Pete Ricketts to headline May 5 Noon Forum

Nebraska governor to be next ‘Face on the Barroom Floor’

By Tom O'Connor
Communication Committee

As Nebraska’s governor nearing the end of his second four-year term, Pete Ricketts has become one of the most prominent faces in Nebraska politics.

On June 16, Ricketts’ face will be etched into the history books of the Omaha Press Club when he will be recognized with the OPC’s most prestigious honor – the “Face on the Barroom Floor.”

Ricketts will become the 169th “Face” to be feted by the OPC and will join a long list of distinguished honorees including his father, Joe, the founder and former CEO of TD Ameritrade who became “Face” No. 132 in 2012.

“It’s truly an honor to be selected as a “Face on the Barroom Floor” – it’s one of the top recognitions one can receive in our state,” Pete Ricketts said. “I’ve been to several “Face” events over the years, including my father’s, so I have a pretty good idea of what to expect. I’m sure there will be plenty of laughs – all at my expense. I hope we can bring in a terrific crowd and make it a fun conclusion to my eight years as governor of our great state.”

Although his agenda has always leaned conservative, there’s no doubt that Ricketts will be in for a liberal dose of ribbing.

A native of Nebraska City, Pete is the oldest of four children of Joe and Marlene Ricketts. The family moved to Omaha, where Pete graduated from Westside High School in 1982. He earned his bachelor’s degree in biology in 1986 and an MBA in marketing and finance in 1991 – both from the University of Chicago.

After graduate school, Ricketts returned to Omaha and worked for Union Pacific before eventually joining his father’s business, which was then called Ameritrade, in 1993. He eventually rose to the position of president and chief operating officer of the firm.

In 2006, Ricketts left Ameritrade to run unsuccessfully for the U.S. Senate against Ben Nelson. He continued to serve on the board of his family’s company until 2016.

A message from the executive director

Your club is active; you should be, too!

Members: We are in a difficult stage in our rebound from the pandemic. Many of you have remained active and up to date with your accounts — and we thank you for your support. The club has multiple members with inactive accounts. This means we have not had payment or activity on the account since the beginning of the pandemic. This creates a situation where we need to deactivate the account if it is not being used.

In an effort to restore accounts to normal business and preserve membership status, I have asked the OPC board of directors to help in contacting members to reactivate accounts. You may be contacted by a board member or management in the next few months regarding your account to update our records.

The club is rebounding nicely, with multiple bookings. One thing I am very confident about is the food. Christine and I have personally been on the front line in the kitchen for the past two years. We know we are serving the best quality every meal, whether it’s à la carte off the menu, an event, or banquets. We have had more positive feedback in the past two years regarding the food than any time in the past 20 years.

Now is the time to take advantage of your private club! We have so many events happening over the next several months. It’s to your advantage to experience the restaurant, which has great food and offers a very intimate dining experience.

We have been open Friday and Saturday evenings with a limited — but very good -- menu with good reviews. The hours on Friday and Saturday are 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. by reservation only.

Check out our monthly calendar on the website or in the newsletter for upcoming events. We always have something going on everyone.

Respectfully,

Steve Villamonte B.S. C.E.C.
Executive Director
Omaha Press Club
The proud partnership between OPC, KIOS-FM

By Ken Dudzik
KIOS Station Manager

For more than 53 years, KIOS-FM has been a radio staple in the Omaha Metropolitan Area, entertaining and enlightening listeners with one-of-a-kind programming supported by the people of the communities it serves, local businesses and great partnerships.

The Omaha Press Club has been one of those partnerships, and a longstanding one at that. Since its inception in the mid-’90s, the OPC Noon Forum has had a proud broadcast partner in Omaha Public Radio, KIOS-FM. Hundreds of speakers later, the partnership is thriving even more so in the KIOS Saturday morning lineup as “Weekend Forum.” In its 6 a.m. time slot the last Saturday of each month, Nielsen ratings indicate a significant increase in listenership compared to previous years for the time period, one that “Weekend Forum” shares with locally produced “River City Chats.”

“This would indicate that both programs have found a hitherto untapped audience that values a thoughtful, long-form consideration of local issues and community leaders,” said Todd Hatton, KIOS program director.

KIOS was born in 1969, in the basement of Central High School as an educational extension of the Omaha Public Schools. In 1971, KIOS became one of the charter members of National Public Radio (NPR) and has since provided the best news, information and entertainment to more than 60,000 and weekly listeners on average.

The mission of KIOS is to empower our community with quality local, national and global content that challenges and connects people, and furthers a deeper understanding of events, ideas and cultures. The partnership with the Omaha Press Club gives KIOS another opportunity to hear from those making a difference each day in the communities they serve.

The success of the long run sustained by Omaha Public Radio can mostly be attributed to just that, partnerships. Without listener partnerships and business underwriters, KIOS would not exist as it does today, as at least 70% of its operating expenses come from generous donors and businesses through monetary contributions. Listener donations come in all amounts, as KIOS asks those to contribute what they can afford and attach a dollar amount to their listening habits.

KIOS is extremely proud to be synonymous with the Omaha Press Club and to be able to share the stories and successes of those who step up to the microphone and share each month. To hear the broadcast, you can tune in to 91.5 FM the last Saturday of each month at 6 a.m. or listen online at www.kios.org where you can also make a donation. The podcast can be found by searching “Weekend Forum” from KIOS wherever you listen to podcasts.

Congressional candidates face off

The Omaha Press Club hosted the first debate of the primary campaign between congressional candidates Alisha Shelton and Tony Vargas. The two are vying for the Democratic nomination in Nebraska’s 2nd District, which includes Douglas County and western Sarpy County. The winner in the May 10 primary will face Republican Rep. Don Bacon or Steve Kuehl in the November general election.

The debate was co-sponsored by the OPC and the League of Women Voters. WOWT’s Brian Mastre moderated the April 19 debate, which was recorded and can be viewed on the WOWT Channel 6 website.

"FACE ON THE BARROOM FLOOR" – GOV. PETE RICKETTS

WHEN: THURSDAY, JUNE 16 – RECEPTION, 5:30 P.M.; DINNER, 6:30 P.M.; ROAST, 8 P.M.
COST: $75 FOR OPC MEMBERS; $85 FOR NON-MEMBERS.
RSVP: THE EVENT IS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC. CALL THE OPC AT 402-345-8008. MEMBERS CAN CHARGE TO THEIR OPC ACCOUNT. NON-MEMBERS NEED TO PROVIDE THEIR CREDIT CARD INFORMATION.

From left: Cynde Glismann, Tony Vargas, Linda Duckworth and Alisha Shelton. Glismann and Duckworth are co-presidents of the League of Women Voters. Photos by Gary Wilk.
Former OPC ‘Face’ Brad Ashford dies at 72

By Tom O’Connor
Communication Committee

One of Omaha’s most lovable politicians, Brad Ashford, died April 19 due to a brain tumor. He was 72.

Ashford, who prided himself on his bi-partisan politics, was honored by the Omaha Press Club in 2017 as the 153rd “Face on the Barroom Floor.” During his career, Ashford served as a state senator as well as a Nebraska congressman.

His roast was memorable, as nine roasters were on the docket. They included:

• Jim Quinley (emcee), pharmacist, Kubat Pharmacy and a running partner;
• Chris Abboud, partner, Abboud Law Firm and former Nebraska state senator;
• Woody Bradford, partner, Houghton Bradford Whitted Law Firm;
• Chris Burbach, Omaha World-Herald City Hall reporter and a running partner;
• Rex Fisher, director of corporate relations, HDR, Inc.;
• Jim Rose, KFAB-AM radio host;
• Erin Grace, former Omaha World-Herald columnist who is now strategic communications manager for the National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology and Education Center at the University of Nebraska at Omaha; and
• Ann and John Ashford, wife and son of Brad.

Some of the best quips of the night included:

Quinley – noted that Ashford was asked to fly on Air Force One with President Barack Obama. The untold part of the story, Quinley said, “He had to take the bus back.”

Ann Ashford – told about a birthday card she received from Brad that read, “Happy birthday, buddy.” It was signed, “Brad Ashford.” On their 20th anniversary at Fleming’s, Ann presented Brad with a three-page love letter before a dinner, where they were joined by Hal and Mary Daub. In the course of the dinner, Brad shared the love letter with the Daubs. “You can’t make this stuff up,” Ann said.

Bradford – recalled Brad’s time as a law clerk in his office. “Brad would run and never come back,” Bradford said. “The question was always, ‘Where is Brad?’”

Burbach – on Brad’s passion for running. After more than 25 years of running, Burbach said Ashford might have logged “up to three miles by now.”

Rose – “Brad’s philosophy is if you’re not part of the solution, just run for office. Brad really doesn’t have enemies, but his friends don’t really like him that much.”

Fisher – fondly remembered an Ashford interview on “Meet the Press” in which Brad “finished the interview arguing with himself.”

Artist Jim Horan drew Ashford dressed for running a race – either a political race or a marathon. On his top half, Ashford is wearing a suit coat, white shirt and striped tie. On his bottom half, he’s wearing shorts and red running shoes – one of which seems to have come untied. Brad’s suit has a label on it – the Nebraska Clothing Company – the Ashfords’ family business.

Brad’s wife, Ann, is timing the run using a large stopwatch and for longer races an hourglass. Ex-President Barack Obama is cheering Brad on.

In the background is the Nebraska State Capitol building. The sower has been replaced by a statue of a runner. There’s very large stack of papers representing the Veterans Act, HR 5099, and a large photo of the Omaha VA Medical Center – two of Brad’s biggest accomplishments as a congressman.

OPC Foundation honors 17 scholars

The Omaha Press Club Foundation honored 17 scholarship recipients and two professional honorees at its annual Awards Brunch and Ceremony on April 23 at the club.

The scholarship recipients:

• Panko-Roberts/President’s Memorial Scholarships: Riley Smith, University of Nebraska at Omaha; Gabrielle Dammkoehler, Creighton University; Emma Krab, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

• John F. Davis Scholarships: Lexy Schulte, UNO; Gavin Struve, UNL; Asha Martel, CU.

• Paul N. Williams Scholarships: Geiler Damlan, UNO; Marin Grehan, CU; Evelyn Mejia, UNL.

• Edward Zorinsky Memorial Scholarship: Jacob Thimjon, UNO.

• Susan Eustice Memorial Scholarship: Kathryn O’Connor, UNO.

• Nebraska Broadcasters Association Scholarship: Pauline Dulong, UNO.

• Robert McMorris Scholarship: Max Fritsch, CU.

• Judy Horan Scholarship: Valeria Uribe, UNL.

• Floyd Kalber Scholarship: Derek Shadle, UNO.

• Stan Bond Scholarship: Jolie Peal, UNL.

• Mark Gautier Intern Award: Liam Fentwick, UNO.

• Career Achievement Award: Allen Beermann, retired executive director of the Nebraska Press Association.

• Journalism Educator Award: Tim Guthrie, Creighton University professor of graphic design and film.

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Meet Chef Silvia

The guest chef for the May 13 Italian Winemaker’s Dinner will be Silvia De Luca. Here she introduces herself and her cuisine to the Omaha Press Club.

By Silvia De Luca

Ciao!!!!

I was born and raised in Milan, Lombardia Region, Italy, a large cosmopolitan city rich in the history of Italy’s finest food, fashion and music.

My passion for food began as a little girl watching my family cook together. My father and my grandmother were my inspiration.

Later in life I lived in Parma, Italy, where I enjoyed other principles of Italian cooking, learned to make fresh egg pasta and regional recipes using the delicious local ingredients.

Parma is in the Emilia Romagna Region which is famous for egg-fresh pasta, Prosciutto di Parma, Culatello Ham, Parmiggiano Reggiano Cheese, etc.

Every region in Italy has its unique local food, ingredients and recipes and of course, wine and extra virgin olive oil. Good, fresh and carefully prepared food represents a fundamental point of getting together at the table to enjoy the company of the people you love and special moments.

Through my years of culinary experience, I have brought a piece of Italy to Omaha.

I have been a vendor at the Farmers Market for three years to sell my Italian pastries and fresh egg pasta. I also have organized Italian cooking classes parties.

I would love to help bring a piece of my food culture to your home to enjoy a meal together and have fun.

Grazie e Buon Appetito!!!!
By Elaine Allen
Communication Committee

UNMC Chancellor and Nebraska University System Provost Dr. Jeffrey Gold was lauded as a great communicator who “never met a camera he didn’t like” during his “Face on the Barroom Floor” dinner and roast, which was attended by 185 friends, colleagues, University Regents and elected officials.

NU Athletic Director Trev Alberts was the emcee of the event and kicked off the evening’s fun by describing his boss as “Android Jeff. He doesn’t eat, he doesn’t sleep. I’m not sure he’s really human.”

Before introducing four of the roasters, Alberts read remarks written by Mike Yanney, who was ill and could not attend.

Yanney described the audience for Dr. Gold’s “Rural Health Matters” program on RFD-TV Monday nights. “He’s got an audience of tens of millions. And at least ten of them tune in each week.”

Yanney praised the chancellor, who he said has elevated UNMC’s and Nebraska’s stature. “I’ve never met a man who has so many relationships and works to maintain them.”

Nebraska Medicine CEO Dr. Jim Linder marveled at the chancellor’s ability to manage his multiple roles during the pandemic. “He always had four masks in his pocket. He switched masks as he went from meeting to meeting.”

Calling him a “great communicator,” Linder joked that he frequently receives emails from Gold, “in the middle of the night with an attachment, followed by a letter, followed by a Fed Ex.”

The next roaster, President and CEO of ICAN Aileen Warren, spent 7-1/2 years as Gold’s vice chancellor of human resources at UNMC. She cited his appearances on UNMC’s “Under the Microscope,” RFD-TV’s “Rural Health Matters,” and UNO’s “Maverick Minute.” “Dr. Gold never met a camera he didn’t like,” Warren teased.

UNMC Videographer Rich Watson roasted his boss with a video of Dr. Gold’s outtakes. He recounted that Dr. Gold has made more than 1,000 videos and television appearances, including CNN, Fox News, as well as RFD-TV.

“I sit at my desk all day, waiting for the chancellor to call,” Watson said. As an introduction to the outtake video, he turned to the chancellor and said, “We call you ‘one-take Jeff’ …. behind your back.”

Watson turned serious at the end when he said Dr. Gold’s most important role was as “Grandpa.”

Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert was the final roaster before Dr. Gold’s “Face” was revealed. She lamented how busy he is and how hard it can be to reach him.

Once, she said, she tried to reach him and “he finally called me back. He told me that he was working in the West Wing of the White House. About ten times!”

Stothert said Dr. Gold does the work of 10 executives with the salary of 10 executives. “Please find Jeff Gold a hobby!”

The mayor praised the chancellor, saying he will continue to change UNMC “for decades to come.”

After artist Jeff Koterba unveiled his “Face,” it was Jeff Gold’s turn at the podium. Dr. Gold explained that he ended up as a “Face on the Barroom Floor” after having dinner with previous “Face” recipients Mike Yanney and Walter Scott. Their advice to him: “Be brief. Stay PG. And stay civil.”

Dr. Gold described the kinds of calls he takes from his “Rural Health Matters” audience during the pandemic.

“One caller said his peanuts were tasting off. I asked him, ‘How much Purell are you using on your hands?’” His advice to one caller: “If you are self-isolating, don’t cut your own hair.”

He said that holding so many of his meetings on Zoom during the pandemic has been a challenge. “Multitasking without hitting the mute button can be pretty scary for most of us.”

Turning serious, Dr. Gold said he values his relationship with Nebraska University President Ted Carter, who previously headed the Naval Academy. “Working for a U.S. admiral has been one of the biggest thrills of my life.”

He told the audience the best decision of his life was marrying his wife, Dr. Robin Hayworth. And he acknowledged how important his family, especially his role as Grandpa, is to him.

“But the second best decision of my life was coming to Nebraska, without a doubt. I am thrilled to be part of the community here.”
Committee Chairs

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- Dr. Robert Meyers

Executive Committee
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- Jeremy Maskel and Dale Ervin

“Face on the Barroom Floor”
- Roger Humphries

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Submissions for the June issue are due on or before May 20.