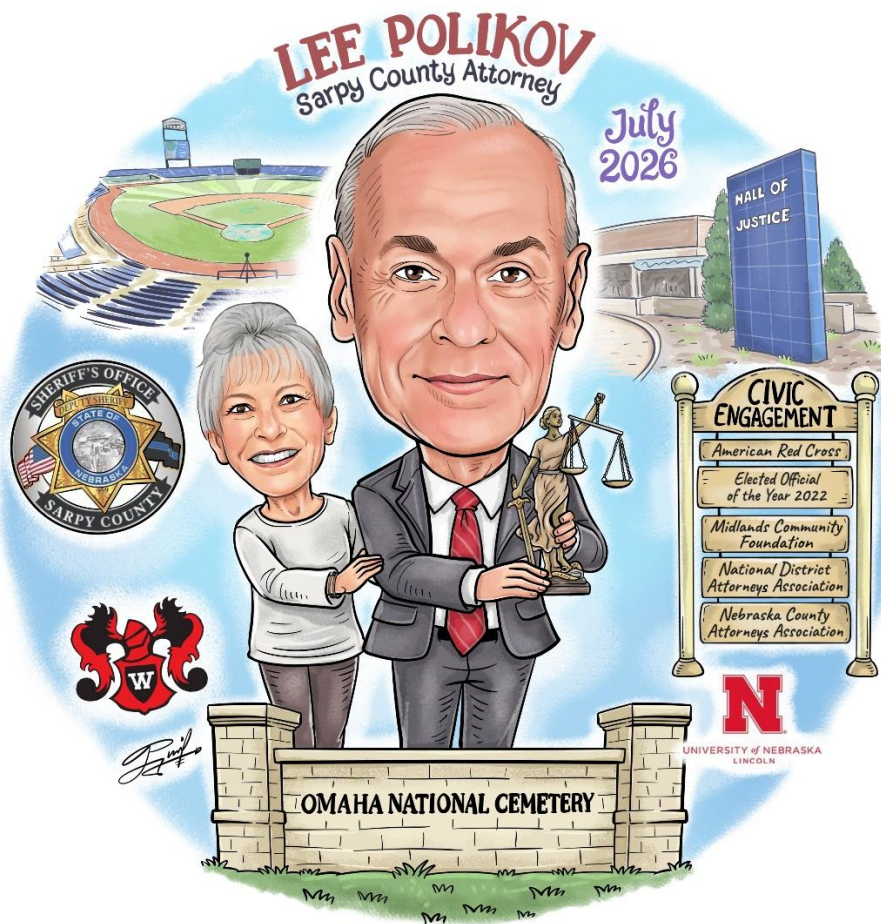




Polikov learns law and order doesn't prevail at Omaha Press Club roast

Longtime Sarpy County attorney is 187th Face on Barroom Floor

By Tom O'Connor, Communications Committee

For 53 years, Lee Polikov has been bringing law and order to Sarpy County. However, as the 187th Face on the Barroom Floor, he learned very quickly that law and order fly out the window when one is being roasted at the Omaha Press Club.

The laughs began immediately when the Rev. Steven Boes, former CEO of Boys Town, delivered his opening prayer and inadvertently referred to the honoree as Don Kleine, the Douglas County attorney.

Bob Batt, retired executive vice president for the Nebraska Furniture Mart, served as emcee for the event. He started his remarks by honoring his late grandmother, Rose Blumkin, the legend who helped build NFM into the powerhouse it is today.

Blumkin, who was honored as the OPC's 35th Face in 1987, always preached there would be a sale starting tomorrow. Batt flipped over his necktie to reveal the word SALE in large letters. Then, the fun began.

Batt, Face No. 124 in 2010, said he and Polikov had been friends for about 55 years and Lee was one of his best men "at my latest wedding."

"It's a tough job being county attorney," Batt said. "Everyone either loves you or hates you." Thanks to his close friendship with Polikov, he said, "I've had prosecutorial immunity in Sarpy County for the past 27 years."

Jeff Davis, retired Sarpy County sheriff, said, "Lee came to work early every day – early afternoon." He said that Polikov had studied hypnotism and had even used it once to procure a statement from a suspect. On a kinder note, he praised Polikov as someone who "always stuck up for the underdog."

Jay Lerner, president and founder of the Lerner Company, said he first met Polikov in 2002 when he was developing Shadow Lake Towne Center in Sarpy County.

"Lee took it as a personal mission that I never got too comfortable – he always had something for me to do," said Lerner, who admitted he had never stepped foot in the OPC before.

Two-hour cigar smoking sessions with Polikov helped Lerner see a side of Lee that most people never see. "He has made Sarpy County a better place," Lerner said. You can be tough without taking yourself too seriously."

Rose Ann Shannon, retired news director at KETV (Ch. 7), called Polikov a "died-in-the-wool Republican."

In the spirit of our current president, she said Polikov intends to tear down the Sarpy County jail and "build a big, beautiful ballroom." Polikov's nickname for Shannon is "fake news."

With Shannon's husband, Phil Johnson, a former photographer at the Omaha World-Herald, serving as her assistant, Shannon proceeded to unveil three blow-up photos featuring Polikov:

- Sitting next to Sen. Bernie Sanders – the photo begs the question, Shannon said, "Is Lee Polikov a socialist?"
- Next to Sheriff Andy Griffith with Polikov's face superimposed over Deputy Barney Fife (Don Knotts) – Shannon said Sarpy County is "a lot like Mayberry."
- Swimming in the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool with a piece of algae on his head – Shannon, who is a member of the OPC Hall of Fame, linked Polikov to the controversial 300-foot gash in the reflecting pool.

Martie Cordaro, president of the Omaha Storm Chasers, called Polikov “one of the most determined people you will ever meet...he always makes sure everyone in the room understands his point and knows that he is right.” He added that most attorneys bill by the hour, Polikov bills “by his opinion – whether you ask for it or not...he refuses to take no for an answer.”

To help deal with the pressures of being around Polikov, Cordaro said Lee’s wife of 50 years, Terry Calek, has grown to appreciate long instrumental musical pieces. It allows her to block out her husband, while imagining that she’s listening to Mannheim Steamroller.

Cordaro, Face No. 179 in 2024, praised Polikov, who was one of the key negotiators in helping Sarpy County become the home for the Storm Chasers, for “keeping baseball in our town.” He also cited Polikov’s focus on mental health – “when people are in their darkest hour, you are there.”

Gil Cohen, executive vice president of sales and marketing for Omaha Magazine, began by saying, “We’re so glad to have Don Kleine with us tonight.”

Polikov has been around so long, Cohen said, that “Wyatt Earp was his first boss and Nebraska was still a territory.” Like Barney Fife, Cohen said Polikov, who was chief deputy in Sarpy County for 26 years prior to becoming county attorney, carried an “unloaded gun with a single bullet in his pocket.”

He said Polikov loves to use his legal skills in everyday life. When watching Law & Order on television, Polikov has been known to say, “Objection – that’s not how the chain of custody works.” When Lee is ordering food at the McDonald’s counter, he begins by saying, “May I approach.”

Cohen said people love to receive mail, but nobody wants to hear from Lee – he sends subpoenas.

More than 100 people attended the roast including notables such as Rep. Don Bacon, Nebraska Lt. Gov. Joe Kelly, John Reisz, chief deputy county attorney for Sarpy County, Jack Stark, regent for University of Nebraska, and Mark Pettit, former news anchor for KMTV (Ch. 3) who now lives in Atlanta. Pettit worked closely with Polikov on the case of serial killer John Joubert IV, who was arrested in Sarpy County in 1983. Pettit has written three books about the Joubert case.

Polikov thanked those in attendance. He said to Bacon, “Since we’ll both be out of work at the end of the year – let’s talk later.” His roasters, he quipped, “will be appearing at the Funny Bone.”

He concluded by saying, “Remember – anything said here tonight is absolutely inadmissible in court.”

Artist's description of Lee Polikov's Face caricature

Lee Polikov has been a key player in Sarpy County for more than five decades and has been a driving force in helping Sarpy County become the state's fastest growing county.

Not only has Lee served as Sarpy County attorney for the past 27 years, he also has worked tirelessly behind the scenes to build the community. He is pictured holding the scales of justice.

Two of his biggest achievements were being a key negotiator in helping Sarpy County become the home for the Omaha Storm Chasers and Werner Park and serving on the committee that made the Omaha National Cemetery possible in Sarpy County.

The artist features Werner Park on the left side of the drawing, while Lee and his wife of 50 years, Terry Calek, are standing in front of the entry sign to the Omaha National Cemetery. On the right side of the drawing you can see the Sarpy County Hall of Justice, where Lee has worked the past 53 years.

An Omaha native, Lee is a graduate of Westside High School and earned his undergraduate and law degrees at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The artist has included the Westside crest and the UNL logo on the drawing.

Prior to becoming Sarpy County attorney, Lee served as chief deputy in Sarpy County for 26 years. On the left side of the drawing, you can see a badge for the Sarpy County Sheriff's Office.

Civic engagement has been a key part of Lee's career, so the artist has put together a display listing some of Lee's top achievements. The list includes:

- the American Red Cross, which Lee served as chair of the Donor Recruitment Committee for a number of years;
- His award as Elected Official of the Year in 2022 given by the Sarpy County Chamber of Commerce for his involvement in innovative initiatives such as Teen Court, Alcohol Diversion, Mental Health Diversion, and Wellness Court;
- The Midlands Community Foundation, an organization that supports philanthropic, educational, and community-driven programs that benefit Sarpy and Cass Counties and the surrounding region – Lee continues to serve as a longtime board member for this foundation;
- The National District Attorneys Association – Lee has been a member of this association for more than 20 years and served a three-year term as vice president; and
- The Nebraska County Attorneys Association – Lee served two terms as president of this association.

So, there you have it – the artist's rendition of Lee Polikov, the 187th Face on the Barroom Floor – a true star in our community's law enforcement efforts and a tremendous addition to our illustrious Faces on the Barroom Floor.