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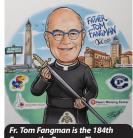
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Full house gives MUCH love to Father Tom

By Anne Walsh

Communications Committee

ow do roasters go "scorchedearth" on a beloved priest who's served Omaha communities with unending joy and comfort for 30 years? Turns out they don't – except



for a surprise speaker who once chased the honoree with a meat cleaver. More on that later.

A sold-out crowd attending the Oct. 30 event enshrining Rev. Tom Fangman as the 184th Face on the Barroom Floor heard plenty of witty zingers, though, with several roasters weaving hilarious tales of "the most connected person in Omaha."

The love was palpable, especially during an impromptu, club-wide chorus of "Happy Birthday" celebrating Fangman's 64th year. He's been pastor at St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Elkhorn, one of the state's largest, since 2016. He previously served several other parishes and nonprofits, including Sacred Heart Parish in Omaha, where he was CEO of CUES (Christian Urban Education Service) and foundation member of the Heart Ministry Center.

Kicking off the evening with a lighthearted mealtime prayer was Rev. Dave Korth, who succeeded Fangman as pastor of Sacred Heart. Declaring that "imitation is the highest form of flattery" in a spot-on impersonation, Korth's enactment of Fangman's mannerisms included arms swept heavenward, with dramatic pauses centered on the word "much."

'We thank you, we praise you for MUCH, because there is MUCH," he intoned. "We're grateful so that we can go forward with MUCH."

Talented emcee Nikki Boulay is a vocalist with the Finest Hour Band, voice actor and former radio personality. But she declared

she's best-known as Fangman's back-up singer.

'At weddings, he begins by turning to the bride and groom and says, 'Look at ya both; you look like you should be on the top of a wedding cake.' So tonight we're flipping the script - Fr. Tom, look at ya! You look like you should be on the Barroom Floor." Initially hesitant when asked to emcee the Face event, Boulay said, "I thought, 'a roast of Fr. Tom? What's next, a Mother Teresa

Asking for a quick show of hands with the question, "How many of you think you're Fr. Tom's best friend," Boulay surveyed the unanimous response and said, "You are so cute if you think you're the ones." And in what became a theme among the roasters regarding Fangman's penmanship, she observed, "Next thing you'll tell me is you can clearly read the last note he sent you."

Boulay said Fangman's wonderful qualities could never be summed up in one night, but his top three traits are kindness, uncanny

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Mayor Ewing reflects on first 100 days in office

'A city with a common vision'

By Katie Raine Thomas **Communications Committee**

maha Mayor John Ewing joined the Omaha Press Club for the "Mayor's Forum," marking his first 100 days in office with a clear message: Omaha's strength lies in unity, opportunity and collective vi-

Sworn in on June 9, Mayor Ewing unveiled his guiding philosophy - "one Omaha," an approach rooted in collaboration across every sector of the city. "I don't want a city as divided as the country," he told the audience. "We need a common vision - an opportunity to be the best city in America."

Ewing outlined an ambitious growth strategy that connects business, public, private and philanthropic partners, highlighting Omaha's \$4 billion in economic development tied to the downtown streetcar project. "My job is to do everything I can to make the

streetcar a success," he said, calling it a catalyst for innovation and mobility.

He also noted a \$30 million project at Creighton University, signaling continued confidence in Omaha's

future. "We're going to see the opportunities and seize them," Ewing affirmed. "After the pain comes investment - a better place to live."

Building a happier, stronger Omaha

Mayor Ewing's vision for a "happier Omaha" focuses on tackling challenges head-on – from homelessness and affordable housing to parks, infrastructure and economic resilience. With four town halls already planned, his administration is working to keep communication open and communities



Nov. 20 Noon Forum will feature Q.U.E.E.N.S. **Butterfly House founder**

By Gary Willis Communications Committee

Q.U.E.E.N.S Butterfly House is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing a safe and supportive home for



women who have been formerly incarcerated. The organization focuses on intentional peer support, relationship building, education, job readiness, family and child reunification, and comprehensive aftercare services.

Through these efforts, Q.U.E.E.N.S Butterfly House empowers its members referred to as, QUEENS, to become productive, selfsufficient community members and the best versions of themselves.

Join us Nov. 20 for an inspiring Noon

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memory and joy for life.

"You take kindness to a rare level: tenderness. Your ability to meet people in brutally difficult, raw and deeply private moments is something to behold," she said. "And you often speak of being with people in their 'holy moments' – I think everyone would agree it's you who make the moments holy."

Joe Lang, founding principal, RDG Planning & Design, said he's "only known" Fangman for 40 years, compared to other roasters' longer friendships. So, he consulted Chat GPT for more lowdown.

"I simply typed in, 'Write a short roast that's humorous about Fr. Tom,'" he said. "I didn't even type in 'Fangman from Omaha,

Nebraska,' and it started spitting out pages." After replacing toner and paper several times, Lang possessed three Fangman-based tomes:

- "Tommy the Early Years: Development of Social Graces," the tale of how he often invited half his Creighton Prep class home to party, somehow passing it off to his parents as "just a few students."
- "Midlife Crisis: Man of the Cloth, Life of the Party," in which a singular truism emerged: When you sing with conviction, pitch is optional.
- "Fr. Tom: A Peek Under the Cassock," the largest compilation highlighting his love of hamburgers, which he treats as a "reward, hobby and a warm-up snack before his workouts."

So deep is his quest for ground meat, Fangman elected to forgo the Face event's dual entrée of beef filet with maître d'hôtel butter and chicken marsala, in favor of a large hamburger surrounded by ketchup.

The Cassock compilation also covers Fangman's athleticism and fitness, which Lang describes as "Rubenesque." He recalled their early, competitive years on the Barrett's Barleycorn sand volleyball court, where their team name, "Fr. Hollywood's Kids," foreshadowed Fangman's vocation. Lang also described the pastor's love of ski-lift gondola rides, where unwitting passengers engage in conversation, and "by the time you get to the top, you've invited him to dinner; promised the use of your slope-side condo, and made a pledge to St. Patrick's Catholic Church building fund."

Boasting 50 years of friendship, Tenaska Associate Joe Finocchiaro spoke of Fangman's infinite capacity to create lasting friendships and love for great parties. "Tom was Snoop Dog before there was Snoop Dog," he said.

He saw firsthand Fangman's "takeover" of the University of Kansas. "We witnessed this unknown kid become one of the most well-connected coeds on campus. He knew everyone. Girls loved him, and no wonder. He spoke their language: fashion, pop trends, diets, gossip, soap operas, you name it. Guys loved him, too, because he was the go-to for finding us fraternity party dates we couldn't find for ourselves."

Finocchiaro described Fangman's frequent dietary failures, compounded by his under-the-radar runs to Vista Hamburgers in Lawrence. On one clandestine trip, his big, yellow Pontiac Bonneville became high-centered on the drive-through lane's concrete

The roasters and the honoree, from left: Joe Finocchiaro, Greg Boulay, Nikki Boulay, Joe Lang, Dennis Fangman, Meg Huerter Brudney, and Fr. Tom Fangman.

divider. He made a desperate call and numerous fraternity pledges responded, lifting his car off the barrier so Vista's drive-through could reopen.

"Tom is also a horrible singer, and he refuses to get the message. We've tried. On a caravan road trip to see Bruce Springsteen in Chicago, the Boss's catalog was playing nonstop, and so was Tom's annoying singing," he said. After several warnings, they pulled over and forced Fangman from the car. Mercifully, other friends trailing in the caravan picked up the vexed vocalist.

Longtime friend Meg Huerter Brudney began with a question: "How many people heard Tom come up and say, 'Oh my God I'm so glad you're here; you're my favorite table... but don't tell the other tables." Met with rousing applause, Brudney looked at the honoree and said, "I'm so on to you, Tom Fangman."

The head of school for Duchesne Academy of the Sacred Heart said she attended KU with Fangman, in the years when he was contemplating his calling. "So what do you

do when trying to discern a vocation? Some work at nonprofits, but not Tom; he worked at a very high-end, couture men's clothing store. Nothing prepares you to be a future priest more than Ralph Lauren polos."

He focused on becoming an archdiocesan priest, claiming he wanted to stay in Omaha with his loving family and friends, instead of being sent to other cities as required by the Jesuits. "But to be honest," Brudney said, "he simply wanted to skip that pesky vow of poverty."

During Fangman's first year in the seminary, she recalled attending a wedding in Chicago with him and a female friend. Leaving late, they decided to overnight in the Quad Cities, but every hotel was booked. So the trio shared a room, "no big deal, we were all friends," which resulted in a spiritual

lecture once Fangman arrived back in Omaha at St. Cecilia's Cathedral.

"He was ranting and talking about our ordeal to Fr. Mainelli, and Father said, 'Tom, you are studying to be a priest now; you cannot spend the night in a hotel with two single women," she said. "And Tom's quick response was, 'But Father, it was like Mary and Joseph, there was no room at the inn."

Greg Boulay, president and CEO of Pella Windows and Doors, noted the roast's emerging themes on Fangman's personality. "We've spent much of our adult lives fighting weight and rationalizing

everything we do; for me it's booze, for you it's Thousand Island dressing," said Boulay to Fangman. "You love dinner, especially the social part of dinner. We all know his phone blows up all the time, but when he's with you, he's with you."

Boulay called out Fangman's penmanship skills. "The whole writing thing is hilarious. All of us have received notes and cards from Tom, and my wife and I approach them like crossword puzzles. We do it because we don't want to get dementia.

"When I get a thank-you, I hand it to her and say, 'Do you want to take the first run at it?' Then I go pour a cup of coffee, come back in, and we'll go four down, eight across. Most of you can relate to that, can't you?"

Since he and his friends were not very athletic while at Creighton Prep, they decided to give music a try. Over the years, Boulay began piecing together musicians, mostly from out of town and including his sister Nikki (the roast's emcee), to form the highly successful band "Finest Hour."

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Fangman story; continued from Page 2

"But really, we became Tom Fangman's house band. I don't know who adopted who, but it morphed into the Sacred Heart festival, and then the St. Pat's festival," he said. Despite the low-paying, Fangman-initiated gigs, Boulay says the band loves the pastor.

"Matt Wallace said it best, 'That padre, anytime he calls and wants us to do something, we're in,'" said Boulay. "But Tom, Finocchiaro's right: you suck at

singing."

And now for the surprise speaker who brandished a meat cleaver: Tom's own brother, Denny Fangman, visiting from Arizona. Denny agreed to attend the Face event, but only if he could be a roaster.

"I didn't want to come just to listen to other people. You guys were all real nice to Tom. I've never seen a roast like this; most people get torn apart, so that's what I've prepared," Denny said. "I've got a little different perspective – the agony of growing up with the guy. It kind of feels like

my birthday to roast Tommy; I've been waiting for this my entire life."

Denny's childhood narrative is as follows: When Tom was babysitting him, he started "pushing his buttons," so Denny picked up a meat cleaver and gave chase. Around they went, until Tom fled to his bedroom and locked the door – whereupon Denny began hacking at it. "And when I finished, all I heard from behind the door was, 'You are in

sooo muuuch trouble!""

They obviously patched things up and in later years, Tom confided to Denny that he was thinking about becoming a priest. "And I said, 'Tom, I don't know if that's a good idea. You hate public speaking; you don't like being around people, and you hate being the center of attention. How about something more suited to your skills, like a Navy SEAL, diesel mechanic or alligator hunter?"

Denny said he's sent Tom's written cards

OMAHA PRESS CLUB

Fr. Tom Fangman and emcee Nikki Boulay. Photos by Kurt Keeler.

to a Harvard linguist for interpretation, but the feedback said simply, "It looks alien." Brandishing a thank-you note from his brother, Denny offered the audience \$100 to "whoever can tell me what it says." But he offered Tom a solution: "Just send texts. What you save on stamps you could have funded that new church alone."

The "Unveiling of the Face" was led by Roger Humphries, chairman of the Face on the Barroom Floor Committee. The portrait features Fangman holding a sword of St. Ignatius, signifying an award from Creighton Prep. Various other logos and elements represent the schools he attended and led, as well as numerous nonprofits, and community awards for service. Longtime OPC Board Member Liz Hruska then presented Fangman with "birthday checks" made out to the Heart Ministry Center in his honor.

As the fifth priest to be recognized in the

54-year history of the Face event, an emotional Fangman addressed the crowd, which rose in a standing ovation after earlier serenading him with, "May the Blessing of the Lord Be Upon You."

"There are some times in life you just want to put in slow motion because you want to take it all in. This is one of them," he said. "I try to live by a theme, 'cherish where you're at with the ones you love to be with.' And my Mom used to say when we were younger, 'Show me your friends and I'll tell you who you are.' I've always remembered that."

He professed his love for Omaha, being part of the community and

said there's nowhere else he'd rather be. The thought of becoming a Jesuit really did give him pause because, "Every one of them ends up in Milwaukee."

And in a nudge to Brudney's earlier quip, he added, "God really blessed me with faith, family and friends. The more the merrier. I really WOULD love to be at all your tables!"

Ewing story; continued from Page 1

engaged.

Ewing reaffirmed his commitment to affordable housing, ensuring costs remain below 31% of a resident's income, and announced a \$40 million investment to expand housing access citywide. He also shared exciting progress on the Crossroads redevelopment, projected to take major shape by 2029, transforming the heart of Omaha's midtown corridor.

Youth, mentorship and empowerment

As a lifelong mentor, Ewing spoke passionately about empowering young people to see themselves reflected in their city's leadership.

"It's important for our youth to have heroes in their community," he said.

His administration is partnering with Omaha Public Schools and community organizations to expand internships, volunteer programs and violence prevention initiatives – including collaboration with the Empowerment Network and nine other cities focused on youth engagement and public safety.

Looking ahead

When asked what he was most proud of in his first 100 days, Mayor Ewing named four milestones that reflect his balanced approach to growth and equity:

- \$40 million committed to affordable housing
- Progress on the Crossroads redevelopment
- Implementation of a new citywide task force
- Strong momentum in economic development

As Omaha's newest mayor navigates the challenges and opportunities of leadership, his message to the Press Club – and to the city – was one of optimism and shared responsibility: "We're going to continue to grow - together."



Cheryl, his wife of 52 years, also is honored

One of OPC's top volunteers, Gary Willis, inducted into Central High Hall of Fame

By Tom O'Connor

Communications Committee

f there are any more loyal members of the Omaha Press Club than Gary Willis, you would have to look extremely hard to find them.

Over the past 23 years, Willis has answered the OPC volunteer bell on countless occasions, whether it's serving on the board, chairing or serving on a committee, or taking photos at an OPC event. If you need something done, Willis will make sure that it gets done – and done right. He currently serves as chair of the Communications Committee and as a member of the Education Committee.

In 2008 when the OPC was closed for remodeling, Willis had the unenviable job of serving as OPC president with the Joslyn Castle as the OPC's temporary home. Let's put it this way – it was not a good year to be club president.

Through it all, Willis has kept a perpetual smile on his happy face, while always making the OPC a key priority.

A true unsung hero, Willis recently received acknowledgement that his volunteer and career efforts did not go unnoticed, as he and Cheryl, his wife of 52 years, were inducted Oct. 9 into the Central High School Hall of Fame.

Gary and Cheryl (Marks) were proud graduates of the Class of 1970. Since graduating from Central, the dynamic duo has stepped up time and again to serve the school's alumni association, as officers, committee chairs, and volunteers at reunions.

Both joined the alumni association board more than 25 years ago, Cheryl serving a term as president and Gary as a longtime treasurer. Gary also has chaired the Hall of Fame committee three times and has served



as its official photographer for more than two decades. He currently serves as the board representative to the Central High School Foundation. The couple can commonly be seen at reunions selling Central gear, and they are very active with their own class reunions.

Both Gary and Cheryl had stellar work careers. Gary was an administrator for 40 years with Union Pacific Railroad and an agent for 30 years with NP Dodge Real Estate.

Cheryl had a 37-year career as a psychi-

atric nurse practitioner. She was a founding board member of the Nebraska Psychiatric Nursing Association and served as president for the Nebraska Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI). She also was a two-term president of the Omaha Black Nurses Association, a chapter of the National Black Nurses Association (NBNA). In addition, she served as a volunteer with the Alzheimer's Association,

Active in their church, Gary is a deacon and Cheryl a deaconess at Bethel Baptist Church. The couple has two daughters – Cherice Williams and Dawn Franklin.

Others inducted into the Central High School Hall of Fame this year included: Hazel Hempel Able, Class of 1905; Patricia Wright Brown, Class of 1955; Pete Festersen, Class of 1989; Donald Goldstein, Class of 1964; Jeannene Rice Mason and Jeannette Rice Johnson, Class of 1964; Stuart Oberman, Class of 1988; Joel Rogers, Class of 1975; and Paul Semrad, distinguished educator/coach.

The Central High School Alumni Association held its inaugural Hall of Fame induction ceremony on Sept. 30, 1999. Since that time, a ceremony has been held annually, and more than 200 individuals have been inducted. Criteria for Hall of Fame selection is based on individuals who have reached the highest levels of achievement in business, the military and community service. Inductees are selected by the Central High School Alumni Association.

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

By Mike McKnight OPC President

riends, family
and parishioners packed the
house at the Omaha
Press Club on Oct.
30 for the Face on the
Barroom Floor event



honoring Father Tom Fangman Friends.

Who can remember the last time dinner had to be served at the bar and fireplace? We moved the registration tables down to the

building entryway to better manage the signin, and that worked well.

I greeted everyone at the revolving door and walkway with many Face attendees being first-time visitors to the OPC. They seemed excited to see the club and enjoy the great food. Let's hope many come back to become members.

Speaking of members, longtime OPC supporter and occasional event emcee Gary Sadlemyer is retiring after a half century at KFAB. His last day on the air will be Dec. 12. So listen in on 1110 AM and shake his hand the next time you see him at the Omaha Press Club. I think he likes Old

Fashioneds.

More news is coming soon on the purchase of our building by NuStyle. The local developers know the history of the Omaha Press Club and indicate we are an important part of their plans with as minimal disruption as possible to the club during reconstruction. Apartments are on the drawing board for most of the rest of the building.

Enjoy the upcoming holiday season at the Omaha Press Club.

A MESSAGE FROM THE MANAGER

all brings beautiful, changing autumn colors, cooling temps and holidays not far behind. The club offers some fun events in November and December.



First up in November is our Winemaker's Dinner on the 7th, featuring five courses with five wines. Did I mention that this meal is made from scratch just like all our meals?

Johnson Brothers representatives Mark and Todd host the dinner and bring great knowledge and fun twists to each wine pairing. Mark has visited many of the U.S. vineyards, meeting the families and workers. From them come stories such as the dipping of the bottles and the long harvests.

Nov. 13 is the date for our annual Past Presidents Dinner, which is open to all. Past presidents and OPC members enjoy the multicourse meal and share club memories with friends.

Noon Forum story; continued from Page 1

Forum featuring Demetrius "Dee Dee" Gatson, founder and CEO of Q.U.E.E.N.S Butterfly House. As someone who has personally experienced incarceration, she brings a unique perspective and deep commitment to supporting women reentering the community. Her passion is rooted in helping those impacted by the justice system and advocating for underserved individuals.

A lifelong Omahan with 50 years of community ties, Gatson draws on her personal experiences and academic achievements to drive transformative change. She holds an Associate's Degree in Human Services from Southeast Community College (2021) and a Bachelor of Science in Social Work from the University of Nebraska at Omaha (2025).

Gatson is also a proud graduate of Leadership Omaha class 46. Outside of her professional work, she enjoys traveling, spending time with loved ones, and cherishing moments with her loyal companion, Tesla.



The Noon Forum on Nov. 20 will feature Queen's Butterfly House. This is a program that provides safe supportive housing for women reentering the community from incarceration. Lunch service starts at 11:30 a.m. with the speaking engagement from noon to 1 p.m.

Noon Forums are held monthly to give you first-hand knowledge of area topics of interest, plus the ability to meet and ask questions of the speakers. I very rarely leave a forum without learning something worthwhile.

There are a few smaller spaces still available for holiday gatherings and events. Many members extend their parties into January with less juggling of schedules and calendars. The club leaves the decor up until the third week in January. This environment is very inviting and allows your guests to enjoy stress-free hassles of entertainment at home. Let OPC help.

PHONE 402-345-8008 FOR RESERVATIONS

Fall Winemaker's Dinner

Friday, Nov. 7, 2025 5:30 Social • 6 p.m. Dinner \$90 members, \$100 non-members

Appetizer
Waldorf Salad Flatbread
with Goat Cheese
Wine

Amuse
Butternut Squash Cheese
and Balsamic Glaze
Wine

Salad Classic Thunderbird Parmesan Croustade Wine

> *Sorbet* Pumpkin Sorbet

Entrée
Broiled Sirloin on a Bed
of Harvest Vegetables
and Oven-Roasted
Garlic New Potatoes
Wine: San Polo, Brunello di Montalcino

Dessert

Apple Crisp in a Ramekin Served with a Chocolate-Covered Spice Vanilla Ice Cream And then comes December and our holiday brunch on the 14th. The Santa Brunch is a longtime popular feast. A live saxophonist will add to the merriment with the sounds of the season,

And last but not least, do not forget about Dec. 31st. Dinner details are still to come, and we hope to see you there!

- Christine Villamonte Restaurant and Club Manager

Past Presidents Dinner

Nov. 13, 2025 • 6 p.m. • \$45

Soup Lobster Bisque

Amuse
Thunderbird Salad Parmesan Cup

Sorbet Mango

Entrée Surf & Turf Loaded Twice-Baked Potato Asparagus

Dessert Chocolate Souffle

Santa's Brunch

Sunday, Dec. 14, 2025
Two Seatings: 10 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.
Price: Adults \$35 • Children \$17
Bring a new, unwrapped toy to donate
to the Salvation Army

Buffet

Steamship Round of Beef
Baked Ham with Maple Whiskey Sauce
Chicken Crepes Supreme
Baked Tilapia Lemon Butter
Lyonnaise Potatoes & Gravy
Seasonal Vegetables
Build-Your-Own Omelet a la Carte
Multi-Topping Pancake Bar
Salad Display, including Thunderbird Salad
Salmon Chaud Froid & Fresh Fruit
Fresh-Baked Pastries, Tortes & Cheesecakes
Chocolate Driscoll Strawberries
Deep Dish Apple Crisp
Brandied French Vanilla Ice Cream
Spiked French Vanilla Eggnog

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Every Thursday

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

Thursday, Nov. 13

Past Presidents Dinner 6 p.m. social, 6:30 p.m. dinner

Friday, Nov. 7

Winemaker's Dinner 5:30 p.m. social, 6 p.m. dinner \$90 members, \$100 non-members

Thursday, Nov. 20

Noon Forum Queen's Butterfly House 11:30 a.m. lunch Noon to 1 p.m. speaker \$19

Thursday-Friday Nov. 27-28

Closed for Thanksgiving

Sunday, Dec. 14

Santa Brunch Two seatings: 10 a.m. to noon 12:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. Adults \$35, children \$17

Wednesday, Dec 31

NEW YEAR'S EVE!!!! Dinner details to come

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.

Hours of Operation

1620 Dodge St., Omah

LUNCH

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

DINNER

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



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Submissions for the December issue are due on or before November 20.