

NEWS

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A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

By Dr. Robert Meyers
OPC President



Dr. Robert Meyers

As my term as president of the board of directors for the Omaha Press Club nears its conclusion, I hope I can adequately express my gratitude for the confidence the board showed in me by electing me to the position.

Of course, being president of the Omaha Press Club is not as difficult as it is in some organizations, because the members of the board, committee chairs and the club managers do such a great job in their positions. These dedicated people work to ensure that our club provides excellent opportunities for learning, for serving and for protecting the principles of the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States.

Learning opportunities are offered via special programs like the Noon Forums and special events like the First Amendment Night a couple of years ago. Recognitions of noted Nebraskans are provided by the Face on the Barroom Floor. Support for the Omaha Press Club Foundation allows that group to

provide scholarships to aspiring journalists, helping to assure our access to a free press. The Hall of Fame helps recognize journalists who have demonstrated their commitment to journalistic ideals over their careers.

Those working with each of the committees that ensure these programs are maintained are the mainstays of the Omaha Press Club. In addition to the special events the committees provide, the management and staff make sure that from the 22nd floor, members are able to enjoy the amazing views of Omaha while enjoying a delicious lunch or an amazing dinner.

Members and non-members alike can take advantage of this spectacular venue for family gatherings, parties, wedding receptions and other special events. Additionally, members can be assured they have the opportunity to secure reservations for special events like Mother's Day and Valentine's Day, and to experience other events like wine dinners and bourbon tastings.

Our executive director and events manager, Steve and Christine, along with longtime staff members Michael, Ron and Bill, provide quality service and ensure each member is treated to a respectful, hospitable atmosphere.

During my time as president, we have

been able to secure better access to the building and to the elevators, and to have direct express access to the club on the 22nd floor. These welcome changes have made it more convenient for people to attend the various events at the club, and most importantly have provided accessibility for those who require accommodation.

We are excited that NuStyle Development, the new owners of the building, are excited and interested in maintaining the Omaha Press Club in its current location. I have created a special committee to continue to work with the new owners as the building is transitioned into a residential community. I will chair, and the following board members will serve on that committee: Angella Arndt, Dale Ervin, Mike McKnight, Jeremy Maskel, Woody Bradford and Hunter Samuels.

The committee will continue to communicate progress with the board of directors and the Press Club management as we strive to achieve a workable arrangement that is beneficial to OPC and NuStyle. It is our goal that after more than 50 years at this location we will continue to provide the quality experiences and opportunities for our members for years to come.

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Annual Meeting will be Jan. 16

By Gary Willis
Communications Committee

Mark your calendars for Thursday, Jan. 16, the date of the Omaha Press Club Annual Meeting.

A 5:30 p.m. social featuring complimentary hors d'oeuvres will precede the 6 o'clock call-to-order. The meeting will include reports from the outgoing president, Dr. Robert Meyers, and the OPC's executive director, Steve Villamonte, plus the annual reports from committee chairs.

Also on the agenda is the election of 2025 club officers, including:

President: Mike McKnight, WOWT

President-Elect: Todd Andrews, Salvation Army

Treasurer: Hunter Samuels, Ronald McDonald House

Secretary: Jeremy Maskel, Omaha Public Schools

Immediate Past President: Dr. Robert Meyers, retired

Board members up for election:

Liz Hruska

Joshua Gear

Angella Arndt

Rod Howe

Roger Humphries

Board members continuing their terms are Allen Beermann, Woody Bradford, Todd Lemke and Bridget Weide Brooks.

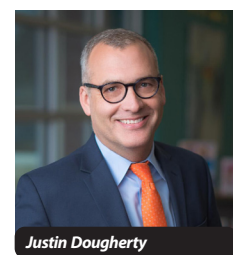
For those who wish to vote but are unable to attend the meeting, a proxy ballot is on page 5. Please mail the ballot to the Press Club or email it to opchristine@gmail.com.

OPS leader will address January Forum

Omaha Public Schools Supt. Matthew Ray will be the featured speaker at the Noon Forum on Jan. 7.

Ray, who has been with the district for 28 years, assumed the top OPS position in July after serving as interim superintendent for the 2023-24 school year.

He began his OPS career as a student teacher at Ashland Park-Robbins Elementary.



Justin Dougherty

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Honored as 180th Face on the Barroom Floor

Russells provide blueprint for successful marriage, making our community a better place

By Tom O'Connor

Communications Committee

For 54 years, Rick and Carol Russell have been united in marriage. It's the perfect example of how opposites can attract and succeed – when each spouse gives the other space to do their own thing.

The Omaha super couple was roasted at the Omaha Press Club on Dec. 5, as they were honored as the 180th Face on the Barroom Floor. The ongoing theme of the evening was how they work so well together to make our community a better place.

Rick, who has been a key executive in the family business, Millard Lumber Inc., for more than 50 years, said, "We work good as a couple – not 24/7."

Carol said, "We've been married 54 years, because I stayed out of the lumber business. I schmooze well. Rick is off to the side." The Russells cancel each other's vote in some elections, but they also stand side-by-side at multiple events nearly every week.

Dr. Laura Jana served as emcee for the event. She made it clear that the Russells were too nice to roast. "As a pediatrician, I never want to make fun of anyone," she said. "Nice is rarely funny."

Nancy Williams, managing partner, Block 27 Consulting and founder/former CEO of No More Empty Pots, began her roast by saying she would not be as soft on the Russells as Dr. Jana. "I can be irreverent, and I can use a lot of expletives," she said. "My favorite expletive is the F-bomb."

Williams didn't dig into her expletive bag, but rather opted to give her observations of being with the Russells. She tossed out several terms to describe Carol – animated, super connector, supportive, encouraging, doting grandmother.

She called Rick "a man of few words," adding "he is one of the most attentive spouses I've ever seen....I've never seen them share disparaging comments about each other."

As an African-American, Williams praised the Russells for their strong belief in racial equity and justice for all. With more people like the Russells, Williams said, "Omaha might be ready to move the needle" in its racial relations.

playing Pac-Man."

Rowe described how he and Russell attended a conference to hear a man named Bernie Marcus discuss his ideas for the future of the lumber business. Rowe said Rick's reaction to the presentation was, "There is no way this is going to work. It's too dark, too junky."

Turned out, Bernie Marcus's idea was to create a company called Home Depot. An initial small investment would have been worth tens of millions of dollars today. Rowe needed Russell, "I'd call that a miss."

Rowe shared that Rick Russell has a passion for photography and even has a photograph on display at Gallery 1516, an Omaha art gallery. Russell likes photographing birds, such as sandhill cranes and great horned owls. His first owl encounter was in the 1970s when the northern spotted owl restricted logging in the Pacific Northwest.

Rowe said it's not uncommon for Russell to exclaim around 2:30 or 3 p.m., "The bald eagles are flying out at Chalco. I've got to go."

Rowe also had commentary directed at Carol Russell, saying, "She's been on more boards than we've ever had in stock at the lumber yard... with all her experience with 'nonprofits,' Carol should consider joining the Millard Lumber board."

The roast concluded with family insights from the three Russell children – Joel Russell, Sara Boyd and Mark Russell.

Boyd, who is founder of Ascend Advisory, a company that aims to help others reach their full potential, called herself "the middle child – the most well-adjusted." Boyd is former president of the Omaha Community Foundation.

She remarked, "I'm so funny, that my son just got up and went to the bathroom" right before she began her roast.

Calling her mother "a social butterfly," Boyd said she thought it was a routine part of childhood "to have to stuff envelopes for Girls, Inc."

Joel Russell, the oldest son, serves as CEO



The roasters and honorees, from left: Nancy Williams, Rick Russell, Sara Boyd, Joel Russell, Mark Russell and Don Rowe. In front: Carol Russell and Dr. Laura Jana. Caricature by Jeff Koterba.



Rick and Carol Russell. Photos by Monica Sempeck

The temperature in the room started to rise with the third roaster of the evening – Don Rowe, a member of the Omaha City Council and a longtime associate at Millard Lumber.

Rowe detailed how Millard Lumber purchased Hoppe Lumber in Lincoln in 1987. The merger resulted in frequent business meetings between Rick Russell and John Hoppe Jr. Their fathers were both in the lumber business and were good friends. John and Rick traveled to many out-of-town industry events. The trips, Rowe said, were "more about drinking Scotch whisky and

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of Millard Lumber. He noted that it's not uncommon for his parents to attend evening functions six or seven nights a week with all their community activities.

"Rick's idea of a vacation," Joel said, "is when Mom schedules a surgery...then he doesn't have to go out six or seven nights a week."

Joel corrected Rowe's earlier comment that Rick likes to leave work early around 2:30 or 3 p.m. for special meetings or to tend to his photography hobby. "It's more like 11 a.m.," he said.

The roast concluded with youngest son, Mark, who is Millard Lumber's sales market manager for the Lincoln area. Mark's antics as a child showed his parents "what parenting really meant and made my dad grow bald."

He learned all about what it means to volunteer, or as he calls it "volun-told." One benefit, Mark said, was when his mother would volunteer at Prevent Blindness, it meant he could go to Family Fun Center.

With eyes tearing and voice cracking, Mark wrapped up the roast by saying, "My parents mean so much to me. Love you guys."

Artist's description of Russell caricature

Face on the Barroom Floor artist, Jeff Koterba, depicted Rick and Carol Russell as builders -- not only with lumber, but as builders and visionaries for the community. They touch lives -- not only in Millard, but in Omaha and beyond.

The family's foundation is Millard Lumber, and the Russells are pictured next to the company's iconic logo while holding blueprints and yardsticks. They're also surrounded by stacks of lumber labeled "Faith, family, and community."

Two forklifts are carrying stacks of lumber, moving here and there, yet coming together for a common cause. Koterba said, "It's all about their strong foundation to help others."

Rather than try to list the countless organizations which have benefitted from the volunteer and philanthropic efforts of the Russells, Koterba portrayed a heart filled with donations. He also included a wallet from Warren Buffett, which Carol Russell used to raise \$270,000 for Girls, Inc.

In the distance, Koterba shows Estes Park, a preferred vacation spot for the Russell family, plus a mountain range with two flags representing their favorite schools -- Nebraska and Creighton.

Omaha's newest volleyball team to address Feb. 5 Noon Forum

By Gary Willis

Communications Committee

League One Volleyball's (LOVB) goal is to build volleyball into the next major American sports league. Suzie Fritz, coach of the Omaha team in the new league, and players Jaali Winters and Jordan Larson will speak at the Feb. 5 Noon Forum.

League One will be the second professional volleyball team in Omaha. The Supernovas of the Pro Volleyball Federation (PVF) debuted in Omaha a year ago and won the league championship. Both the Supernovas and League One Omaha began practicing a few weeks ago for their January season openers.

Suzie Fritz, an NCAA veteran, has a storied career. She was most recently the associate head coach at Arkansas after 25 years as head coach of Kansas State. In her nearly 30 years as a volleyball coach, she led nationally ranked teams to 18 NCAA tournament appearances, with her players including 18 All-American selections, 29 All-Region selections, and 60 All SEC/Big12 selections.

Over the past decade, she also coached three AVCA Midwest Freshman of the Year and two Big 12 Freshman of the Year recipients. She also served as a coach for the USA Women's Collegiate program, appointed to a coaching role with the USA A2 team in 2006, again in 2009 as a head coach. In 2023, she also served as a talent evaluator for the USA Women's Open Tryout. In 2023, Fritz's team represented the United States at the World University Games in Kazan, Russia.

Winters, an outside hitter from Ankeny, Iowa, is a four-time All-American from Creighton University, where she remains the program's most decorated athlete ever. She is the first player in the past 20 years to be named two-time Big East Championship MVP and still holds more than 80 BlueJay volleyball records. Her international experi-

ence includes competing on the U.S. Volleyball Collegiate National Team in 2017 and playing professionally with multiple clubs in Spain, Greece and France after graduating from Creighton.

Larson, a Hooper, Nebraska product and Premier Nebraska alumna, is one of the most decorated American volleyball players in history. She made her mark on Cornhusker volleyball as a three-time All American and 2006 NCAA champion, earning the nick-

name "Governor" due to her popularity in the state. Most recently she has been an assistant coach at Nebraska.

Larson joined the U.S. Women's National Team in

2009 and has led the U.S. to four Olympic medals, including the team's first-ever gold at Tokyo 2020, where she earned MVP and Best Outside Hitter honors. At Paris 2024, she helped the U.S. claim silver, becoming the first American indoor athlete to win four Olympic medals.

Larson won gold at the FIVB World Championship (2014), Volleyball Nations League (2018, 2019, 2021), and the Club World Championship (2015, 2016). She has played in Puerto Rico, Russia, Turkey and Italy and with Athletes Unlimited during her 15-year pro career.

The Press Club presentation begins at noon and continues until 1 p.m. Lunch, at \$19 per person, is served beginning at 11:30 a.m. Reservations can be made on the Press Club website; click on reservations for all events (right side RSVP tab) or call the club at (402) 345-8008. Non-Press Club members are welcome to attend.



A MESSAGE FROM THE MANAGER

Happy New Year!

Looking back at the club and 2024, we have had some great events.

In addition to the always memorable evenings honoring the Faces on the Barroom Floor, here are some of the top events I summed up for both lunch and dinner hours: the whiskey tasting, our quarterly wine dinners with pairings, the Easter, Mother's Day and Santa Brunches (with Santa and Mrs. Claus), all with live music and so much food that you wanted to go home and take a wonderful nap you earned.

Do not forget 2024's informative forums



Christine Villamonte

and that lively congressional debate.

Our annual Hall of Fame event always brings out the best of the best in journalism, their friends and families. Great memories are built, with enjoyable networking for all.

Touching base on the recently announced First National building sale that is expected to be finalized in March:

The Omaha Press Clubb has called the main bank home for more than 50 years. Many stories have surfaced of where we were prior . . . nowhere. Club members for years had gathered in backyards and backrooms of hotels and bars.

Since the Main Bank building opened in 1971 at 1620 Dodge St., we have called the top floor home.

For the past couple of years, the building has been renovated, floors emptied, and

hallways becoming less busy. Changing times have given employees the option of working from home, requiring less workspace.

Under the new owners, NuStyle Development, our building will become apartments, lots of them. Omaha World-Herald reporter Henry Cordes, a longtime OPC member, recently wrote an article detailing the plans to convert the building into 300 apartments and commercial space.

The club will continue to occupy the 22nd floor. On page 1 of this newsletter, OPC President Bob Meyers discusses the creation of a club committee that will communicate and work with NuStyle

We are excited to keep our original home with our new landlords. We are here to stay!

-Christine Villamonte

President's story; continued from Page 1

I have been privileged to serve the Omaha Press Club as president during 2024 and am pleased to welcome Mike McKnight as our new president and Todd Andrews as president-elect for 2025. I know that Mike and Todd will serve with distinction and provide outstanding leadership to the board in the years ahead.

It is important to also recognize the service of two board of directors members who are retiring from the board following their years of service. Dale Ervin has served admirably as our treasurer, and Gary Willis has been a mainstay for years. Thanks to Dale and Gary for their service and commitment to the Omaha Press Club.

While I will continue my service as past president, I welcome the new leadership that Mike McKnight will provide as president of the board and Hunter Samuels as the incoming treasurer. As always, I continue to encourage our members to take advantage of the opportunities your membership provides and to invite your friends and neighbors to join us, and to become involved in one of the various committees the make the club function so efficiently.

Thank you for entrusting me with this distinctive honor.

Forum story; continued from Page 1

Ray was a district-wide substitute teacher before returning to Ashland Park-Robbins to teach fifth grade. After teaching, he served in various roles in Student and Community Services before becoming executive director of the department.

Ray became OPS board secretary in 2013. In 2018, he became chief of staff, a role which transitioned into deputy superintendent.

He was central in creating and adopting the OPS Strategic Plan of Action in 2020. The plan guides the district through 2025 and beyond.

Ray's leadership will continue a district-wide focus on four strategic priorities: academics, staff, financial accountability, and ethic of care.

Santa Brunch a merry time at OPC

Santa and Mrs. Claus were popular guests of honor at the Omaha Press Club's annual Santa Brunch on Dec. 15. Among the many youngsters greeting the visitors from the North Pole were Peter and Mary Kate Broderick.



Photo by Roger Humphries

HOW TO FIND US

**OMAHA PRESS CLUB
1620 DODGE STREET, 22ND FLOOR
OMAHA, NE 68102
402- 345-8008**

THE OMAHA PRESS CLUB IS IN THE FIRST NATIONAL BANK BUILDING (NOT THE TOWER) AT 1620 DODGE STREET IN THE HEART OF DOWNTOWN OMAHA. OUR LOCATION IS ADJACENT TO THE DOUBLETREE HOTEL.

PARKING: YOU MAY PARK IN THE DOUBLETREE GARAGE. ENTRANCES ARE FROM THE HOTEL DRIVEWAY OR FROM DODGE STREET BETWEEN 15TH AND 16TH STREETS.

CLUB ACCESS: FROM 7 A.M. TO 7 P.M., TAKE THE GARAGE ELEVATOR DOWN TO THE G (THE GROUND OR OMAHA PRESS CLUB) LEVEL AND FOLLOW THE SIGNS TO THE BANK BUILDING AND THE PRESS CLUB ELEVATORS.

IF ARRIVING AFTER 7 P.M. MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY OR ALL DAY ON THE WEEKEND, PRESS 2 IN THE GARAGE ELEVATOR, EXIT THE GARAGE AND WALK OUTSIDE TO THE BANK BUILDING ENTRANCE AT THE NORTHWEST CORNER OF THE 16TH AND DODGE INTERSECTION (LOOK FOR THE ATM AND FIRE HYDRANT).

AT THE DOORS, THERE IS A BLACK BOX. BUZZ IN AND SAY, "OMAHA PRESS CLUB." FOLLOW THE SIGNS STRAIGHT AHEAD THROUGH THE HALLWAY AND PAST THE SECURITY DESK TO THE ELEVATORS ON THE LEFT. ONLY TWO ELEVATORS GO ALL THE WAY TO THE TOP OR 22ND FLOOR, AND THEY ARE DEDICATED EXCLUSIVELY TO THE PRESS CLUB.

OPC MEMBER PROXY BALLOT

Members not attending the annual meeting on Jan. 16 may vote by returning the proxy ballot below to reach the Omaha Press Club by 4 p.m., Wednesday, Jan 15. See instructions below.

OFFICERS			BOARD OF DIRECTORS		
President			Angella Arndt	For	Against
Mike McKnight	For	Against	Joshua Gear	For	Against
President-Elect			Rod Howe	For	Against
Todd Andrews	For	Against	Liz Hruska	For	Against
Treasurer			Roger Humphries	For	Against
Hunter Samuels	For	Against			
Secretary					
Jeremy Maskel	For	Against			
Immediate Past President					
Dr. Robert Meyers					
 Board members continuing their terms:					
Allen Beermann, Woody Bradford, Todd Lemke, Bridget (Weide) Brooks					
Officers and board members assume office on Feb. 1, 2025					

Fax this completed ballot to 402-345-0114 or mail to the Omaha Press Club, 1620 Dodge St. 22nd Floor, Omaha, NE 68102-1561. Absentee ballots MUST be received by 4 p.m. Wednesday Jan. 15.

NOTE: *If you plan to attend the annual meeting, do not return this proxy ballot.*



2024 - 2025 Officers

Dr. Robert Meyers
President
Retired

Mike McKnight
President-Elect
WOWT

Dale Ervin
Treasurer
First National Bank

Jeremy Maskel
Secretary
Omaha Public Schools

Angella Arndt
Past President
Freelance Content Contributor

Board of Directors

(2023-2025)

Todd Andrews
Liz Hruska
Roger Humphries
Hunter Samuels
Gary Willis

Salvation Army
Catalyst Public Affairs Analyst
Roger Humphries Photography
Ronald McDonald House
NP Dodge Real Estate

(2024-2026)

Allen Beermann
Woody Bradford
Bridget (Weide) Brooks
Todd Lemke

Retired
Houghton Bradford Whitted
Image Building Communications
Omaha Publications

Communications Committee

Don Summerside • Gary Willis • Josh Gear
Roger Humphries • Tom O'Connor
Bridget (Weide) Brooks • Hunter Samuels
Todd Andrews • Jon Brooks • Angella Arndt
Anne Walsh • Sandra Tursi • Elaine Allen
Daisy Hutzell-Rodman

Committee Chairs

Communications Gary Willis, Angella Arndt
Education Dr. Robert Meyers
Executive Committee Dr. Robert Meyers, Angella Arndt, Jeremy Maskel and Dale Ervin
"Face on the Barroom Floor" Roger Humphries
Hall of Fame Hunter Samuels
Marketing / Membership Bridget (Weide) Brooks

OPC Foundation

Brian Norton
President
Melissa Matczak
First Vice President
Maria Marron
Second Vice President
Mike Holmes
Treasurer
Bridget (Weide) Brooks
Secretary
Henry Cordes
Past President

TRUSTEES
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John Chapman
Chris Christen
Lei Guo
Chris Machian
Tracie McPherson
Peggy Rupprecht
Wendy Townley
Matt Wynn
TRUSTEES EMERITUS
Elaine Allen
Steve Jordon
Howard K. Marcus

WE'RE ONLINE! READ YOUR OPC NEWSLETTER AT OMAHAPRESSCLUB.COM



Every Thursday
Prime Rib Night
5:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Tuesday, Jan. 7
Noon Forum
Omaha Public Schools
Supt. Matthew Ray

11:30 a.m. lunch, noon-1 p.m. speaker
\$19

Thursday, Jan. 16
OPC Annual Meeting
5:30 p.m. social, 6 p.m. meeting

Wednesday, Feb. 5

Noon Forum
League One Volleyball
Coach Suzie Fritz, players
Jaali Winters, Jordan Larson
11:30 a.m. lunch, noon-1 p.m. speaker
\$19

Friday, Feb. 14
Valentine's Day Dinner

Hours of Operation

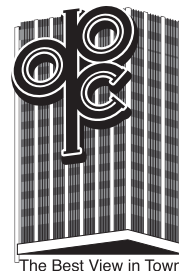
1620 Dodge St., Omaha NE 68102

LUNCH

Tuesday- Friday
11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Closed Mondays

DINNER

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



OMAHA PRESS CLUB STAFF

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NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

Sandra Tursi Graphics Editor
Tom O'Connor Proofreader
Don Summerside Copy Editor

**Submissions for the February issue
are due on or before January 20.**

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.