Omaha Restaurant Association

NEWS & VIEWS

Volume 42 • Issue 4 • December 2025

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News & Views is published in March, June, September & December. Comments, facts and opinions expressed herein are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not express agreement of the members. If you would like to contribute information for up coming newsletters, please mail to the ORA - 4270 N. 139th Street, 68164, or CALL (402) 493-4739.

From Your President

WOW I can not believe we are already rounding out 2025. As I look back and reflect on this year it was full of many changes and challenges for our industry. We have all felt the impact with our businesses, and we adjusted several events accordingly to put less of a strain on our members. I still can't help but feel like it was a successful year. Each one of our events we all came together all rallied to complete our missions to make each event even better. As my term as President comes to a close I want to thank each and everyone of you for your hard work and contributions to the ORA allowing us to support so many local organizations. Our Membership has grown, and our ORA family keeps getting stronger.

I would like to wish everyone all the best in 2026!
Your President, Natalie Hankins

Welcome NEW MEMBERS

- BEACON HILLS
- BENJAMIN'S NEIGHBORHOOD KITCHEN
- CON AMOR LATIN KITCHEN
- FORTUNE FISH
- THE DROVER

2026 ANNUAL MEETING
LET'S DO LUNCH!

(VOTING BALLOT & INSTRUCTIONS ON INSIDE BACK PAGE)

Brought back by Popular Demand: Let's Do Lunch at Cascio's! Our Build Your Own Bloody Mary, Mimosa & Coffee Bar is available from 11:00-NOON. To be followed by a Lunch, Board Member Inductions and Award Celebration.

Please take a minute today to cast your vote for Restaurateur of the Year, Purveyor of the Year and Employee of the Year (Harold Norman Excellence Award).

Fill in the name of a person you feel goes the extra mile to make our industry better. The Purveyor of the Year can be chosen from five companies that the board of the ORA feels give a tremendous amount of support not only our mission but to their customers. Please choose from these very deserving companies only! The Employee of the Year was created to honor that hard working employee who often goes unthanked. Nominate someone you feel goes above and beyond the call of duty. Let us know via e-mail the reason you would like this person to receive the award and be honored. Please send your email to; JWarren@DineOutOften.com

We hope to see you at Cascio's Steakhouse on January 25th, 2026!

PLEASE NOTE: The past recipients of the Restaurateur of the Year are listed and cannot be nominated and voted for again.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

Omaha Restaurant Association

Celebrating Our 82nd YEAR

ANNUAL MEETING
Let's Do Lunch

SUNDAY, JANUARY 25th, 2026
Cascio's Steakhouse

11:00 am - NOON	Build Your Own: Bloody Mary, Mimosa or Coffee
NOON - 1:00 pm	Lunch, Awards and Board Member Inductions
1:00 pm - 2:00 pm	Celebration of Award Winners

2025 Restaurateur of the Year
2025 Purveyor of the Year
2025 Harold Norman Excellence Award

$85.00 PER PERSON
$55 is tax deductible, tax is included
($85 per person or $680 for a table of eight)

For reservations and payment visit
www.dineoutomaha.com or mail check to ORA
4270 N. 139th Street | Omaha, NE 68164

MAKE YOUR RESERVATIONS BY JANUARY 13TH

Votebefore January 9th Online: https://dineoutomaha.com/annual-meeting-ballot/

OFFICIAL BALLOT

Omaha Restaurant Association

Restaurateur of the Year 2025 | Purveyor of the Year 2025
Harold Norman Excellence Award 2025

Please vote on the ballot below by January 9th, 2026 and return it to:

Omaha Restaurant Association | 4270 N. 139th Street | Omaha, NE 68164
E-Mail: JWarren@DineOutOften.com

Winners will be presented at this year's 2026 Annual Meeting
on January 25th, 2026 and will not be informed prior to the meeting.

RESTAURATEUR OF THE YEAR AWARD 2025

YOU CANNOT SELECT A PAST RECIPIENT

Please choose someone you believe stands out in the industry through providing an outstanding business as well as contributing to the industry through the ORA and other civic causes.

PRIOR WINNERS

1989 Mac Thompson
1990 Rick Fox
1991 Linda Anania
1992 Ron Samuelson
1993 David Hayes
1994 John Chisholm
1995 Bill McKenna
1996 R. Tim Peffer
1997 Mark Hoch
1998 Denis Hall
1999 Matt Warren
2000 Brian Magee
2001 Sally Kawa
2002 Vince Fletcher
2003 Ann Mellen
2004 Nicole Jesse
2005 Chuck Caniglia
2006 Cedric Fichepain
2007 Katie O'Connor
2008 Tony Fucinaro, Jr.
2009 Cory Guyer
2010 John Wade
2011 Yves Menard
2012 Greg Lindberg
2012 Don & Marie Losole
2013 Brad Marr
2014 Glenn Wheeler
2015 Jared Clarke
2016 Jennifer Coco
2017 Darwin Hanssen
2018 Dave Mainelli
2019 Greg Cutchall
2020 Mitch Tempus
2021 Bob & Amy Freshman
2022 Alfie Cascio
2023 Raechel & Zach Van Buskirk
2024 Anthony Hitchcock

PURVEYOR OF THE YEAR 2025

CHOOSE ONE OF THE FOLLOWING FIVE PURVEYORS

All outstanding companies, who promote the mission of the ORA by sponsoring and attending the events and have a strong desire to improve the hospitality industry.

VOTE FOR ONE

- ◯ Larsen Supply Co.
- ◯ Nebraska Textile & Supply
- ◯ Premier Midwest Beer & Beverage
- ◯ Quail Distributing
- ◯ US Foods

2012 Rotella's Italian Bakery
2013 Omaha Steaks
2014 Quality Brands of Omaha
2015 Reinhart Food Service
2016 Loffredo's Fresh Foods
2017 Southern Glazers Wine & Spirits
2018 H. Olafsson International Specialty Foods
2019 Spin Linen
2020 TriMark Hockenberg's
2021 Chesterman Coca-Cola
2022 Glenn Valley Foods
2023 Johnson Brothers of NE.
2024 Performance Food Group

HAROLD NORMAN EXCELLENCE AWARD 2025

Choose any employee who shows strong leadership, works hard, is dedicated, loyal and wants to see improvement in the industry.

**Include a short story of why you choose this person.*

Please email to: JWarren@DineOutOften.com

PRIOR WINNERS

2014 Katie Vap
2015 Kevin Caniglia
2016 Brian Young
2017 Bobby Mekiney
2018 Pedro "Pete" Garcia
2019 Linda Faye Austin
2020 Zac Triemert
2021 Danny Dominguez
2022 Dave Warren
2023 Jesus Garibay
2024 Henry Rice

2025 _____
Please fill in your choice for RESTAURATEUR OF THE YEAR

2025 _____
Please fill in your choice for HAROLD NORMAN EXCELLENCE AWARD
(EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR)

https://dineoutomaha.com/annual-meeting-ballot/

FAMILY MEAL

Save the Date

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 01 2026 | 5PM
INSTITUTE FOR THE CULINARY ARTS



EMAIL EMMA HELWIG
FOR MORE INFO.
ERHELWIG@MCCNEB.EDU

WE HOPE YOU CAN
MAKE IT AND BRING A
FRIEND!

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- Continue working with flexible class scheduling
- Employer-funded degree programs available

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PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS | CURRENT STUDENTS | LEARN MORE

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Community College

OMAHA HOSPITALITY HALL OF FAME

2025 INDUCTEE CELEBRATION





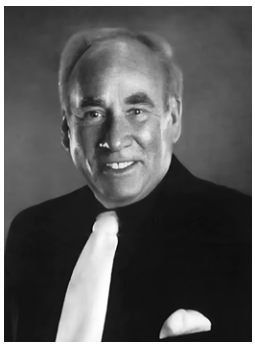
Doug Case



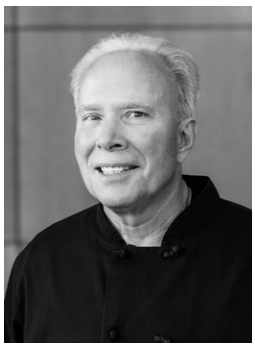
Chad Hartmann



Mike Kelley



Loren Koch



Jim Major



Andy Reetz

What a celebration! We had a packed house celebrating some outstanding leaders in our industry and their support teams were there to cheer them on. On October 19th we gathered at the Institute for the Culinary Arts at MCC to recognize the achievement of six and welcomed them into the Omaha Hospitality Hall of Fame. This annual event is to support education through culinary scholarships. This year's inductees to the Hall were: **Doug Case,** Chef, **Chad Hartmann**, Purveyors, **Mike Kelley**, Restaurateur & Friend of the Industry, **Loren Koch**, Restaurateur, **Jim Major**, Chef and **Andy Reetz**, Restaurateur & Club Manager.

Dwitt Becker, the Board Chairman and Brian O'Malley, the Masters of Ceremonies welcomed the honorees, their friends and families and many industry supporters. Each honoree was introduced on film and accepted their induction on stage. The gratitude and humility shown throughout the evening were deeply impactful, especially through the heartfelt acceptance speeches.

Matt Brown, Master Sommelier, introduced each course, which was prepared by students, faculty and staff at the ICA@ MCC, and paired with a wine. Music was enjoyed thought out the evening by Nikki Boulay and The Beatniks played thought the evening. We were grateful that only one individual was honored in the In Memoriam in 2025—past inductee Eddie Galas (Class of 2016).

The evening ended with a toast to the honorees and a dessert and cocktail reception downstairs in the cooking and baking labs. The food and drinks were outstanding thanks to our supporters listed on the next page. And of course to the students, instructors and mentors.

To read more on each honoree or to nominate someone to be considered for induction please visit www.omahahospitalityhalloffame.com.

Board Member Bio

MARA TAYLOR-MESTRIK

Salted Edge



Restaurant people are different. You could almost say I was destined to spend my life in the restaurant and hospitality world. When I was 5 or 6 years old, my mom would bring me to her job at the Omaha Press Club. I remember being mesmerized by the staff, watching them work in what seemed like a choreographed dance as they prepared the restaurant for a busy night of guests. It feels fitting that my first job, many years later at 14, was as a "bus girl" at the Omaha Press Club. That busser role ignited a passion for this industry that, like many of my fellow restaurant lifers, has never faded.

Restaurants are in your blood. I received my bachelor's degree from UNO in Broadcast Journalism and, at one point, imagined a different career path. But a job after college as a server at Austin's Steakhouse changed my trajectory. I spent several years as a General Manager with Austin's before moving to Phoenix, Arizona, where I lived for 15 years. While in Phoenix, I was fortunate to work at Oregano's Pizza Bistro, a beloved local favorite. As Oregano's grew from 3 to 14 locations, I grew into the regional director role, solidifying my place as a restaurant lifer.

Life eventually brought me back to Omaha, and back into the Omaha restaurant world where my journey began. Fast forward to today: I'm the Director of Sales for Lucky Eleven Hospitality Group, the company behind newer restaurants like Salted EDGE and Pivot Prime. I've been part of the Lucky Eleven family since its early days and had the privilege of opening Salted EDGE as General Manager. I'm currently focused on expanding the private dining, catering, and events side of both concepts. It's an honor to continue my journey with an amazing, talented team.

Though my settings have changed over the years, my passion for this business and my respect for those who dedicate their lives to it have never wavered. I'm also proud to be part of the Omaha Restaurant Association board, giving back to the community that launched my own journey. I'm surrounded by peers who share the same crazy passion and are just the right amount of different—just like me. Thank you, ORA team. Here's to an amazing 2026!

THANK YOU

to these businesses for their generous support of the 2025 Hall of Fame Event

Absolutely Fresh Seafood
Acxion Foodservice
Chesterman Coca-Cola
Chieftain Distribution
Fortune Fish Gourmet
FreshEdge
Greater Omaha Packing
H. Olafsson International Specialty Foods
Johnson Brothers of Nebraska
Loffredo Fresh Foods
Nebraska Textile & Supply
Nelligan Creative
Omaha Steaks
Omaha Sourdough Company
Performance Food Group
Premier Midwest Beer & Beverage
Quality Brands of Omaha
Quench Fine Wines
RNDC
Savor Imports
Southern Glazers Wine & Spirits
Sysco
US Foods



DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE WITH PASSION AND AN
Scholarship Money is available for them!

NEBRASKA RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION
HOSPITALITY EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

Hospitality Educational Foundation
2026 Scholarship Application
Deadline to apply: April 15, 2026

The Nebraska Restaurant Association Hospitality Educational Foundation provides scholarship opportunities for qualified students and professionals who plan to pursue higher education in the fields of culinary and hospitality and will use those skills in Nebraska. Scholarship(s) will be awarded at the discretion of the scholarship committee. Amounts of scholarships will depend on focus on continued education or advancement of current career in the hospitality industry.

Please attach your resume and fill out Parts A, B, & C to complete the application process

Part A: Personal & Academic Information

Note: Please write N/A for any section that does not apply to you.

Name: _____

Cell Phone: _____

Email: _____

Current Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Current High School or Career Academy: _____

GPA (write "N/A" if not applicable): _____

Current Post-Secondary Institution or Employer: _____

GPA (write "N/A" if not applicable): _____

Have you participated in a Nebraska ProStart Program? ☐Yes ☐No

I am applying for Professional Development: ☐Yes ☐No
(I already work in the industry)

In 2026, I will be enrolled at the following Post-Secondary Institution or Professional Development

Program: _____

Institution Address: _____

Major: _____

INTEREST IN PURSUING A CULINARY EDUCATION?

Apply by April 15, 2026!

Degree Objective: Choose your degree

Area of Emphasis: Choose your area

If you select "Other," please specify: _____

Are you a previous HEF Scholarship winner? ☐Yes ☐No

Part B: Personal Statement

Note: Please provide thoughtful responses (about 5-7 sentences per question)

1. Why did you select the culinary or hospitality field as a career?

2. What are your future goals in the hospitality industry?

3. Describe the most challenging hospitality-related experience you have faced.

   What did you learn from this experience?

4. Describe your employment history in the hospitality industry.

5. What are your short- and long-term career goals, and how will your education support them?

Name/Relationship	Cell Phone Number

Please include a letter of recommendation from a teacher mentor or boss with your application.

Please e-mail no later than **April 15, 2026**, to: Info@nebraskadining.org

Or mail this form postmarked **by April 15, 2026**, to: Nebraska Hospitality Association
Attn: HEF Scholarships
2603 Superior St, Suite 101 #238,
Lincoln, NE 68521

Finalists will be invited to a Zoom interview with industry professionals. If selected, your Social Security Number will be required for scholarship disbursement. Scholarships are mailed to the financial aid office of your institution upon enrollment verification.





Omaha Hospitality Hall of Fame

2025 Inductees

Doug Case · Chad Hartmann
Mike Kelley · Loren Koch
Jim Major · Andy Reetz

Sunday, October 19, 2025

Dinner and Awards Promptly at 5:00pm
Doors open at 4:45pm

Inductee Dessert & Cocktail Reception
Immediately Following



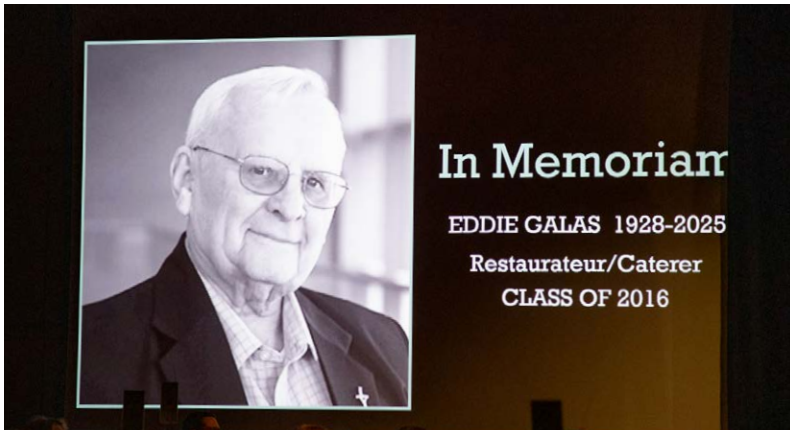


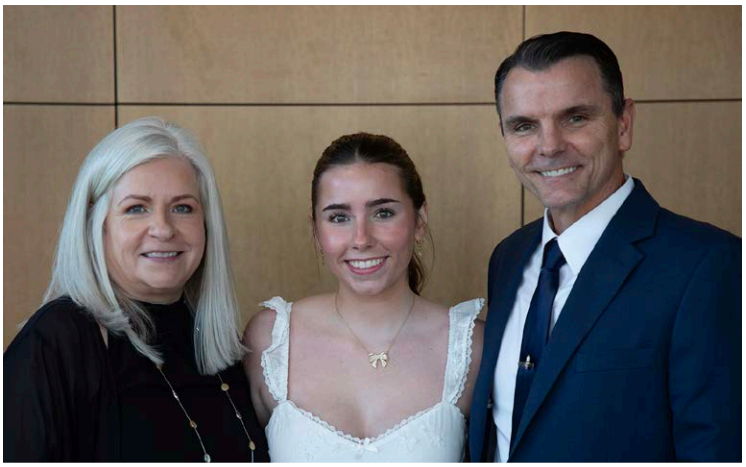


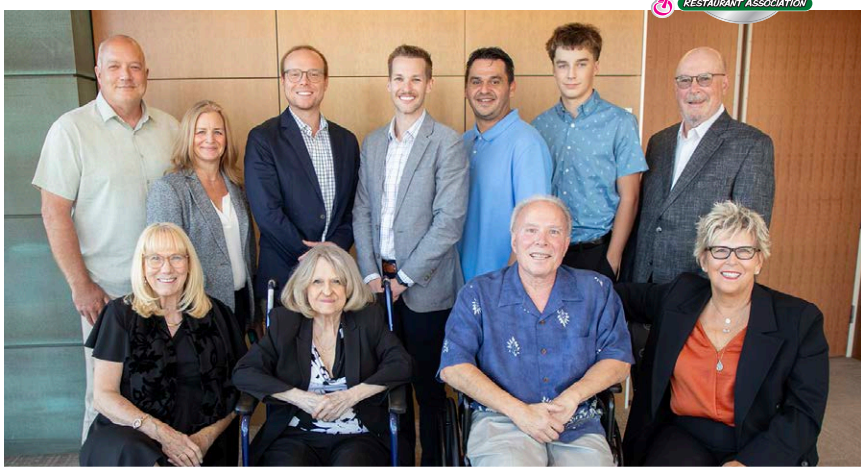























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EVENT PHOTOS

December 2023




















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26
YES CHEF
DOUG!
SEASONED TO PERFECTION!






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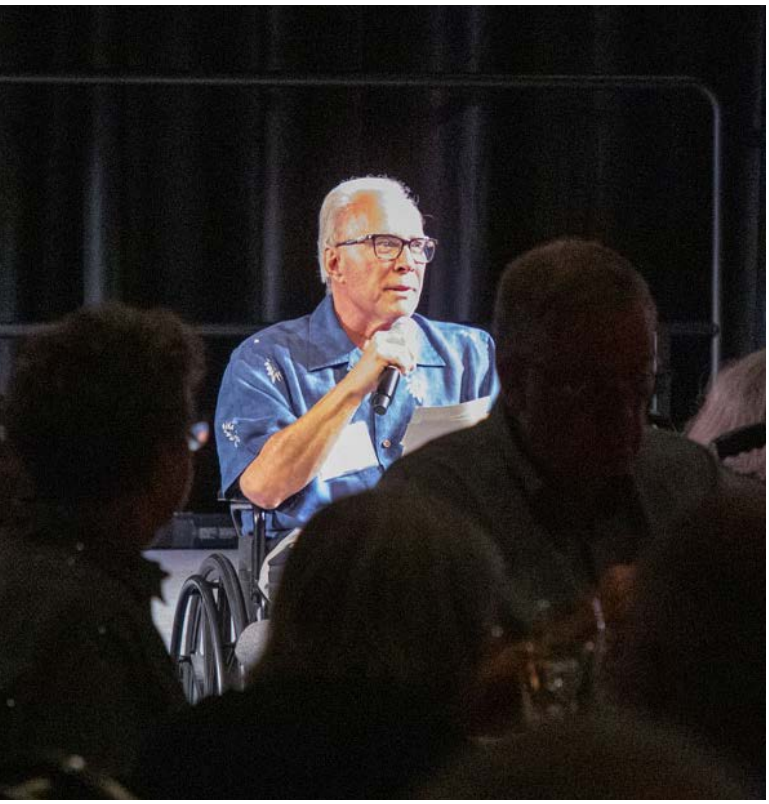













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EXIT








































Red Velvet Trifle
Gluten Friendly








YES CHEF
DOUG!
SEASONED TO PERFECTION!














fourth quarter classes
SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY
RESTAURANT SERVICE II
BAKING III
PROFESSIONALISM
BAKING PRODUCTION


















FIRST AID KIT
2





Ordinance update to the Omaha Municipal Code

On August 26th, 2025, an ordinance update to the Omaha Municipal Code proposed by the Douglas County Health Department was passed by the Omaha City Council. The existing ordinance was severely antiquated as it had not been updated since the 1970's and contained many outdated policies.

Before the ordinance was proposed to the City Council, it was presented to a panel of stakeholders that included representatives from the Omaha Restaurant Association and the Nebraska Hospitality Association. The panel reviewed the proposed ordinance, presented recommended changes, and ultimately gave its stamp of approval to move forward.

The highlighted changes include the prohibition of bare hand contact with ready to eat foods and the requirement of a Certified Food Protection Manager (CFPM) to be on staff for certain food establishments. Both requirements were also passed by the Nebraska State Legislature in April of 2025, so even without the change to the local ordinance, these requirements would still be in place.

The most significant addition to the new ordinance is the requirement for all food handlers in the City of Omaha to obtain a Food Handlers Certification within 30 days of employment. The Douglas County Health Department is proud to have partnered with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to provide the training. The online training platform has already been in use in Lancaster County for many years and will be adapted to meet Douglas County's needs.

The online training will be separated into three levels: Serve Clean, Prep Cook, and Shift Manager. The level of training required for each employee will be determined by the job duties of the position, but in general, the following training can be expected per job position:

Serve Clean – Wait staff, bus staff, dishwashers, and bartenders

Prep Cook – Food prep and cook staff

Shift Manager – Any person on-site that is the acting Person in Charge

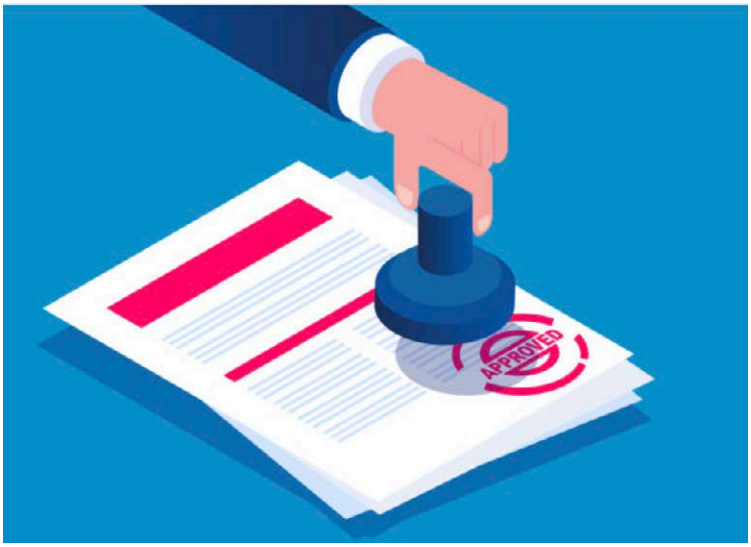
The cost of the training will be $20, and the certifications are valid for two years. The online platform

allows flexibility for the trainee to receive all three levels of certification for a single payment of $20, and the trainee will have the opportunity to retake the training as many times as they wish within the two year period that the certification is valid. The certifications are the property of the employee and will travel with the employee if the employee changes jobs. If applicants are not able to pay through the online payment portal, the applicant can make payment in any form, in person, at the Douglas County Health Department. Applicants that are under the age of 18 will have the opportunity to have the $20 cost waived.

The food establishment permit holder will be expected to ensure that the food establishment has the minimum staffing requirements. That minimum staffing is determined by whether there are exposed foods being handled at the establishment. For establishments that are handling exposed foods, a CFPM must be on staff, and a CFPM or an employee with a shift manager certification must be on site during all hours of operation. The permit holder is also responsible for ensuring all other employees have the appropriate food handler certificates depending on their job duties. For establishments that only handle pre-packaged foods, a shift manager must be on staff, and a shift manager or an employee with any level of food handler certification must be on site during all hours of operation. Temporary and seasonal event food establishments will be held to the same minimum staffing requirements.

The permit holder will also be required to maintain an up-to-date list of all employees working in the food establishment on a form provided or approved by the health director. The form shall include the employee's name, date of hire, and food handler permit or CFPM numbers and expiration dates. Furthermore, copies of all employee certifications must be maintained on site. Lastly, CFPMs shall not be designated for more than one food establishment at a time unless more than one food establishment operated by the same owner is located on the same property or on contiguous properties.

CFPM certifications can be obtained from any ANSI-accredited program. The accepted programs can be found at douglascountyhealth.com on the Food Safety & Compliance page. Depending on the CFPM training selected, many languages are available. Food handler certifications must be obtained through the training provided by the Douglas County Health Department. The food handler certification training



will initially be available in English and Spanish, with other needed languages being added as resources allow.

The online training portal for Douglas County food handler certifications is expected to be ready for use in January of 2026. The Douglas County Health Department will then give permit holders until mid-2026 to comply. At that time, violations will be written if establishments are found to be out of compliance with the new requirements. If at any time an establishment is deficient of their minimum staffing requirements due to employee departure, the establishment will have 30 days to correct the deficiency.

Starting in January of 2026, any NEW applications for a food permit will require proof of a staff member with a CFPM certification before the application will be accepted.

Volunteers and employees of educational institutions that have received training in proper food safety practices and that are supervised by a CFPM are exempt from the food handler certification requirements.

Other noteworthy updates to the ordinance include changes to temporary and seasonal event permits. The term "Seasonal Event" is replacing the previous term "Farmers Market". Temporary umbrella permits will now be charged per 20 vendors. Additionally, seasonal event vendor permits will now be location specific. Meaning vendors that are accustomed to applying for one permit for all locations in the city, must now apply and pay applicable fees for each location.

Any questions pertaining the new ordinance or requests for the full text of the ordinance change can be directed to adam.carlson@douglascounty-ne.gov







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Customers receive a comprehensive on-site fryer management service, which includes temperature calibration, oil micro-filtration and a thorough vacuum based detail cleaning of each fryer on every visit.

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The Tap-Pay Solutions Advantage

Creating Greater Opportunities

What if you could increase sales, earn customer loyalty and create new revenue opportunities overnight? With a strong record of success, we have the tools and staff to meet the challenges you face to help take your business to the next level.

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If you do not currently own point-of-sale (POS) equipment, we carry the most up-to-date payment equipment at competitive costs so you can begin taking advantage of expanded business potential immediately. If you already own POS equipment, our specialist can reprogram it to begin taking advantage of our superior solutions in a matter of minutes.

Superior Services

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We provide complete credit and debit card processing for retail, mail-order and internet businesses, including terminal equipment, 24-hour customer service, training, supplies, online statements and much more;

- Competitive rates and fees
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- Reprogramming of compatible EMV equipment
- PCI DSS Compliant
- Free customer service, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

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Virtual Terminal includes a free shopping cart, product management tools, complete online reporting and 24/7 internet access, so you can manage your business from anywhere and anytime.

- One system processes both credit card and check payment
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- Low processing rates

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PAID SICK TIME NEBRASKA

NEBRASKA HEALTHY FAMILIES & WORKPLACES ACT | EFFECTIVE DATE: OCTOBER 1, 2025

BEGINNING OCTOBER 1, 2025, EMPLOYEES ARE ENTITLED TO PAID SICK TIME.

DOWNLOAD POSTER AND HANG AT YOUR RESTAURANT

EVENTS CALENDAR

*Any ORA member is welcome to share in any meeting at any time. If you would like to speak at a meeting, please call Jennie Warren at jwarren@dineoutoften.com and schedule a time.

JANUARY 25th	**Annual Meeting-Lunch** Cascio's Steakhouse - 11 a.m. 1620 South 10th Street
FEBRUARY 10th	**Monthly Board Meeting** **Legend's** - 8:30 a.m. 69th & Pacific
MARCH 10th	**Monthly Board Meeting** DJ's Dugout - 3 p.m. Aksarben, 2102 S 67th St
APRIL 12th	**Too Many Cooks in the Kitchen** Marriott Regency - 5 p.m.
APRIL 14th	**Monthly Board Meeting** Phoenix - 8:30 a.m. 12015 Blondo St

Photos in this issue were graciously provided by Beverly Nelligan at NELLIGAN CREATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY AND DESIGN.
EMAIL: NelliganCreative@gmail.com

Omaha Restaurant Association Board of Directors

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NICK SALDI
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Immediate Past President
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Executive Director
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GREG HANSON
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MARA TAYLOR-MESTRIK
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JILL PANZER
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IMPORTANT NEWS FOR OUR MEMBERSHIP: Please Read!

ServSafe MANAGEMENT TRAINING

ServSafe National Restaurant Association™

The Omaha Restaurant believes in educating their members and elevating the safety in our member's restaurants. We are offering 10 slots in the January 12th & 13th and the February 9th &10th classes at the UNL Extension office to our members on a first come first serve basis.

We will pay the $115 for the class and test, you just need to buy the 8th Edition ServSafe Management book!

Classes are from 9am-4:30 pm at 8015 West Center Road.

Due to the demand this year we are only able to offer you one paid class for you or your manager. Each business is required to have a manager certified this coming year.

E-mail Jennie at **jwarren@dineoutoften.com** with the name, email and cell number of the person you hope to get certified and if there are spots available we will confirm with you.