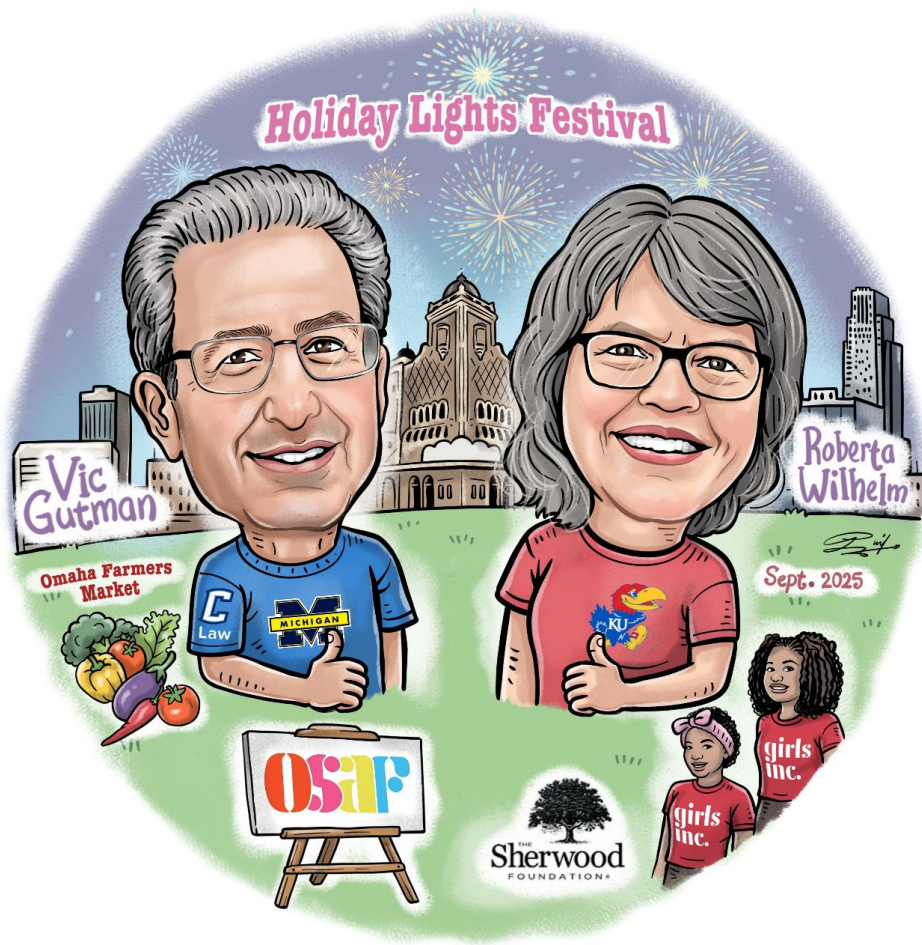




Face roast for Gutman, Wilhelm is double the fun

By Joshua Gear

Communications Committee

A dynamic duo of Omaha business and community development spent the evening of Sept. 25 at the Omaha Press Club, receiving a rare gift for their hard work – a good old-fashioned roasting. The event honored Vic Gutman and Roberta Wilhelm, a pair whose outstanding work and passion have powered nonprofits and businesses for decades.

Setting off the celebration was Emiliano Lerda, the CEO and co-founder of Elevator Co-Warehousing+Community. The event's emcee remarked on meeting the couple, having encountered Wilhelm through her husband.

"Usually, when you know Vic, people just write you off by association, so thank you, Roberta, for not doing that!" Lerda said. Recalling how a Catholic man from Argentina

became friends with a Jewish man from New Jersey, Lerda said their connection was automatic.

"I got to know Vic like most people did – by arguing with him," Lerda said before celebrating Wilhelm's passions for colorful language and colorful illustrations.

And turning to Roberta: "People say she should perhaps publish her doodles in a book. It would undoubtedly outsell anything Vic has ever written or spoken," Lerda said before celebrating the couple's accomplishments.

"Together, they're two of the most incredible, kind, funny, amazing people in Omaha," Lerda said.

Next, the couple's friend and associate, Emily Mwaja from the Sherwood Foundation, stepped to the mic. Sherwood's director of capacity building has worked with Roberta and Vic on a number of occasions over the past two decades before becoming collaborators at Sherwood.

"Roberta has been begging for money in this community for so long!" Mwaja said. "Finally, her bestie Susie (Buffett, Sherwood Foundation founder) came to her and said, 'Do you need a job?'"

Mwaja brought several items from Wilhelm's office, adorned with hilarious, profanity-laced sayings she's known to spout.

Next, she turned her attention to Gutman, remarking how he fell for his wife during her time leading the Rose Theater.

"Nothing says desperate like working for your crush and still being the least-favorite contractor," Mwaja said, before welcoming the couple's grandson Jamal to the microphone as a surprise guest, using his familial knowledge to crack jokes about them both.

"I know them better than anybody!" Jamal told the room, setting up his thoughts first on his grandmother.

"Grandma was like, 'girls are the world' and was working at Girls Inc. like, 'girl power, girls rule,'" Jamal said. "Meanwhile, she's got seven grandsons! Ain't no girl power at that family reunion."

Jamal then turned to his grandfather, talking about his busy days leading operations like the Farmer's Market, Holiday Lights Festival and Summer Arts Festival.

“Even though he was busy, we never had to second-guess who he loved the most,” Jamal said. “It was always... his dogs.” With a heartfelt comment celebrating the pair, the young roaster turned the mic back to Mwaja.

“Thank you for investing in making Omaha a cooler and more vibrant city,” Mwaja told the honored couple. “Thank you for always being in my corner and supporting the work I do. Your mentorship has meant the world to me.”

Next, Julie Walker took the stage. The Rose Theater managing director played down her theatrical day job, cutting straight to the jokes.

“I spent all day in business planning, so I'm going to divide everyone up into groups,” Walker said. “There's sticky notes on the table. Share your thoughts and make your notes.” Having worked with the couple for a number of years, she commented on their celebrations of women in the work force.

“Roberta taught everyone to make women strong, smart and bold. You know who took that advice to heart? – Vic Gutman,” Walker told the room. “He’s surrounded himself with strong, smart and amazing women, present company included.”

Remarking on their work together, Walker took the opportunity to thank Gutman and Wilhelm.

“I'm happy to roast Vic, and I'm happy to toast Roberta,” Walker said. “Roberta is who I want to be when I grow up. Vic absolutely deserves some roasting.”

Finally, Face on the Barroom Floor Chair Roger Humphries headed to the front of the room to introduce the couple’s official artwork. The colorful Face features nods to the pair’s educational backgrounds and joint efforts creating cultural and community touchstones in Omaha, including the Rose, Summer Arts, Farmer’s Market and Holiday Lights.

Then Gutman and Wilhelm took center stage at the gathering, thanking the guests and taking turns to poke fun at the night’s roasters, before closing their remarks with one missed opportunity.

“If you really wanted to provide this group entertainment, you would have had Roberta and I roast each other!” Gutman told the room. “It would have been brutal.”

Here's a description of the caricature of Vic Gutman and Roberta Wilhelm, the 183rd Face on the Barroom Floor:

For the past 50 years, Vic Gutman and Roberta Wilhelm have gone about their business, managing a variety of special events and nonprofits, with one goal in mind – to make our community a better place to live.

They first met when working at The Rose Theater, so the artist has drawn the theater in the background. They tied the knot in 1998.

Through his work with Vic Gutman & Associates, Vic has been the master of the special event. He started the Omaha Summer Arts Festival in 1975. The festival celebrated its 50th and final event last summer, so the artist included a sign on an easel with the OSAF logo.

Above the couple are fireworks filling the sky from the Holiday Lights Festival, another Gutman production. To the left of Vic are a bunch of fresh vegetables from the Omaha Farmers Market – yes, another Gutman special event.

Vic and Roberta are decked out in T-shirts depicting their college alma maters – Gutman got his undergraduate degree at the University of Michigan and his law degree from Creighton University. Wilhelm received both her undergraduate degree in theater and her master's degree in acting and directing from the University of Kansas.

Roberta's first job out of school was at the Emmy Gifford Children's Theater, now The Rose. She worked there for 20 years, including the last six years as executive director. For the past two years, Roberta has been serving as director of capacity building at Sherwood Foundation. She is probably best known for her work at Girls Inc., where she worked for 19 years and served as executive director.

The artist has included the Sherwood Foundation logo as well as two beautiful young ladies wearing their Girls, Inc. T-shirts.

So, there you have it, the artist's depiction of Vic Gutman and Roberta Wilhelm – the 183rd Face on the Barroom Floor – a great addition to the floor of the Omaha Press Club!

