Sept. 16 event will honor remarkable five-decade career
Media icon Otis Twelve to be next Face on Barroom Floor

By Tom O’Connor
Communications Committee

Otis Twelve has done it all – from hosting a radio show to writing novels to being a stand-up comedian – and he’s always left us with a laugh in our belly or at the very least a smile on our face.

On Sept. 16, the laughs are sure to continue as the man whose iconic media career has spanned five decades will be honored as the Omaha Press Club’s next Face on the Barroom Floor.

“This has all the earmarks of being a classic Face on the Barroom Floor event,” said Roger Humphries, chair of the Face on the Barroom Floor Committee. “Otis Twelve embodies what the Face on the Barroom Floor is all about – he has been a prominent figure in the Omaha media, but – best of all – he doesn’t take himself too seriously. He knows these Face events are designed to be fun. I have no doubt this will be one for the ages.”

True to form, Otis joked that the theme of his Face event will be “undersea romance.”

A native of Des Moines who grew up in Philadelphia and Kansas City, Otis attended Creighton University and was accepted into law school there before he decided to pursue his media career instead. For a time in the early 2000s, he lived with his family in Walnut, Iowa, but they moved back to Omaha in 2006.

He is probably best known for his work in radio which started in 1978 with “Midnight Mondo” on KQKQ-FM before he moved to Z-92, where he partnered with Diver Dan Doomey and Sandy Palmer to, as he put it, “keep the fine art of radio theater alive.”

Those collaborations produced a number of long-running features such as “Space Commander Whack,” “Lance Stallion: Radio Detective,” “Roseanne Grubbs” and “The Mean Farmer.”

Known for his distinctive, deep, powerful voice, Otis also worked in radio at KFAB-AM, CD-105, KKAR-AM, and for the past 16 years as morning host on listener-supported Classical 90.7 KVNO-FM. He is a member of the Nebraska Radio Personalities Hall of Fame.

On the TV side, Otis worked for a dozen years as a movie/entertainment critic for KETV (Ch. 7) and KPTM (Fox 42).

But there’s much more to the man whose real name is Douglas Vincent Francis Wesselmann.

Mean Farmer.

Dr. Joanne Li will speak at the July 21 Omaha Press Club’s Noon Education Forum about her first year as UNO’s chancellor.

Dr. Li became the 16th chancellor of the University of Nebraska Omaha on July 1, 2021. She is the first woman of color to serve as UNO chancellor and the first Asian-American in the history of the University of Nebraska System to hold an executive leadership role.

Dr. Li came to UNO from Florida International University where she was dean of the business college. At UNO, she has created new initiatives like the Career Connect Internship Program, hired a new athletic director, and charged recent graduates with making changes in the world.

Dr. Li was recently named to serve a four-year term as a trustee on a national accreditation commission for post-secondary institutions. The Higher Learning Commission (HLC)’s board of trustees includes university administrators and community leaders from across the country. Dr. Li is the first Nebraska higher ed administrator to serve on the HLC since 2017. Her term will begin Sept. 1.

At the Noon Forum, Dr. Li will discuss the work of UNO’s NCITE (National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education) Center of Excellence, present an overview of UNO’s campus facilities and an annual overview of UNO’s campus facilities and plans for updates, and her visions for UNO.

Lunch service for the Noon Forum begins at 11:30 a.m. for $19 per person. The program starts at noon and concludes at 1 p.m. Call 402-345-8088 for reservations. Or email opchristine@gmail.com. Reservations must include an OPC member number or credit card. Non-members are welcome.
Aqua Africa: access to water and more in South Sudan

By Hunter Samuels
Communications Committee

Buey Ray Tut was born in South Sudan, the son of an Ethiopian mother and South Sudanese father. In their country, women and their daughters were tasked with the duty of collecting water for their home, which was a 3-mile walk to the nearest well, with the 3-mile return including carrying roughly 80 pounds of water. Unfortunately for Tut’s mother, she only had five sons, leaving that chore to her alone.

It was that experience that, at least partially, led to the creation of Aqua Africa in 2011.

Tut, Aqua Africa’s executive director, spoke at length about his background and his work during the June Noon Forum at the Omaha Press Club.

He and his friend, Jacob Khol, founded the nonprofit while in college here at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Since then, they have drilled 25 wells and built three water towers in South Sudan, and it’s impossible to overstate the impact of providing access to such a basic necessity. Tut said that when a well is built and the tap is opened, “lives change that day.”

Beyond the water, though, Aqua Africa has a secondary focus: “We wanted to export democracy.”

Tut continued, “Constructing water wells is great, but I wanted to do more with development. I wanted more for South Sudan. There has to be more.”

The reason for wanting more came from a time when Tut was just 9 years old. He remembers sitting in his home with his family, enjoying dinner, when security forces stormed in and arrested his father, for what they called “political activities.” He was imprisoned for roughly a year, essentially for speaking his mind in opposition to those in power. Shortly after his release, the family was granted asylum here in America.

While the economic and educational opportunities were part of the driving force behind the move, Tut cherishes and appreciates the values here even more. Things like individual rights, free speech, and as mentioned, democracy.

Part of the process for creating the wells in South Sudan includes the communities electing committees to oversee the operation and management of the wells, and in that way, they learn about the democratic process and become invested in it.

Tut said the organization’s goal is to impact 2.5 million people in South Sudan over the next few years, effectively helping 25 percent of the population. It will require some shifts in how Aqua Africa operates, as well as growth from the current nine-person staff structure (two in Omaha, seven in South Sudan), but Tut is determined to make it happen.

Aqua Africa relies on the philanthropic community for support, and Nebraskans provide roughly 60 percent of the funding. To support Aqua Africa, you can visit http://aqua-africa.net.

Douglas County health chief to speak to Forum in September

By Gary Willis
Communications Committee

The director of the Douglas County Health Department will be a Press Club guest in September. Dr. Lindsay Huse will speak and take questions from our audience at a Noon Forum on Sept. 15.

Dr. Huse became the health chief after Dr. Adi Pour retired in June 2021.

A native of Gering, Nebraska, Dr. Huse has spent her entire nursing career in public health. She came to Omaha from Wyoming, where she had been the state supervisor of public health nursing.

Join us for lunch at the club to hear Dr. Huse talk about fighting the pandemic and other challenges during her first year in Omaha.

Noon Forum lunch service begins at 11:30 a.m. for $19 per person. The program starts at noon and concludes at 1 p.m. Non-OPC members are welcome; call 402-345-8008 for reservations.
Jack Payne, voice of CWS, was OPC Face in 1993

By Don Summerside
Communications Committee

Jack Payne, the longtime folksy voice of the College World Series and the Omaha Press Club's 53rd Face on the Ballroom Floor, died June 2 at age 99.

Payne received the OPC honor in June 1993, his 30th year as the CWS public address announcer at Rosenblatt Stadium. In addition to the ballpark background in the Face caricature, Jim Horan's drawing depicted a football player tugging on each of Payne's legs. One player was a Cornhusker, reflecting Payne's years on the KFAB radio team at Nebraska games from 1970-1992. The other player in the drawing was an Omaha Mustang; Payne served as general manager of the semipro football team in the 1960s.

Payne stepped down from the Rosenblatt press box in 2000 after his 37th College World Series in the announcer's chair. Prior to that, he had covered the CWS from 1951 through 1963 as a radio and TV reporter.

Payne's baritone voice was a familiar sound for decades at numerous other sports venues, including PA announcer at the Metro Conference and Nebraska high school track meets, and broadcasts of Cornhusker and high school basketball as well as the Drake Relays.

Payne moved to Omaha in 1951 after beginning a broadcast career in his native Oklahoma. He took a job as sports director at WOW radio and WOW-TV (now WOWT) in Omaha. In 1970, he moved to KFAB and was a member of the station's Cornhusker broadcasting team.

He joined a three-man booth that also featured play-by-play icon Lyell Bremser and Dave Blackwell. By the time he stepped out of the booth, in 1992, Payne was with Kent Pavelka and Gary Sadlemyer.

One of the amazing numbers rung up by Payne at the College World Series was 533 – the number of consecutive games he announced. Did he ever come close to missing a game? “In 1999, I had a bad case of laryngitis and congestion at the Thursday night opening ceremonies,” Payne recalled. “But by game time Friday I was ready for the first pitch.”

Payne is survived by two daughters – Karen Shaw of Palm Desert, California, and Jackie O'Brien of San Antonio, Texas – and numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Jack's wife of 69 years, Connie, died in 2015.

Ricketts Face event postponed

By Tom O'Connor
Communications Committee

COVID-19 has struck again – this time it hit Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts and First Lady Susanne Shore the day before the governor's scheduled Face on the Barroom Floor event on June 16. The event was a sellout.

Thankfully, the event which was to feature two iconic roasters – Gary Sadlemyer, long-time morning show host on KFAB-AM, and Larry the Cable Guy, arguably Nebraska’s most famous comedian since Johnny Carson – will be rescheduled for later this fall. An exact date has not been determined.

Ricketts and his wife experienced very minor COVID symptoms and were able to self-isolate in accordance with guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

When a new date for the Face event is determined, full details will be provided in the Omaha Press Club newsletter – OPC News.

Meanwhile, plans are well underway for two additional Face on the Barroom Floor events this year. Otis Twelve will be honored on Sept. 16, and Othello Meadows will receive a Face salute on Nov. 3.

A message from the manager

The summer always feels like it goes so fast, or maybe it is just me as the party pace has eased with baseball and softball activity at its peak.

We are glad to be back to normal at the club after two years of pandemic limitations. We continue to maintain a cleaning routine close to hospital standards to make people feel comfortable. And we thank you again for supporting the club during these unusual times.

The July-August newsletter brings us to the annual club closing so that OPC staff can enjoy a summer vacation. The closing dates are July 24 through Aug.15, with the reopening on Tuesday, Aug. 16.

Meanwhile during our break, consider visiting a club on our reciprocal list, a perk for OPC members. If you have a destination in mind, give me a call at 402-345-8008 for reciprocal availability.

We continue to maintain a cleaning routine close to hospital standards to make people feel comfortable.

Bring a friend and enjoy the rest of your summer.

Christine Villamonte
Restaurant and Events Manager

Italian Winemaker's Dinner
Guest Chef Silvia De Luca

Friday, Aug. 26, 2022
6 p.m.
Members $75 (tax included)
Non-Members $85

Aperitivo
Crostini Eggplant & Smoked Cheese
Wine

Primo
Tagliatelle with Ragù Bolognese
Besciamelle
Wine

Secondo
Pork Rolls Alla Messinese Siciliana
Wine

Contorno
Mixed Salad, Fresh Fruit & Rosemary Potatoes
Wine

Dolce
Almond Pie

PHONE 402-345-8008 FOR RESERVATIONS

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**Hours of Operation**

**LUNCH**
Monday - Friday
11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.

**DINNER**
Thursday - Saturday
5:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.

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Submissions for the September issue are due on or before August 20.

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**Cancellation Policy:** All reservations must be cancelled 48 HOURS in advance.