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 friends and family.

Those to be honored on Saturday, Sept. 17:

- John Chapman – WOWT
- Jim Denney (posthumous) – Omaha World-Herald
- Paul Hammel – Nebraska Examiner, Omaha World-Herald
- Bill Kelly – Nebraska Public Media
- Anne Walsh – Union Pacific Railroad
- Dave Wingert – Boomer Radio

By Tom O’Connor
Communications Committee

Otis Twelve has become an iconic figure in Omaha media during a career spanning five decades.

On Sept. 16, the Omaha Press Club will salute the legend by making him the 169th Face on the Barroom Floor.

Standing between Otis and his place on the floor will be a diverse group of roasters who promise to make the evening one of the most memorable in OPC annals. The group of seven runs the gamut of Otis’s remarkable career with representatives from the world of media, music, movies, business and even family.

Serving as emcee will be Dave Webber, the longtime sportscaster/journalist for WOWT (Ch. 6). Webber was Face No. 123 in 2009.

By Gary Willis
Communications Committee

Douglas County health chief to speak to Forum Sept. 15

C OVID, monkeypox, naegleria fowleri (brain-eating amoeba), and even a resurgence of polio.

These are some of the challenges we are facing that are making the headlines. Dr. Lindsay Huse will speak Sept. 15 at the Press Club on fighting the pandemic and other topics during her first year as director of the Douglas County Health Department and take questions from the Noon Forum audience.

A native of Gering, Nebraska, Dr. Huse has spent her entire nursing career in public health. She came to Omaha from Wyoming,
Foundation to lead drive for Rudy Smith Scholarship

By Henry Cordes
OPC Foundation President

The Omaha Press Club Foundation and the family of groundbreaking Omaha World-Herald photojournalist Rudy Smith have announced a drive to create a scholarship in his honor.

The creation of a Rudy Smith Scholarship, which would be awarded annually to a college student pursuing a career in journalism, will be the focus of the OPC Foundation’s fall 2022 annual appeal for its scholarship program. While details of the scholarship are still being worked out, it will likely be designated for a student of color.

Each year, the OPC Foundation, the charitable arm of the club, awards more than $50,000 in scholarships to the top journalism and communications students at the University of Nebraska Omaha, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Creighton University.

When Rudolph “Rudy” Smith Sr. joined the staff of the World-Herald in 1964, he became the first African American to work in the paper’s news department. His award-winning photography appeared in the paper and in other national publications for more than half a century.

In addition, Smith also became the first African American faculty member in the UNO Department of Communications, where he years earlier received his journalism degree.

During his college years, Smith was active in the struggle for civil rights in Omaha, helping establish UNO’s Department of Black Studies and pushing legislation removing discriminatory housing practices near campus.

Smith died in 2019. He was 74.

“The foundation is excited to not only recognize the legacy of such a great Omaha journalist, but to help pave the way for others to follow in his footsteps,” said Henry Cordes, a longtime World-Herald colleague of Smith and the president of the OPC Foundation.

Rudy’s family, including wife Llana, have already put forward a donation to kick off the drive. Now Rudy’s former colleagues, OPC members and others in the community will have an opportunity to contribute to making it a reality.

The drive will formally kick off this fall with a reception at the club on Tuesday, Nov. 15, from 5 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Douglas County Treasurer John Ewing and his wife, Vivian, will be reception hosts. The Ewings are also honorary chairs of the 2022 campaign.

Book and street remember Smith

With a career that started in 1963, the year that the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his “I Have a Dream” speech, and ended in 2008, right after Barack Obama was elected president, photographer and civil rights activist Rudy Smith had the unique perspective of living, making and capturing history.

“The Black Experience Through the Lens of Rudy Smith” was published after the death of Smith in 2019. The book highlights his work chronicling Omaha’s black community. Included are more than 300 photographs ranging from sports icons Bob Gibson, Bob Boozer, Marlin Briscoe, Johnny Rodgers and Gale Sayers to political and entertainment figures to the 1960s civil rights movement and the joys and struggles in north Omaha.

Earlier this year, a street in north Omaha was named for Smith. The City Council approved the commemorative designation for Lake Street from 34th Avenue to 36th Street.

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Face on the Floor story; continued from page 1

and KKAR-AM and in television as a movie/entertainment critic for KETV (Ch. 7) and KPTM (Fox 42).

Otis, whose real name is Douglas Vincent Francis Wesselmann, was a founding member of the Ogden Edsl Wahalia Blues Ensemble Mondo Bizzario Band, a musical group that has been enshrined in the Nebraska Music Hall of Fame.

‘FACE ON THE BARROOM FLOOR’ – OTIS TWELVE

WHEN: FRIDAY, SEPT. 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.

Two more Face events rescheduled for November

Two Face on the Barroom Floor events that had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic have been rescheduled for November.

Othello Meadows, a community leader in the revitalization of North Omaha, will be honored on Thursday, Nov. 3. His original Face event was slated for May 21, 2020. The roast will be open to the public.

Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts will be honored on Thursday, Nov. 10. His original Face event was set for June 16, 2022. The roast will be headlined by Larry the Cable Guy, one of Nebraska’s all-time greatest comedians. The event will be an invitation-only affair.

Look for more details on these Face events in the October issue of OPC News.

Huse story; continued from page 1

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Shatel pulls no punches on Husker football

By Tom O’Connor
Communications Committee

It was vintage Tom Shatel – open, honest dialogue about all things Husker football while mixing in a few of his insights on everything else going on in the world of sports. He held no punches.

This year’s Shatel Lunch at the Press Club took place on August 24 – three days before the Huskers played Northwestern (and lost 31-28) in Dublin, Ireland.

The Omaha World-Herald sports columnist knew exactly how devastating the Northwestern loss would be to the Husker faithful. “There’s a lot of anxiety...if we lose this game, the season’s over,” he said. “There’s still a long way to go. They’re going to lose some games. The key is how they handle adversity.”

Shatel said the last four games (Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin and Iowa) “will write the story on Scott Frost this year.” Hopefully, “this team will grow as the season goes.”

With the coach’s job on the line, he said, “Trev Alberts is the story of the season. Winning really doesn’t guarantee anything – you have to do things the right way all the time.”

Athletic Director Alberts has made Frost relinquish his offensive play-calling role and become a CEO. Mark Whipple has been brought in from the University of Pittsburgh to be the offensive coordinator.

Shatel called Frost “a reluctant CEO” and that for Whipple it’s a “retirement job...a Golden Parachute.”

He noted at the Big Ten Media Days in late July that when media asked Frost how he felt about not calling offensive plays this year, he responded, “It’s sad.” Shatel also felt it was odd that Frost made no opening statement when he addressed the media, but simply asked for questions.

“You have to be a big-boy coach,” he said. “It doesn’t take five years to build a program. It just doesn’t. They don’t understand the Big Ten. This year is a Band-Aid...a one-shot Hail Mary. The Big Ten is waiting on Nebraska to get going.

“If all you do is lose close games, you don’t know how to do it. Culture comes from the head coach.”

Shortly before the season started, to show how hard offensive line coach Donovan Raisol was working his players, Frost was quoted in the media as saying his offensive linemen were vomiting 15-20 times per practice.

“That’s a comment a CEO doesn’t make,” Shatel said.

One area Nebraska has improved is in its physicality, he said. “They’ve gotten more physical the last two years and have matched Iowa and Wisconsin in physicality.”

On Sept. 17, Shatel said the Huskers will host Oklahoma in what could be a pivotal game. “That’s a game Nebraska can win. If we can beat Oklahoma, that’s a credibility win.”

Other Shatel nuggets from the luncheon included:

• High praise for Chris Crutchfield, the new basketball coach for the University of Nebraska Omaha. “He can walk in any room, and everybody comes right to him. They’re recruiting a whole different player (than UNO in the past). They’re going after kids everywhere – Chicago, Kansas City, Atlanta.”

• Former Husker quarterback Adrian Martinez “will do well at Kansas State this year. It will be good for him to get away from here and get a fresh start.”

• According to Texas reporters covering the College World Series, new Husker quarterback Casey Thompson is “good, but he can also be bad. He runs hot and cold.”

• “Everyone’s going to be in the shadow of Creighton (in men’s basketball). They’re going to be unbelievable.”

• He likes the addition of USC and UCLA to the Big Ten. “I’ll get to go to California instead of State College (Pennsylvania) and West Lafayette (Indiana).”

• In terms of its importance, “The Rose Bowl will go away.”

• With Husker basketball, Fred Hoiberg is “not under as much pressure as Scott Frost. Their ceiling tournament is the National Invitation Tournament, which is in Las Vegas this year.”

Bacon, Vargas to debate Oct. 13 at OPC luncheon

By Gary Willis
Communications Committee

Second District Republican Congressman Don Bacon and Democratic nominee Tony Vargas will debate the issues Oct. 13 at the Press Club.

Bacon defeated Steve Kuehl and Vargas defeated Alisha Shelton in the May primary. Their 2022 race is being watched around the country. Voters will decide in the Nov. 8 election.

The luncheon debate, from noon to 1 p.m. and open to the public, is sponsored by the Press Club and the League of Women Voters of Greater Omaha. The cost is $19 per person. For reservations, call the Press Club at 402-345-8008 or make online reservations at omahapressclub.com (click RSVP in the upper righthand corner of the website).

Doors will open at 11 a.m. Serving begins at 11:30. If you have special dietary restrictions, please let the club know when you make your reservation.

WOWT Channel Six is our partner for the debate. The moderator will be Channel Six anchor/reporter Brian Mastre. WOWT will record the debate and make it available for public viewing on various platforms.

Parking is suggested at the DoubleTree parking garage. It’s free for OPC members, who should bring their tickets to the club for validation.
With a bachelor’s and doctorate in finance, Dr. Joanne Li is highly attuned to costs, particularly when it comes to her university’s affordability for a diverse range of students.

Participants at the July 21 Noon Educational Forum heard Dr. Li’s strategic plans to achieve more graduations more efficiently, while positioning the University of Nebraska Omaha as an economic catalyst for the city and state with nationwide impact.

Dr. Li is UNO’s 16th chancellor, having just completed her inaugural year July 1. She is the first woman of color to serve as UNO’s chancellor and the first Asian American in the University of Nebraska System to hold an executive leadership role. Born in Hong Kong, she came to UNO from Florida International University, where she was dean of the business college.

Her positivity and passion encompass both UNO and her hometown. Praising UNO’s “spectacular” people, highly ranked programs, and expanded research through efforts such as the NCITE (National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology and Education) Center of Excellence, Dr. Li asserted, “UNO is ready for the world; is the world ready for UNO?”

Of UNO’s 15,000-plus students, 40 percent are the first in their families to attend college, and one in two students requires substantial financial support. It’s imperative these students “cross the finish line” to graduation, she said, as Nebraska is “bleeding talent” with a 1.9 percent unemployment rate.

To that end, Dr. Li recently introduced the Career Connect Internship Program, which guarantees paid internship positions for many UNO students through a 40-plus group of area companies and organizations. It gives students a direct path from college to career experience, while ensuring employers are able to hire the interns they need to support operations.

Dr. Li also outlined a two-step approach to increase graduation rates:

• Student performance, with a focus on degree completion, optimal time to degree, and first-year retention achieved through personal touch from caring faculty.

• Strategic recruitment, by introducing UNO to those in the community who have not considered higher education, as well as reaching out to students nationwide and internationally.

Committed to affordability and attainability, Dr. Li said the University of Nebraska has frozen tuition rates systemwide. And, through the NU System’s Open Education Resources (OER), free or low-cost digital resources available on day one of class are replacing traditional textbooks. OER is an extension of UNO faculty efforts to present courses and materials online, enabling the university to save more than $2.5 million for students over the past three years. Because of these efforts, she said, UNO is one of the nation’s most affordable institutions.

The most successful cities in the world have a public four-year, research-based university that’s fully integrated into the surrounding community. Dr. Li emphasized UNO’s importance to Omaha, citing a wide variety of accomplishments: thousands of course-required community volunteer hours; several top-rated programs, including a No. 1 nationally ranked Biomechanics Department and the highly sought-after Aviation Institute; nine faculty members recognized in the nation’s top 2 percent by a recent Stanford University Report; recognition as the recipient of the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll Award; and creation of the NCITE Center of Excellence, which assists with U.S. Department of Defense research and is strategically located just 15 minutes from STRATCOM.

As she continues actively learning about UNO’s long-term capital needs and plans – including consideration of a $100 million campaign for a new building on Scott Campus – Dr. Li is unshakeable in her vision.

“UNO will be an ecosystem of learning. Imagine you are in a mall on campus,” she described. “You walk past students operating 3-D printers and robots, then you hear beautiful music coming from the campus radio station, then you see English, psychology and IT majors supporting national security while studying terrorists’ speeches at NCITE.

“The future of higher education is where you put multi-disciplines together, promoting collaboration and organically creating intellectual curiosity. The biggest task is truly becoming part of the community, breaking down all barriers and inviting people to come and be part of it, so that everyone understands: ‘I belong.’”

By Anne Walsh
Communications Committee

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Guests experience a taste of Italy at August Winemaker’s Dinner

By Angela Arndt
Communications Committee

Approximately 40 guests attended the Winemaker’s Dinner on Friday, Aug. 26, featuring Guest Chef Silvia De Luca.

Originally from Milan, Italy, De Luca also lived in Parma, Italy, further developing her cooking skills.

Diners enjoyed a delicious taste of Italy with a five-course dinner complemented by six wines. De Luca shares her expertise and love of Italian cooking through her catering business and cooking classes.

Chef De Luca and the OPC staff provided a tasty and enjoyable evening.

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A fun time was had by all at the wine dinner, including Chef Silvia De Luca and OPC Manager Christine Villamonte. Photo by Roger Humphries.
Club membership accounts have been in a bit of disarray for some members over the past two years due to COVID. Management and board volunteers are working toward bringing accounts up to date, including membership status. You may be contacted by management or one of the volunteers working on the membership update. If you have questions about your account, email opcchristine@gmail.com or call the club at 402-345-8008.

Now is the time to take advantage of your private club! We have so many events happening over the next several months. It is to your advantage to enjoy the restaurant, which offers great food and a very intimate dining experience. We are open Monday through Friday for lunch, and Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays for dinner. We also have a variety of special events, many of which are open to the public.

Please spread the word about the club. Like other restaurants, we have been hit hard by the pandemic. Tell your friends about the OPC! We have guest passes available for you to hand out to family and friends. It is a great opportunity to let people know about our unique rooftop restaurant. Many members have their favorites, including our signature Thunderbird Salad, Prime Rib, French Onion soup, and Peruvian Clam Chowder. The Club Rueben has been claimed to be of one of the best in town.

Our wine dinners are exceptional with great value! Look for the next one in October. And you can rent the club for your personal and business events — weddings, birthday parties, retirement celebrations, holiday parties, and more — with some of the best rental fees and menu prices in town. Members pay no rental fee for the room with minimum food and beverage purchase.

Check out our monthly calendar on the last page of this newsletter or the OPC website for upcoming events. We always have something going on for everyone.

See you at your club!

Steve Villamonte B.S. C.E.C.
Omaha Press Club Executive Director

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OTIS TWELVE</th>
<th>Octoberfest Winemaker’s Dinner</th>
<th>Evenings at the OPC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Face on the Ballroom Floor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 16, 2022</td>
<td>Oct. 7, 2022 • 6 p.m.</td>
<td>Special Dinner Menu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:30 p.m. social, no-host bar</td>
<td>Members $75 • Non-Members $85</td>
<td>Fridays and Saturdays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:30 p.m. dinner</td>
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<td>5:30 p.m. – 8 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Members $75 • Non-Members $85</td>
<td>Appetizer</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Beer Cheese &amp; Pretzel</td>
<td>Apricot Brie Encroute $15</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Wine or Beer</td>
<td>Artichoke Dip &amp; Croustade $12</td>
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<td>Amuse</td>
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<td>German Sausage with Gnoki</td>
<td>Amuse $5</td>
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<td>Wine or Beer</td>
<td>Peruvian Clam Chowder</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Salad</td>
<td>French Onion Soup</td>
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<td>OPC Thunderbird Salad</td>
<td>Salad $5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sorbet</td>
<td>OPC Thunderbird – Caesar</td>
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<td>Strawberry</td>
<td>Sorbet $3</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Wine</td>
<td>Strawberry</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dual Entrée</td>
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<td>OPC Signature Filet with</td>
<td>Entrée $35</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Maître D Butter</td>
<td>Filet Mignon Bordelaise</td>
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<td></td>
<td>&amp; Fresh Salmon Veronique</td>
<td>New York Steak Maître D’Hotel</td>
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<td>Asparagus</td>
<td>Prime Rib Au jus – Club Steak</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Risotto Arancini</td>
<td>$25</td>
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<td>Dessert</td>
<td>Chicken Marsala – Chicken Piccata</td>
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<td>Chocolate Mousse Swan</td>
<td>Fresh Alaskan King Salmon (Piccata or Beurre Blanc)</td>
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<td>Risotto Pilaf or Twice-Baked Potato</td>
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<td>Asparagus Bundle</td>
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<td>Dessert $8</td>
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<td>Chocolate Souffle or Cheesecake</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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Events

Thursday, Sept. 1
(and every Thursday)
Prime Rib Night
5:30 p.m. - 8 p.m.

Sept. 2-3
(and every Friday
and Saturday)
Special Dinner Menu
5:30 p.m. - 8 p.m.

Monday, Sept. 5
Labor Day, club closed

Thursday, Sept. 15
Noon Education Forum
Dr. Lindsay Huse
Douglas County health director
11:30 a.m. lunch, $19
Noon to 1 p.m. program

Friday, Sept. 16
Face on the Barroom Floor
Otis Twelve
5:30 p.m. social, 6:30 p.m. dinner, 8 p.m. roast
Members $75, non-members $85

Saturday, Sept. 17
Journalists of Excellence
Hall of Fame Dinner
5:30 p.m. social, 6:30 p.m. dinner
Members $65, non-members $75

Friday, Sept. 30
Quarterly minimum deadline

Friday, Oct. 7
Octoberfest
Winemaker’s Dinner
6 p.m. hors d’oeuvres, 6:30 p.m. dinner
Members $75, non-members $85

Thursday, Oct. 13
Congressional Debate
11:30 a.m. lunch
Noon to 1 p.m. debate
$19, open to the public

Thursday, Oct. 27
Noon Education Forum
UNO Athletic Director
Adrian Dowell
11:30 a.m. lunch, $19
Noon to 1 p.m. program

Thursday, Nov. 3
Face on the Ballroom Floor
Othello Meadows
Members $75, non-members $85
5:30 p.m. social, 6:30 p.m. dinner

Thursday, Nov. 10
Face on the Ballroom Floor
Gov. Pete Ricketts
Invitation only

Are you looking for a perfect party setting? A lunch surrounded by brilliance? A dinner your guests will always remember? Keep the OPC in mind.

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

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