you update your calendar. Don’t forget to book your holiday parties or special events, whether it be for your family or for work. Dates fill fast, so start planning now. Call Christine at 402-345-8008 to lock in your date!

Looking forward to seeing you at the club!

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As the pandemic seems to be retreating, and business is slowly returning, the Omaha Press Club management, board and membership owe the biggest thank-you to our landlord. Without the support of the Lauritzens and FNBO the Press Club would not be here to celebrate its 50th anniversary.

June was a good month for the club. Our KFAB Gourmet Club dinner, hosted by Scott Voorhees, was one of the best turnouts for the multicourse wine events as far back as can be remembered. Scott was a great host, and lots of first-time OPC guests got to experience why the Omaha Press Club is a town jewel.

David Brown, president and CEO of the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, was the guest speaker for June’s Noon Education Forum, and I personally sat in. With David at the helm of our chamber, Omaha is in good hands.

The Thomas Wilkins “Face” event was well attended and a fun evening for all, with lots of compliments on the meal.

We had a sparse turnout for the Father’s Day Grill, which is such a bargain for those who take advantage, but it’s a reminder even as life returns to normal that members are still a bit reluctant to visit the club.

** Club happenings you do not want to miss!!! We have so much going on at the club, so be sure to take advantage.

Our Two-for-One Prime Rib Thursday evenings are a real deal, and the club’s prime rib is my favorite of all the beef.

Our next Noon Education Forum on July 8 featuring Dr. Adi Pour, the recently retired Douglas County health director, should be an interesting event, with COVID developments including the infections that knocked North Carolina State out of the College World Series.

The Summer Closing this year will be July 26 through Aug. 16. Tom Shatel will do his Shatel Lunch Series on Aug. 18, and we will have his favorite hamburger steak for lunch. This event should be great with all that is going on in the Nebraska sports world.

Also on the calendar:

- Sept. 18, the annual Journalists of Excellence Hall of Fame dinner.
- Sept. 23, the next “Face on the Barroom Floor” featuring John and Viv Ewing.
- Oct. 23, the first ever First Amendment celebration with honorees Allen Beermann and Chuck Hagel.
- Nov. 13, the Omaha Press Club 50th Anniversary.

The club calendar is filling up, but we still have plenty of dates for your lunch or dinner. Contact Christine at 402-345-8008 or opcchristine@gmail.com.

The Press Club is unique in comparison to other facilities. We require reservations and can accommodate social distancing with ease due to the layout of the restaurant. This is a value for dining out with regards to your health and safety.

The Curbside Friday Family Meal is on pause for now but may start up again this winter with the popular items like the fried chicken and prime rib that were served during the pandemic.

See you at the club.

Steve Villamonte, Executive Director
Thomas Wilkins is 164th ‘Face on the Barroom Floor’

Virtuoso roast is given to Omaha Symphony music director

By Tom O’Connor
Communications Committee

Thomas Wilkins is a master at connecting with musicians and the community. But, when it comes to smacking a golf ball, he sometimes hits the wrong notes.

That was the ongoing theme of the June 7 “Face on the Barroom Floor” roast for Wilkins, who ended his 16-year run as music director of the Omaha Symphony with his final concert on June 12. The maestro was honored as the Omaha Press Club’s 164th “Face” in a virtuoso performance by five business executives who served as his roasters.

One of the roasters, Bruce Carpenter, senior vice president for HDR, Inc., thought the Omaha Symphony’s search committee might have made a mistake in selecting Wilkins 16 years ago.

“He was too nice. He had no ego,” said Carpenter, who was amazed at how conversational Wilkins was with the musicians and how easily he interacted with audiences. “Then we played golf — that’s where I really saw the creativity come out.”

Carpenter said Wilkins was never in the fairway and spent most of his time in the rough or along the fence.

For Lance Fritz, chairman, president and CEO of Union Pacific, Wilkins “was always dressed to the nines. We’d be at Omaha Country Club or Happy Hollow, and Thomas would always be impeccably dressed, with a barbecue bacon burger in one hand and the juice dripping on his Allen Edmonds shoes.”

Dave Diamond, retired chief financial officer for Mutual of Omaha, said if not for Wilkins’s golf game it would be difficult to roast him, as he doesn’t have any other foibles.

Diamond gave his top five reasons for why Omaha loves Thomas:

1. He has grown with us, as he has led us. (“His grace and strength of character – he is an amazing person. We will miss him greatly.”)
2. He is passionate about people. (“He pays it forward better than anyone I know.”)
3. His enthusiasm is contagious. (“Threads of ideas keep flowing out.”)
4. He is a Renaissance man (“He is a clothes horse with an obsession for gadgets.”)
5. He is direct. (“He would always let you know if your guitar needed to be tuned.”)

Trenton P. Bausch, a partner in the Cline Williams law firm, was emcee. He told the audience that Wilkins knew he wanted to be a conductor at the tender age of 8. This was mind-blowing to Bausch, who said when he was 8, “I had watched Star Wars for the 12th time, and I wanted to be a Jedi Knight.”

In going through Wilkins’s bio, Bausch was stunned by Wilkins proclaiming that he was 8, “I had watched Star Wars for the 12th time, and I wanted to be a Jedi Knight.”

In one of the best lines of the evening, Wilkins told the audience, “I’m surprised he has that much time to practice (golf), which tells me someone is running Union Pacific.”

In Johnny Carson fashion, he played an audience participation game in which he would say, “Thomas Wilkins is so nice,” And the audience would respond, “How nice is he?”

In addition to his niceness, Slosburg touched on Wilkins’s popularity, his inventiveness, his cool factor and his humility. As he went through each of Wilkins’s qualities, the audience became increasingly engaged, helping Slosburg feel the power of being a conductor.

He noted that Wilkins has an “approval rating of 98.5% among an audience age 6-10.”

Slosburg made light of Wilkins switching from waving his baton with his right hand to using his left hand, so as not “to overtax his right side.” He scoffed that Wilkins had reduced the weight of his baton by 1.5 grams, or “the weight of a paper clip.”

Wilkins didn’t back down in his rebuttal to the roasters. He gave each a thank-you gift for their efforts — Bausch (a compass to help him find his golf ball); Carpenter (a golf rules book); Diamond (a basketball hoop for his office since he’s not playing golf anymore); Fritz (a MVP golfing trophy); and Slosburg (some cheap cans of wine because he is a wine connoisseur).

In one of the best lines of the evening, Wilkins told the audience he will be “forever blessed and forever grateful” for his time in Omaha, and in return, he received a lengthy standing ovation.

Artist Wayne Sealy’s “Face” drawing put Wilkins in formal attire, but with a few changes. He is holding a golf club, while wearing a grilling apron with grilling utensils in his jacket pocket. The backdrop shows the Holland Center and the Hollywood Bowl — two of Wilkins’s favorite venues — and he is surrounded by many of the awards that he has received over the years.
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Submissions for the September issue are due on or before Aug. 20.