



#130 Bruce Lauritzen

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Lauritzen was a fitting honoree during the 40th anniversary of both the Faces and the Press Club's opening atop the First National Center. His father, John, and uncle, John Davis, were instrumental in the club's opening in 1971. He is chairman of First National Bank of Omaha, founded in 1857, its holding company First National of Nebraska and Lauritzen Corp.

Lauritzen is the fifth generation of his family to be involved at First National, now the largest privately held bank in the nation. But he is not the family's first newsmaker. That was his great-great grandfather Thomas Davis who helped found Omaha in 1854 by donating \$600 in gold dust for an official charter. Another family newsmaker was Episcopal Bishop Robert Clarkson for whom Clarkson Hospital is named. Clarkson also built Trinity Cathedral and founded more than 50 churches in Nebraska and the Dakotas. In 1953, Lauritzen's father made news when he pioneered one of the first credit card companies in the United States.

Attorney Woody Bradford, a longtime friend of both Lauritzen and the Press Club, was emcee. Mogens Bay, CEO of Valmont Industries, noted that Lauritzen is royal Danish consul for Nebraska. "That ticks me off that he is the consul and I am the one with the accent." Son-in-

law Nate Dodge, president of NP Dodge Management Co., focused on Lauritzen's legendary inability to perform household chores. "When Bruce and Kim were newlyweds, she was mounting a ceiling light in their apartment and asked Bruce to get her a Phillips screwdriver. 'Sure, honey,' he replied. 'But where do the Phillips live?'"

Lauritzen led First National's efforts to help preserve downtown Omaha with 14 square blocks of improvement, including two sculpture parks, two parking garages, the First National Technology Center, a child development center and the 40-story First National Tower, the tallest building between Chicago and Denver. His leadership in downtown improvement encouraged other companies to invest in the area.

While chairman of the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, he worked to create Heartland of America Park and for years was part of the city leadership that helped restore 113 acres along the riverfront. Lauritzen Gardens was made possible by the philanthropy of Bruce Lauritzen, his late wife, Kimball and his mother, Elizabeth Lauritzen. Lauritzen was on the team that merged Clarkson and University hospitals in 1997 to create The Nebraska Medical Center, and in 1976, he led efforts to save the General Crook House when he was chairman of the Douglas County Historical Society. Lauritzen is a past chairman of the Young President's Organization, Nebraska Chapter. In 2004, he was inducted into the Omaha Business Hall of Fame. He is a past director of the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, Omaha branch, and a past member of the Federal Advisory Council to the Federal Reserve Board in Washington, D.C. Lauritzen is president of the Omaha Development Council and Foundation, chairman of Clarkson Regional Health Services, chairman of The Nebraska Medical Center and of the Lauritzen Gardens board of trustees and a director of Ak-Sar-Ben, Creighton University, Heritage Services and the Nebraska Game and Parks Foundation.

Artist Jim Horan pictures Lauritzen scaling the First National Tower on his way to work "how he got to work until he found out that building had elevators." His Alpine backpack overflows with golf clubs, his favorite shotgun, bank credit cards and the crown he wore as king of Ak-Sar-Ben. Flocking around Bruce are sculptures of geese from the bank's Spirit of Nebraska's Wilderness Park and from the First National's Pioneer Courage Park. In the background are the Lauritzen Gardens. Next door, the First National Center is rocking with a Press Club party, a 40th anniversary cake and Executive Director Steve Villamonte waving a "Thanks Bruce" sign.