

LAWRENCE BUSINESS MAGAZINE

2025 Q2



LAWRENCE BUSINESS MAGAZINE FOUNDATION AWARDS

and the Lawrence Magnet - Returning to start a New Chapter



These two longtime friends' lives weaved in and out through the years, finally ending up back home in Lawrence and working together in a joint business venture.

Here and

by Darin White, photos by Steven Hertzog
and contributed by Carmody and O'Neal

All good stories have a beginning, a middle and an end. The following stories start very near the beginning and have a twist in the middle, while the ending hangs in the balance. Some stories are still being written. If Tom Carmody's and Dr. Jon O'Neal's stories were a script, they could be titled, "Here and Back Again: Two Tales of Return to Kansas."

Carmody and O'Neal's friendship began in their teenage years. Their adventures don't exactly parallel each other or always look much alike, but they cross at different times and in significant ways that help drive the arcs of their stories.

In 1970, Tom Carmody moved to Lawrence with his family when his dad took a promotion to manage a manufacturing plant. It was a hard move for Tom, as he was established in a great neighborhood with a plethora of kids his age in the Houston, Texas, area. Thankfully, there was also a great neighborhood with kids in Lawrence, and he was able to get connected in the area quickly. It helped that he was involved in sports and attended Broken Arrow Elementary School and South Junior High School (now Billy Mills Middle School).



Back Again

A little after Carmody moved to Lawrence, O'Neal moved to Lawrence with his family when his dad retired from the U.S. Air Force (USAF) to become the academic counselor for The University of Kansas (KU) Athletics Department. His parents had met at KU, were involved in the Air Force and lived in many different locations before moving back. Because the Athletics Department wanted his father to reside near the athletes, his family moved into Jayhawk Towers. His parents had one apartment, and O'Neal had his own apartment as a junior high-aged student, eating meals at the KU athletes training table.

It was at South Junior High where O'Neal and Carmody first crossed paths. They continued their journey through Lawrence High School and The University of Kansas, where they were both part of the Beta Theta Pi fraternity. After Carmody graduated from KU with a Bachelor of Science degree in business, he stayed at KU to obtain his master's degree in business administration. O'Neal continued his schooling by joining the Air Force, which financed his studies at The University of Kansas School of Medicine. Carmody and O'Neal moved on to their respective careers in different locations, but they would reconnect later.



Top two photoes:
Jon on location shooting
AU PAIR, KANSAS (aka
THE SOCCER NANNY) in
Lindsborg, KS.

To the right:
Jon with visions of grandeur
(and thinking of Kevin
Wilmott) at the Academy
Museum of Motion Pictures
in LA



Going Their Separate Ways

Carmody headed to Dallas to begin a 20-year career in the energy business. It was in Dallas that he met his future wife. He was then transferred to Denver and eventually took a job in energy in San Francisco, where the couple had their first child. Carmody later took yet another job in energy in Omaha, Nebraska.

In 1996, the family, including two children, moved back to Lawrence, where he started his own energy business. Like his fortuitous move into a great neighborhood in Lawrence during his childhood, he and his family also moved into a great neighborhood in town. Before long, Carmody was working on his own as an energy trader before his previous employer, Aquila Energy, hired him back. He worked for Aquila until the company transitioned away from the type of work he was doing.

At this point, Carmody decided he wanted to invest in himself. He partnered up and helped launch two well-known local restaurants, 715 and Ladybird Diner. He had always had an interest in journalism and writing, so he also decided to write screenplays.

In the Air Force, O'Neal was stationed at locations such as Colorado Springs, Colorado, Guam and Omaha, Nebraska, where he was chief of flight and mission standards. He was planning on getting out of the Air Force until he was given an offer he couldn't refuse—a residency in occupational and environmental medicine, and a

master's of public health from Harvard University. He then became a consultant to the School of Aerospace Medicine, finally leaving the Air Force after 10 years.

When O'Neal moved to Boston, he worked as a corporate physician for Polaroid. After retiring as a lieutenant colonel and senior flight surgeon from the Kansas Air National Guard, he consulted for the USAF, Army, Navy and the Veterans Administration.

One might say he has diverse interests and skill sets. As an art history graduate of The University of Kansas, his photographs are included in major museum collections, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. and the Princeton University Art Museum.

During his time in Boston, while O'Neal was on Cape Cod by happenstance, he met Australian cinematographer Peter James, who filmed "Driving Miss Daisy." O'Neal and James struck up a friendship, and O'Neal started hanging out on film sets when he had time off as a physician. He read scripts when he was on set and thought screenwriting was something he could do—so he started writing screenplays.

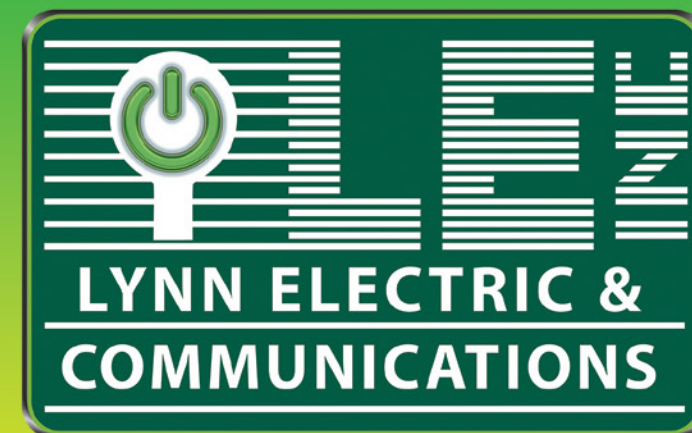


Jon standing with portrait of Traci Lords, lead actress in AU PAIR, KANSAS (aka THE SOCCER NANNY) at the entrance to the John Waters exhibit at the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures in LA

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O'Neal reveals the first script he wrote, titled "Partners Forever," was based on a true story of his friend's husband in the Air Force who died from AIDS. The story was modified to having his friend be a doctor in Boston, and her husband was a Major League Baseball player for the Red Sox. This script drew the interest of an agent in Chicago who pitched the piece to Jessica Lang, and it was considered but never realized. But it was enough encouragement for him to continue to write.

The second script O'Neal wrote was about the Kansas City Monarchs, which was part of the Negro League baseball teams. He heard about a book about the Negro Leagues on NPR radio titled, "Only the Ball Was White." He found out that the Kansas City Monarchs was one of the best teams in the league, and after some fascinating research, O'Neal wrote, "Black Diamond," a drama about a gospel/jazz singer in the 1940s who falls in love with a Kansas City Monarchs Negro League baseball player trying to be the first Black player in



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Tom Carmody on the set of "The Only Good Indian"



Tom Carmody with Director Kevin Willmott on the set of "The Only Good Indian"



Tom Carmody on the set of "The Only Good Indian"

the Majors. It was a time when jazz singers would sing at the Sunday afternoon Kansas City Monarchs' games, and the players would go to the jazz club after the game.

O'Neal's script started placing high in competitions and received several awards. He submitted his script to the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television, and the piece won the prestigious UCLA Screenwriters Showcase. O'Neal was accepted to the school and went on to receive his master's of fine arts in screenwriting from there.

Together Again

Around 2006, O'Neal and Carmody teamed up to create Carmody/O'Neal Workshop Productions with the goal of producing movies in and about Kansas and the Midwest. The last screenplay O'Neal wrote in film school was titled "Au Pair, Kansas," about a recently widowed woman who lives on a Lindsborg, Kansas, ranch and hires a Norwegian soccer player as an au pair to help raise her two sons. Carmody was the executive producer, and when the film was released, it was titled, "The Soccer Nanny." It won the 2011 Winner Festival Prize and AMC Theaters Independent Best Heartland Narrative Feature. Notable actors include Traci Lords and Norwegian actor Håvard Lilleheie.

Carmody and O'Neal also cowrote a screenplay titled "Johnny Pigskin." Carmody reveals that the basic plot is sports-related and based on Haskell Institute playing Notre Dame in 1915. The piece is in script form now, and they are working to finalize and produce it as a film. When doing research for the screenplay, Carmody found out that Haskell would hire native trackers to find children who left and bring them back. This was the basis for his film, "The Only Good Indian," which he wrote and produced, and starred Academy Award winner Wes Studi. O'Neal was a coproducer on the film, which was directed by Academy Award Winner Kevin Willmott, with whom Carmody has worked on a number of films.

"The Only Good Indian" premiered at the 2009 Sundance Film Festival, and it played on the Starz Western channel. According to IMDb:



Writer, Tom Carmody in his Lawrence film-production office.

"Set in Kansas during the early 1900s, a teenage Native American boy (newcomer Winter Fox Frank) is taken from his family and forced to attend a distant Indian 'training' school to assimilate into White society. When he escapes to return to his family, Sam Franklin (Wes Studi), a bounty hunter of Cherokee descent, is hired to find and return him to the institution. Franklin, a former Indian scout for the U.S. Army, has renounced his Native heritage and has adopted the white man's way of life, believing it's the only way for Indians to survive. Along the way, a tragic incident spurs Franklin's longtime nemesis, the famous 'Indian Fighter' Sheriff Henry McCoy (J. Kenneth Campbell) to pursue both Franklin and the boy."

O'Neal has five feature screenplays based in Kansas that he says he is excited to finalize, fine-tune and produce. He moved back to Topeka this spring, while the collaborative company Carmody/O'Neal Workshop Productions is still based in Lawrence. Carmody has a number of irons in the fire, including one he is currently working on titled "Elf Angie," a North Pole-based script, and is thankful he made the move back to Kansas.

"That's the other thing, the connections here just are amazing," Carmody says.

The lifelong friends say they look forward to having time to collaborate and develop stories based and filmed in Kansas in the future. Kansas power times two. ▲

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