



*165th 'Face on the Barroom Floor'*  
Ewing friends roast 'Old Man' and 'Awesome One'

*By Anne Walsh, Communications Committee*

There's no doubt John and Viv Ewing are a beautiful couple, inside and out. It was the outside that drew some good-natured barbs during the 165th "Face on the Barroom Floor" event Sept. 23 honoring the civic-minded pair, just days after their 37th wedding anniversary. Several longtime friends and family members shared memories that held "elements of truth but also embellishments and exaggerations."

Following a 24-year career as an Omaha deputy chief of police and involvement on more than 60 nonprofit boards, John has served as Douglas County treasurer since 2007. Dr. Viv has a long career in nonprofit executive leadership and is currently vice president of development for Children's Square U.S.A.

Kicking the evening off was emcee Tim Cavanaugh, retired chief deputy in the Douglas County Treasurer's Office, retired captain in the Omaha Police Department, and a Metropolitan Utilities District board of directors member.

Cavanaugh noted that John diligently works out every day "and then posts shirtless pictures on Instagram. Every. Day." He lamented that fellow roaster Thomas Warren "made the mistake of telling John there was a mirror at the bottom of the swimming pool. It took four people and 10 minutes to get him off the bottom."

Retired Omaha Police Chief Warren, now chief of staff for Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert, recalled a friendship with John that goes all the way back to first grade. While attending Horace Mann Junior High School, now King Science Center, they (along with Warren's future wife, Aileen) vied for a front-row seat granted to the top student.

Warren said he sometimes played dumb, granting John the seat "to boost his confidence." That spirit of competition defines them still, with each claiming bragging rights for furthering each other's careers.

In a heartfelt moment, Warren recalled when John suffered a career setback in the police department and was depressed. After an intense pep-talk during which "I slapped him. . . no, I'm just kidding, that's the exaggeration part," Warren went on to say, "The proudest moment I had as police chief was when I had the opportunity to promote my good friend, John Ewing."

It was Warren who gave John the still-used nickname "Old Man" for his rolling walk as a child. John's brother Eric, executive director of the Great Plains Black History Museum, acknowledged the Ewings' wedding anniversary, saying "without me John wouldn't be here today."

While attending the University of Nebraska at Omaha, John had persuaded Eric to stand near Dodge Street wearing a neck-to-toe sandwich sign urging students to "Vote for Vivian Collins for Homecoming Queen." She won, becoming the first Black woman to receive the honor. Eric insists his brother and sister-in-law have yet to fulfill the IOU debt for his efforts.

Meanwhile, Warren declared "John fought above his weight class" to woo Viv. And Cavanaugh said, "Viv, I didn't know you were homecoming queen. That had to have driven John crazy – that HE wasn't the homecoming queen."

Professing that "you tease the ones you love," Debbie Orduna, president of Children's Square U.S.A., said Viv enjoys leading and effectively gives directions, but sometimes struggles with following them. Orduna claims Viv, while driving to her Iowa office, frequently clashes with Siri and ends up in Nebraska City, Missouri Valley or northern Iowa when trying to cross the I-480 bridge between Omaha and Council Bluffs.

Noting that Viv's license plates say, "Awesome One," Orduna speculated that John had gifted his wife with the personalized plates because he wanted everyone to know how special she was. "So, I asked her, 'How did you get your husband to get you those plates?' And she said, 'I got them!' So, from that I learned there's no need to be humble; if you tell people you're awesome, you're awesome!"

Though complimenting Viv's elegant smile, wonderful personality, true class and lovingly strategic personality, Vanessa Johnson said when Viv phones, she wonders, "Oh Lord, what does she want and how much is it gonna cost me today?"

A youth case manager for Saint Francis Ministries, Johnson said she does not demean people, so composing remarks for the roast was difficult ". . . but I did it. And I want to say that I'm good friends with Viv, but for the next two to three minutes, I'm not."

While respectfully wondering why the Ewings received such a prestigious award only to have it end up on the barroom floor, Johnson said she was confident Viv would find a way to get her face relocated to the ceiling, similar to Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel.

Daughters Christina and Alexandria Ewing narrated fond recollections of their parents, including their mother's friendliness. While attending a movie as a family on Thanksgiving night, the girls were astonished when Viv returned from a restroom break mid-movie and sat with people in the row ahead, chatting and sharing their popcorn and soda. Friendliness notwithstanding, it turned out Viv thought, in the dark, that she was with her own family.

And while Christina and Alexandria admire their father's exercise regimen, they wonder: "Does he like working out, or does he just enjoy the selfies of himself working out?"

Artist Wayne Sealy unveiled the Ewings' portrait, which shows John wearing a suit and police uniform, as well as a glimpse of the Superman shirt he wears when exercising. A piggybank signifies his work with the Treasurer's Office, along with his police deputy badge No. 493.

Viv is shown holding a Bible, representing the couple's service as pastors at Salem Baptist Church. Her motivational book, "Yes, You Can Have Your Cake and Eat It, Too," is included, as well as John's favorite saying, "Stick with me, kid. You'll go far."

A UNO logo and homecoming queen reference depict their alma mater and Viv's honor, Sealy explained, while their competitiveness is illustrated through an UNO card game.

In her rebuttal following the unveiling, Viv addressed the allegation that she stood up John on their first date – at her own home, leaving him to converse with her father and brothers. She was simply running late, as she often did back then (although her family had to clarify who had stopped by).

Viv also asserted that indeed she can follow directions; it's just that she enjoys the scenic routes and Siri is wrong. Thanking attendees present from the Treasurer's Office, John reflected on

those who positively impacted his life. His mother and father, he said, gave him an amazing foundation. “My Dad always said, ‘Son, I don’t care what you do, just always be the best.’ So, I’ve always tried to be the best.”

Of his wife, John said, “I couldn’t have a better partner who compliments me in ways that we are the same, and then challenges me in ways when we’re not the same. And we make a great team.”

Of his daughters, he said, “The best reward you can have as a parent is to have kids who are good people, and they are great people.”

He also recognized Cavanaugh, Warren and his brother Eric as “three guys very instrumental in my life.”

More than 39 years ago, a 21-year-old rookie police officer walked into the Omaha Press Club and beheld all the Faces. John didn’t know any of them but hoped then that he would have a public service career worthy of the honor. “So, this really means a lot to me,” he said. “It means I’ve done what I set out to do: Serve the community I love.”