

# UNLV

MAGAZINE | SPRING 2024



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Graduate student Kelly Sun forms heart hands for #UNLVStrong.

[PHOTO BY: JOSH HAWKINS]



## Dangerous Jobs

Kinesiology students get in gear to better understand the physical demands of first responders.



## Must Love Dogs

Pet therapy program celebrates 10 years of cuddles and comfort at Lied Library.



## Recovering from Tragedy

A deadly campus shooting brings trauma and grief. Here's how Rebels are recovering.

+

► **Mentors Lost:** Professors remembered for how they inspired students to strive for answers and find their paths.

► **A Collection for Healing:** Preservation and memorial efforts ensure we will not forget.



“As the first in my family to attend college, I am making my parents proud. Because of this scholarship, I have opportunities that they could only dream of.”

**Amy Montano**  
Terrible’s Cares Scholarship Recipient

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# UNLV

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## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The University of Nevada, Las Vegas, wishes to acknowledge and honor the Indigenous communities of this region, and recognize that the university is situated on the traditional homelands of the Nuwu (noowoo), Southern Paiute (paioot) People.

**Full statement:**  
[unlv.edu/land-acknowledgement](http://unlv.edu/land-acknowledgement)

## From the President

# A Path Forged By Our Commitment

As you no doubt already realize, the past few months have been difficult for many students, faculty, and staff. We miss the patient and kind professors senselessly killed on Dec. 6. As you’ll read further in these pages, we will ensure that the legacies of Jerry Cha-Jan Chang, Patricia Navarro Velez, and Nako Takemaru will not be forgotten. We are continuing with our Rebel Recovery Program in earnest so all of us can heal.

Following the tragedy, I must admit I worried that some students might not return after the chaotic end to their fall semester. But we welcomed our largest-ever spring class. This spring’s enrollment is 5% larger than last year’s, and nearly 95% of students were retained from the fall. To me, this signals that students – and their parents – value UNLV and the important role we play in helping them to achieve their dreams. Their growth, like ours, is not to be stopped.

On March 1, I was humbled and honored when the Nevada Board of Regents renewed my contract as president of this great institution. A few days later, I delivered my annual State of the University address. When I prepare for these events, I like to take a close look at the work happening throughout our university. And each year, I grow even more amazed by and appreciative of the incredible contributions of UNLV’s dedicated staff, faculty, and students. There is so much for Rebels to be proud of.

We’re continuing conversations with regional planners and elected officials regarding a future UNLV campus on 2,000 acres in North Las Vegas. This land offers potential for graduate student housing, an education and leadership training center, and both a sports rehabilitation and aquatics facility.

We have multiple new building priorities for the main campus, including



new buildings for our College of Education and the College of Fine Arts. We are also accelerating the timeline for a new Lee Business School. As a trio, these buildings are physical symbols of our mission to improve the lives of individuals and transform our communities:

- We ensure the next generation can achieve their academic goals, and we begin that work early through partnerships to improve our pre-K-12 system.
- We foster a climate of research innovation and inspire creative activity in the form of original new works. As we expand our art facilities, we increase our contributions to the cultural vitality of our community.
- We leverage our resources and collaborate with stakeholders to fully support economic diversification. We envision the new business building as the epicenter for industry engagement with UNLV.

Another major achievement in March came when UNLV was selected by the National Science Foundation to participate in a first-of-its-kind Regional Innovation Engines to translate our high-impact research into tangible innovations. We’ll be working with Nevada’s Desert

Research Institute, Arizona State University, University of Utah, and industry partners on a project that could infuse \$160 million in federal research dollars into our region over the next decade.

On top of this, we also received two grants from the U.S. Economic Development Administration to accelerate clean energy technology and provide early-stage funding opportunities for small businesses and university-based innovation. This shows what happens when you create a university ecosystem that ultimately benefits everyone.

UNLV’s path is forged, not by our challenges, but by our commitment to improving the well-being of our students, our faculty and staff, and the world. I am incredibly humbled and grateful to have the opportunity to continue leading UNLV. And I am more committed than ever to helping our university move forward.

Thank you for your partnership and support of UNLV.

**Keith E. Whitfield**  
UNLV President

## 5 REASONS TO BE PROUD REBELS

### ENGINEERING

#### 1

## DESIGNED FOR FLEXIBILITY

The new **Advanced Engineering Building (AEB)** threw open its massive garage-style doors and brought much-needed classroom and research space to the burgeoning Howard R. Hughes College of Engineering.

And leave it to the engineers to bring efficiency to every nook and cranny of the elegant new spaces. Even the skybridge connecting the new building to the existing Engineering Complex was designed to be more than a mere walkway.

The college needs every inch of the space to support its growth. Enrollment has doubled to 3,600 graduate and undergraduate students over the past 14 years and is expected to reach 4,500 by 2030.

"Novel engineering design and prototypes, innovation of new technologies, and patents will come out of this building," said Rama Venkat, dean of Howard R. Hughes College of Engineering. "That is one of the things we are confident of. The AEB will truly be a place where real-world problems seek and find next-generation solutions."

That takes collaboration across teams, Venkat said, so the building was made to foster just that. The large "flexatorium" is a lecture hall by day and a disco by night (or at least it could be). It flows naturally into the building's makerspace area and out into a courtyard for when the college hosts events to showcase student innovations.

In one corner of the courtyard is steel-framed box covered with barely noticeable netting. This drone aviary offers students a safe way to experiment with new designs.

On the upper floors are open concept labs flanked by shared office spaces and conference rooms. Even in these rooms, the workstations and chairs are easily moveable. In the dry lab, researchers will work on circuit design, robotics, big data, and cybersecurity technologies. In the wet lab, faculty and students will bring innovations to water resources management, energy, and biomedical fields.

"The labs of today are no longer small and siloed," he said, adding that each floor can support about 100 graduate students and their research activities. "The best research and the best solutions result from interdisciplinary interactions from disparate fields coming from different perspectives of the same problem."

In 2023, UNLV Engineering faculty were awarded over \$17 million in research grants – the highest ever in the college's history.

"We wanted every space to have a purpose," Venkat said. "By fall, each and every corner of the building will be bustling with activity. And, sooner or later, we might need another building."

**An alum connection:** As an intern for CORE Construction, student **Tyler Tippetts** was there when the Advanced Engineering Building broke ground in February 2022. Once he graduated, he was hired full-time and saw the building through to completion as a project engineer.

**Read more about how he helped build AEB:**

[► unlv.edu/news](https://unlv.edu/news)





**AEB** BY THE NUMBERS

60%

► Expected increase in College of Engineering enrollment by 2030

52,000

► Square feet of classrooms, research labs, and meeting spaces designed to encourage collaboration

26.84

► Amount of data cabling — in miles! — used in the new building

682

► Tons of structural steel used in construction



The drone aviary (left) will support research and advanced study in autonomous aerial system development. The "flex-atorium" (right) transforms quickly from lecture hall to event space.



FINE ARTS

**2** ARTFUL ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION

Born-and-raised Las Vegans may remember the day when Commercial Center was the place to see-and-be-seen. Now thanks to a partnership between the College of Fine Arts and Clark County, the outdoor mall off East Sahara Avenue is jamming once again.

The **Arts in the Center** partnership is expanding the college's reach into the community through free public arts programming. It also provides a catalyst for the creation of daring new interdisciplinary works and performance innovation, associate dean Warren Cobb said.

"We have so many talented students in our programs," Cobb said. "This initiative is a wonderful way to provide them with an opportunity to unleash their creativity, knowing that their creations will be experienced not only by their peers but also by the wider community."

**Upcoming at Arts in the Center:** **Environment-Built/Natural** (April 10), an examination of the physical spaces around us through a multitude of student-created works. ► **Parking Lot Plays** (April 19-21), UNLV's Nevada Conservatory Theatre's world premiere of five short plays told in and around cars • **UNLV Film Comedy Showcase** (May 1), a live show of works-in-progress written sketches and entirely improvised long-form comedy. **Commercial Center Reimagined** (June X), a debut of a short documentary about the revitalization of Las Vegas' Historic Commercial Center.

Performances are free but seating limited. RSVP details:

► [unlv.edu/finearts](http://unlv.edu/finearts)

NEW INITIATIVE

**3** POLICY INSIGHTS FOR A BUDDING INDUSTRY

Southern Nevada is an emerging center for the cannabis industry with roughly \$1 billion in annual legal cannabis sales and new lounges slated to open this year. Add to that the potential intersection between gaming and cannabis, and Nevada is in a position to lead cannabis policy discussions relevant to state and federal cannabis policy and regulation across the country.

UNLV established the **Cannabis Policy Institute** to address the policy implications and support research opportunities connected to this fast-growing and highly watched industry.

Leading the institute is alumna Riana Durrett, '05 BA Political Science, '08 JD, and '23 LLM. She also teaches at the law school and is vice chair on the state's Cannabis Compliance Board. The institute brings an interdisciplinary group of faculty together with cannabis industry and government leaders.

"UNLV is the right place to foster an understanding of the complex issues surrounding cannabis legalization," she said. "UNLV is poised not only to be a leader on cannabis policy and research in Nevada, but its voice and contributions are in high demand. There's a place for UNLV in the national conversations as the industry adapts to ever-changing federal and state landscapes."

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► [unlv.edu/news/newsletter](http://unlv.edu/news/newsletter)

LEE BUSINESS SCHOOL

**4** A SMART RISK FOR CAREER SEEKERS

Backed by a \$5 million gift from the Nevada Surplus Lines Foundation, the Lee Business School launched the **Kerestesi Center for Insurance and Risk Management**.

The center's initiatives include launching a specialized degree in insurance management and collaborating with businesses and regulatory agencies to create internships, externships, and mentorship programs for students. The center also will host seminars, workshops, and conferences with industry experts and policymakers.

"The demand for qualified professionals to bolster the industry has never been greater, and the profession is well-positioned to meet the personal and professional goals of new college graduates, who increasingly seek flexible work arrangements and work-life balance," said professor Chris Utterback, who is leading the center. A 40-year industry veteran, he already helped establish UNLV's academic minor in risk management and insurance.

He noted that UNLV's highly diverse student body will help feed the industry's pipeline with new professionals. Half of the insurance workforce is projected to retire in the next 15 years, leaving more than 400,000 professional-level positions unfilled, according to federal statistics. Less than 25% of the workforce identifies as part of a racial or ethnic minority.

The center is named for Thomas F. Kerestesi, who began his career in California before returning to Las Vegas to work with his father, Frank, at Cragin & Pike, the oldest insurance agency in Nevada.

ATHLETICS

**5** DONATIONS REBEL UP

UNLV Athletics announced that Boyd Gaming Corp. and the Boyd family have committed a combined \$6.5 million for the construction of the **Boyd Multi-Use Indoor Practice Facility**.

"What is particularly exciting for our family and our company is that this state-of-the-art practice facility will touch almost every program across UNLV Athletics, benefitting both men's and women's sports alike," said Marianne Johnson, executive chairman of Boyd Gaming.

Boyd Gaming's prior \$5 million donations have supported renovations to the Lied Athletic Complex, scholarships, and the softball team. The family has contributed more than \$30 million over the years to establish and support the William S. Boyd School of Law at UNLV.

The latest gift is part of UNLV Athletics' Rebel Up campaign. The \$150 million campaign is aimed at providing funding for new facilities, elevating current facilities, and building a stronger endowment program. The campaign also recently received \$1 million from the Las Vegas Raiders Foundation.



Junior point guard Kiara Jackson

**More reasons to cheer:** The **Lady Rebels** won the Mountain West Conference basketball championship. That's now three in a row for coach Lindy La Rocque. ► The **Skatin' Rebels** club team took second place in the American Collegiate Hockey Association Division I championship. ► Track & field alumni **Kaysha Love** and **Azaria Hill** paired up for the International Bobsleigh and Skeleton Foundation World Championships. At fourth,

they were the highest placing U.S. team. ► Linebacker **Jackson Woodard** became the first UNLV football player named first-team Academic All-America. The semester GPA for all UNLV student-athletes hit an all-time high of 3.35 in the fall.



By suiting up in the gear worn by first responders, students Carlene Yup, Chesney De Graff, and Austin Cooper learn how to help people in demanding fields avoid injury.

## THE COURSE

## FIRST RESPONDER AND MILITARY HUMAN PERFORMANCE

To help those in physically demanding jobs, kinesiology students gain a first-hand understanding of environmental factors that affect performance.

BY STEVEN SLIVKA

On TV and in movies, actors can make the work of hauling gear in bulky uniforms look effortless, whether it's the rifle-toting title character in *American Sniper* or the detectives with their gunbelts, radios, and parkas in *True Detective: Night Country*.

Their real-life counterparts, however, exert a significant amount of strength and energy to complete their jobs. Firefighters, for example, can carry about 50 pounds of additional weight with their personal protective equipment and self-contained breathing apparatus.

### WHAT STUDENTS LEARN

There is critical science behind im-

proving their performance and keeping people in physically demanding professions free of injury over the span of their careers. Students in the First Responder and Military Human Performance course get in-depth understanding of these jobs, with a special emphasis on job task analysis and environmental concerns.

### THE EXPERTS TEACHING THE CLASS

Kinesiology professor Brian Schilling is an expert in strength and conditioning and the director of the Physically Demanding Professions Research Laboratory. Schilling's lab focuses on the physical demands among military, law

enforcement, and fire and rescue personnel, and how to best train them to meet the demands of their professions.

Kathryn Bell, a doctoral student in kinesiology and nutrition sciences, also teaches the course. She is a member of the U.S. Army National Guard and has a master's in applied physiology.

"I have had several incredible experiences in the military that have complemented many of the topics I teach in class," she said. "I have not only gotten to experience so many aspects of what I teach from a military perspective, but I also work with other soldiers whose day jobs are in fire and law enforcement."

### HOW IT'S TAUGHT

This is a hybrid-model class for both graduate and undergraduate students. They go explore content online and then have a weekly 75-minute discussion or lab exercise. They are able to try on the equipment and learn first-hand

how it affects performance.

"To foster small group discussions, I typically take between 12 and 18 students each cohort so they can work in small groups of three," Schilling said. "I tend to get plenty of students who are veterans or who are connected to law enforcement or fire. This past semester, I had a veteran, two paramedics, and someone who wanted to go into the fire academy. I also had an active Metro police officer in my class. These students really add to the conversation because they are able to speak from their unique experiences."

### THE ORIGIN

Schilling developed the class after talking with friends who work in these fields. "I asked them what they would want students to know who go into the same fields," Schilling said. "Trying to tie in the environmental concerns with human performance is very unique, as athletes typically don't see the same extremes in the environment. We talk about heat, altitude, pollution, cold air, underwater diving, etc."

Infusing the class with hands-on experience was especially important to Schilling. Students can look at the equipment that professionals have to wear on a daily basis, but physically putting them on creates an entirely different perspective on how the weight and other elements can affect performance in the line of duty.

"On several occasions, I've heard students say that their perception of military, fire, and law enforcement has drastically changed from what they originally thought the jobs entailed, and much of that has to do with the Hollywood perception of these careers," Bell said.

### STUDENTS ARE SURPRISED TO LEARN ...

That these professions also require excellent communication skills. "You cannot do these professions if you don't communicate," Schilling said. "These are human-based professions and you have to be able to communicate or you won't make it."

Bell said that students are also surprised to learn that military personnel are incredibly diverse, serving in a wide range



of roles — it's not all elite warfighting as depicted in most movies. It's the same misperception of law enforcement.

"Many students are shocked to hear that police officers spend a lot of their time in their vehicles with integrated short bursts of high-intensity movement. That imposes a different level of musculoskeletal stress compared to the other tactical professions," she said. "It's really fun to show the realities of these professions and see our students gain a whole new appreciation for those who work within them."

### HOW THE CLASS DEVELOPS OUR WORKFORCE

This class is both an integration of physiology and biomechanics information that students have studied in the kinesiology degree, as well as an introductory course to prepare students for positions in "tactical human performance" fields. Those fields include dietitians, strength and conditioning professionals, psychologists, and scientists.

While some entry-level positions are available for graduates with a bachelor's

degree, oftentimes advanced degrees and certifications are required. As a major research university, UNLV offers a full slate of graduate academic programs to develop this workforce.

### THE RESEARCH-TO-CLASSROOM CONNECTION

As director of the Physically Demanding Professions Research Laboratory, Schilling has received federal funding from the Department of Defense to examine a soldier's performance after blood donation, as they might have to do when deployed.

Schilling has also collaborated with other departments within the School of Integrated Health Sciences on research studies, including the effects of body armor on breathing functions and the tendency of military cadets to conceal an injury.

"Our lab has a responsibility to provide up-to-date, actionable information for our stakeholders," Schilling said. "In turn, Kinesiology 411 can help make sure future practitioners are well positioned to be evidence-led in their professions."

**Kinesiology graduate student Kathryn Bell helps student Carlene Yup put on military gear.**



# TOGETHER, WE HEAL

BY MATT JACOB

**Six years after examining the fallout from the 1 October shooting, psychology professor Stephen Benning is studying the emotional aftereffects of the Dec. 6 shooting. The goal: to understand the road to psychological recovery for all.**

IT WAS SHORTLY BEFORE NOON ON DEC. 6, and Stephen Benning had just wrapped up a Zoom meeting in his office in the Carol C. Harter Classroom Building Complex. Both his office and cell phones pinged.

It was a university-issued alert that campus police were responding to a report of shots fired.

At first, the UNLV associate professor of psychology didn't know what to think. Was the notification sent by mistake? Was it a drill?

With the second alert moments later, he knew it was not. He promptly dragged a desk in front of his office door and hunkered down.

Over the next several hours, Benning — who also directs UNLV's Psychophys-

iology of Emotion and Personality laboratory — somehow was able to keep his emotions in check. He occupied his time checking on the welfare of colleagues and students via text and responded to similar messages sent to him.

Even as police escorted him from his office after being

locked down for nearly four hours, Benning focused not on his own mental condition but that of others. The expert in clinical psychology, psychopathy, emotion, and personality was willing to administer psychological first aid to anyone in need.

He spent the next few hours standing outside the reunification area at the Thomas & Mack Center before finally heading home around 7 p.m. Even that night, as he spoke to his family about the trauma of the day, Benning remained mostly in clinician mode, setting aside his personal emotions.

That all changed the next morning when he walked into his office and noticed what was hanging on his desk chair: his coat.

He flashed back to the previous winter, when he was battling a serious health issue.

"I had severe anemia and would've been deathly cold being outside that long in those temperatures without a jacket. Seeing the jacket on my desk chair, I thought, 'Oh, I guess I wasn't even really that cold; I didn't even need my jacket.'

"That's when the first wave of emotion hit me. There was that sense of gratitude of having survived a serious medical condition, but then also a rueing of having been barricaded during a mass shooting."

## GOOD GRIEF | ALLI AND RUTHANNE (2023)

BY SARA JEAN ODAM

Featured in the Barrick Museum's spring exhibition, "The Emotional Show."

Odam, a Las Vegas-based painter, created this oil on paper portrait as part of a series after a family tragedy.

*"There is a tension between people who want to 'help' survivors of a tragedy, and the survivors themselves whose behavior, feelings, and activities are hardly predictable or one-size-fits-all," Odam says. "People say a lot of things out of awkwardness and not knowing what to say, and that can end up being more hurtful and isolating than helpful, even if the intention is*

*the opposite. I attribute this to an overall fear of, and lack of tools for navigating grief and dark scary things in general. When the scary things are kept in the dark and only whispered about, it hurts everyone. Which was the whole purpose of my sitting with family members and painting them even when we struggled to know what to say to each other."*

**BENNING WOULD EXPERIENCE** a series of emotional ups and downs in the days that followed the on-campus shooting that claimed the lives of three fellow faculty members [see Page 26 for their stories].

And he knew most members of the UNLV community were dealing with similar emotional trauma — whether they were on campus during the shooting or not.

Benning harkened back to a year-long, in-depth psychological trauma study he conducted in the wake of the 2017 shooting that claimed the lives of 58 people attending an outdoor country music festival on the Las Vegas Strip.

The 1 October study featured more than 120 participants and examined their psychological symptoms and feelings. About one-third of respondents were on the festival grounds; the rest lived in Southern Nevada but did not attend.

Respondents were encouraged to share — via self-report questionnaires — their stories, feelings, and experiences in the tragedy's immediate aftermath, known as the acute stress period. Benning and his team then reconnected with respondents during the post-traumatic period at intervals of 45 days, three months, six months, and one year.

The goal of these follow-ups: to track how much (if at all) the participants' emotional trauma diminished over time.

Most psychological studies on this topic are retrospective — that is, well after the acute period, Benning explained.

"We also wanted to get these stories because people experience trauma in very different ways," he says.

"And our self-report questionnaires can only do so much to capture the effects that trauma has on people;

they don't necessarily get at how people experienced and remember the events themselves."

So, in the wake of the Dec. 6 shooting at UNLV, Benning updated his past study, and the university's Institutional Review Board fast-tracked its approval process. He only had a window of about three weeks to recruit participants. The reason: The acute-stress period must be captured within the first 30 days of a traumatic event.

To promote the anonymous study, he turned to social media as well as student newsletters.

Among the 85 initial respondents, Benning received a complete data set from 73 individuals, with a mix of students, faculty, and staff. More than half were on campus at the time of the shooting, with 16 in close proximity to the incident — at Beam Hall, the Student Union, or the Valerie Pida Plaza — and 27 locked down elsewhere on campus.

Of the remaining participants, 12 had been on campus but departed before the lockdown; 17 didn't come to campus that day; and one was near but not actually on campus.

While the approach and methodology of the two surveys were largely the same, Benning did make a couple of minor tweaks based on results of the 1 October study.

For instance, Benning gleaned from his first study that it was important to inquire about changes to eating and substance use habits post-shooting; if those affected by trauma reported being more sensitive to feelings of anxiety; and if those affected were able to process their own emotions in the immediate aftermath.

Perhaps the biggest takeaway from

the 1 October study, though, was how participants perceived support from friends and loved ones — and how those perceptions affected their overall sense of well-being.

A large percentage of 1 October participants said they interpreted seemingly encouraging statements like "feel better" and "you can get back to life" as invalidating and critical.

"One thing we're doing in this current study is asking [participants] to describe — using a few words or a couple of sentences — what kinds of criticism they may be experiencing," Benning says. "Because if people are perceiving others as critical of them, they're likely going to feel worse, not better."

**ONCE HIS LATEST RESEARCH** is completed near the end of this year, Benning says he will cross-compare the results of the two studies. From there, he hopes to share his findings during a community presentation at the Resiliency & Justice Center that was established after the 1 October shooting. Its mission is to help survivors of violent crimes throughout Nevada.

He also plans to make the research available to other community partners — both inside and outside of Nevada. When it comes to the healing process following traumatic events, Benning stresses that it's important for both victims and outsiders to understand that everyone reacts differently.

Not only will emotions ebb and flow over time, but each individual travels their own road to psychological recovery.

"Assuming that there's a one-size-fits-all response to these kinds of traumatic events — it's not reality," Benning says. "So while I can understand the desire to try to help people feel better and to [get them] to resume a typical level of functioning, those kinds of statements often come across as criticisms.

"It's much more helpful to involve people in activities — not assuming that people are too broken or too damaged to go out and do fun things. Not only is it OK, but it's important to engage in things that promote your healing. Just as it's important to recognize that your journey is your own."





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## LEARNING IN THE WAKE OF A TRAGEDY

BY MATT JACOB

When UNLV joined the long list of U.S. academic institutions touched by an on-campus shooting, Kaitlin Clinnin knew the trauma would still be lingering when campus reopened for the spring semester.

Professors and students alike would be navigating uncharted waters — that is, figuring out how to teach and learn while simultaneously juggling a variety of emotions that can wax and wane from week to week, day to day, and even hour to hour.

The director of composition in UNLV's English department, Clinnin's research focuses on trauma-informed teaching.

"Unfortunately, this was not my first campus shooting," Clinnin says. "In fact, at every institution where I've taught or been a student, there has been a lockdown situation and, in many cases, a campus violence situation.

"Also, I'm from Newtown, Connecticut, which is where the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting took place. That's where I played rec basketball."

Drawing on her expertise in trauma-informed teaching, Clinnin has developed a blueprint to help instructors recognize and support students who have experienced an emotionally disturbing event.

### THE TENETS OF TRAUMA-INFORMED EDUCATION

Clinin's first principle is to establish and stick to a consistent classroom structure. Teachers should be clear and transparent with their expectations, policies, and procedures.

"Trauma disrupts us," Clinnin says. "It takes us out of our usual routine, disorients us, and makes us feel powerless and out of control. So we want to create a classroom where everyone can learn to the best of their abilities, while reestablishing that sense of safety and security that's been disrupted."

The second principle focuses on



flexibility. While clear routines are important, the months after a traumatic event is not the time to rule with an iron fist.

Clinin recommends instructors try to be accommodating whenever possible. For instance, if past policies have allowed students to miss up to two classes without punitive actions, consider pushing it to three or four classes.

That dovetails into the third principle of empowerment — that is, give students a bit of control over certain aspects of the class.

"This is not to say that students should completely determine the course structure," Clinnin says. "But maybe letting them decide when they're going to turn in an assignment — say, within a 48-hour window. Or give students multiple ways to demonstrate that they understand the course content."

Lastly, there's the principle of connection — to students and among students. Instructors should make a concerted effort to connect with students on an empathetic level.

And they can foster student-to-student connections. "It could be as simple as having the students introduce themselves to the person next to them on the first day and exchange email addresses and phone numbers so they can check in with each other," Clinnin says.

"Really, all four of these strategies are just good pedagogy — but they are especially important after a traumatic event has happened."

Ultimately, the goal for all is to reestablish a sense of safety and security, so "we can turn our focus to learning."

## UNLV, DRI TO PARTNER ON CLIMATE 'ENGINE'

Drought. Continuously warming temperatures. Rapid population growth.

It's a combination that can threaten the livability and economic future of the Southwest.

The National Science Foundation announced a multi-institutional consortium to confront the climate challenges facing the desert Southwest and spur economic development in the region. Both UNLV and the Desert Research Institute will serve as core academic partners on the Southwest Sustainability Innovation Engine (SWSIE).

The multimillion-dollar project is aptly named an "Engine" for its long-term goal: to catalyze economic opportunities by addressing water sustainability, renewable energy, and carbon-footprint reduction in the desert Southwest.

"SWSIE is very different from a normal



grant," said engineering professor Jacimaria Batista, who is the grant's Knowledge Translation co-lead.

"This program goes beyond pure faculty and student research." It takes things a step further by successfully translating sustainability ideas into technology using research and industry collaboration as the tools. At its core, the Engine is about entrepreneurship and its translation into technologies that will make the Southwest region more sustainable."

The Engine is a first for the NSF, which in the past funded only basic research, Batista says. The application process took more than a year of planning. The SWSIE project was among a handful chosen from a highly competitive national pool of 34 semifinalists.

With Arizona State University as lead, other academic partners include the University of Utah, the Water Research Foundation, SciTech Institute, and Maricopa Community Colleges.

# A Decade of 'Paws'itivity

Now a beloved Study Week tradition, pet therapy visits to the Libraries bring much-needed stress relief to students.

BY SEAN KENNEDY

Charlie, a Shih Tzu mix, was a disheveled thing when Sue Grundfest found him a few years back in a shelter. He was experiencing many medical issues and was not the cute dog people are drawn to now.

"No one could initially tell what kind of dog he was because his hair was so matted. He had certainly been neglected in his previous home, and took some time to warm up to people. His first days with me, he had several surgeries and procedures," says Grundfest.

But at Lied Library, he's developed quite a fan base among students stressed out by finals.

"He's found his purpose in helping people through our therapy program," Grundfest says. "There are students now who always come in looking for Charlie."

Grundfest is founder of Pet Partners of Las Vegas/Love Dog Adventures, which partners with University Libraries. The Libraries launched "Paws for a Study Break" a decade ago to help students manage stress so they can perform better on their finals.

Now the line to visit the Love Dogs stretches from one end of the building to the other. They come for the cuddles and a chance to get selfies with the canine celebrities.

"I always worked the line with Charlie," says Grundfest. "The line around the building makes us feel so proud. And students really do come for a little comfort and joy, and it's important."

Animal-assisted therapy programs have become popular at universities across the country as attention has focused on the mental health and well-being of students under increasing

strain to perform academically.

"The libraries are really the heart of campus, especially here at UNLV, and one of our goals has been to create a sense of community for students," says associate professor Rosan Mitola. "Therapy dogs are a consistent way to draw students into our spaces and foster a sense of belonging and connectedness to the library."

Mitola worked with Libraries colleagues — including Su Kim Chung of Special Collections & Archives and Jason Aubin, now director of space management for the University Libraries — to launch the dog therapy event, Paws for a Study Break, in 2013.

"We weren't really doing programming back then, so we had to develop a lot of processes and procedures, and get clearance to have dogs on campus and inside the library. It was not like, 'Oh, let's have a small event in the library.' It was a lot of work," says Mitola.

After putting the bone of the program in place, the trio invited Grundfest and the Love Dogs to campus for their first visit in 2013. The program was an instant success. Nearly 1,000 students attended the first two-day event.

Over the years, "Paws for a Study Break" and other animal-assisted therapy events have flourished, providing cuddles and selfie opportunities to more than 14,000 students. Often when the Love Dogs visit Lied Library, the line will stretch from one end of the building to the other.

Pet Partners of Las Vegas has nearly 40 partnerships with organizations around Las Vegas and has expanded on campus with events at the Boyd School of Law, Kirk Kerkorian School of Medicine, and School of Dental Medicine. But Grundfest treasures her original



PHOTO: JOSH HAWKINS



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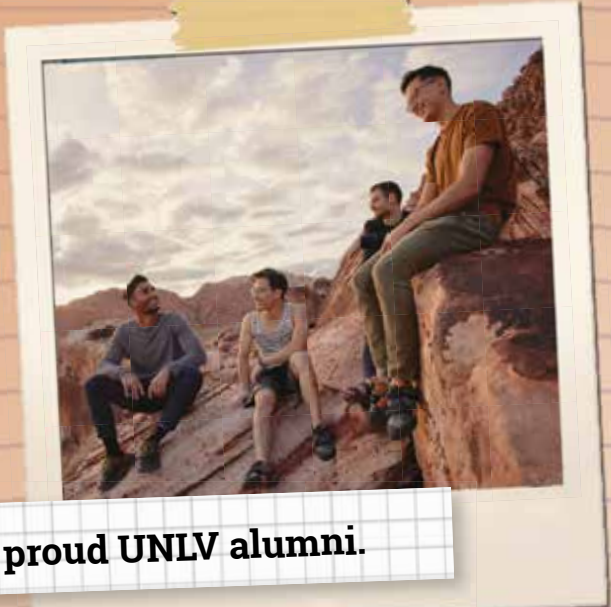
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partnership with Libraries in particular. "The employees and the students at the library, they treat us like gold," Grundfest says. "There is joy and fun and camaraderie in the room, and we feel a part of the university experience."

### SERVICE AMID TRAGEDY

On Dec. 6, 2023, Grundfest and four volunteer handlers were at Lied Library for their official 10th anniversary visit with students. It was supposed to be just a two-hour Study Week event. Then a chilling emergency text notification started popping up on student phones: active shooter on campus. The entire campus went into lockdown and the Library celebration took on new meaning as around 120 students, staff, and volunteers sheltered inside the Amargosa Room.

"It's one thing to bring in therapy animal teams after a tragedy, where we are there to comfort and assist those affected, and another thing altogether to be a part of the tragedy itself," says Grundfest. "It was eerily quiet as we waited for guidance or news, and each therapy dog had a circle of students around them."

Charlie and his Love Dogs did their job. "They walked around the room to visit students, and were a good distraction for students," says Grundfest. "We were perhaps in the wrong place at the right time to help students."

Nearly four hours later, police teams began evacuating buildings. Many of those in Lied Library made their way to the Thomas & Mack Center before eventually traveling to the Las Vegas Convention Center. The whole time, the dogs continued to provide support for traumatized students.

"One student held Charlie's paw during the entire walk," says Grundfest. "All the dogs were so supportive to the students."

After students made their way home, many reached out to the Libraries on social media to check on the dogs to make sure they made it home OK. "I hope the library staff and faculty are all safe during this time," said one message on Instagram. "I just wanted to check whether the dogs were all right as well? They must have been really startled with the alarms that went off ♥️"

PHOTO: JOSH HAWKINS



### BENEFITS OF ANIMAL-ASSISTED INTERVENTION

Grundfest, a licensed therapy dog instructor and evaluator, says there's much more to animal-assisted therapy than simply bringing a friendly pet to events.

"We train the handler as well as the animal," says Grundfest. "[Handlers] must take a course and pass everything, from understanding infection control to HIPAA laws to understanding how to handle the animals."

Animal-assisted therapy has a number of documented health benefits, including lower heart rate and blood pressure, while also providing emotional benefits for individuals who are struggling.

"Whether we are bringing up a low affect or bringing down a manic affect or working with special-needs children and youth or aiding with physical therapy or occupational therapy, the integration of the animals into the traditional and non-traditional therapies has been proven," says Grundfest. "The unconditional love of the animals is palpable, and the handler is just as important. Both ends of the leash are critical to the success of the intervention."

While the Dec. 6 shooting was their first time being in the middle of a traumatic event, the Love Dogs have provided intervention services in the aftermath of other tragedies. Following the October 1, 2017, shooting at the Route 91 Harvest Music Festival, the Love Dogs were on campus and at Lied Library.

"When 1 October happened, Sue immediately reached out and asked how she could support our students reeling from the shooting. Within hours, Sue organized volunteer handlers for their therapy dogs to be in the library. During our most difficult days, we've had therapy dogs to help the UNLV community grieve, heal, and move forward," says Mitola.

While the Love Dogs are most famous at UNLV, other therapy animals are members of Pet Partners. Scarlet and Angel, miniature horses, have made therapy visits to campus, and other therapy animals include cats, rabbits, guinea pigs, and birds.

"I've tested several pigs over the years, but I've never found one with the right temperament that can remain silent in stressful situations," says Grundfest. "I remain hopeful, though."

After the campus shooting, therapy dogs have returned for additional healing, staff meetings, and for the opening of the spring semester. And, as they have done every semester for the past 10 years, the Love Dogs will return to the Libraries during Study Week.

"While therapy dog programs have proliferated at UNLV, our long-lasting partnership with the Love Dogs started the tradition on campus. We're so grateful to Sue and her team of dedicated volunteers. Their generosity has really made this program for our students possible," says Mitola. "Therapy dogs are consistently our most popular event with students, and an event I look forward to every semester."



*"It's one thing to bring in therapy animal teams after a tragedy, where we are there to comfort and assist those affected, and another thing altogether to be a part of the tragedy itself."*

Sue Grundfest  
Founder, Pet Partners of Las Vegas

# Still Strong

*After a deadly shooting,  
Rebels learn to recover*

STORIES COMPILED BY CATE WEEKS, BETH DEBOUCK, SEAN KENNEDY, TONY ALLEN, AND FRANCIS MCCABE  
PHOTOGRAPH BY JOSH HAWKINS

# UNLV

## *I: Introduction*

**BY THE TIME THIS ISSUE REACHES YOU**, UNLV will be four months removed from Dec. 6, 2023 — the day a gunman entered Frank and Estella Beam Hall, killed three beloved faculty members, and left thousands frightened and confused during lockdown. But, of course, the reverberations will long continue.

The days that followed brought concern for the recovery of a fourth seriously injured professor (he wishes to have his privacy honored while he continues to recuperate). Classes and finals were suspended. Impromptu memorials and a campuswide vigil marked the start of the grieving process. Two weeks later, Winter Commencement reminded the campus to still celebrate student achievement.

The timing shortly before winter break meant that many faculty and staff dispersed for the holidays. They returned in January to a campus forever changed.

“We’re not going to forget Dec. 6, but it will not define us,” President Keith E. Whitfield said in his recent annual State of the University Address. “We’re not there yet, but we’re doing better. I honestly believe that it’s because we’ve come together as a community — that’s our strength, and it will propel us to continue to recover.”

In January, Whitfield launched the Rebel Recovery Program to communicate regularly about the investigations, efforts to expand mental health resources for students and employees, address campus safety and infrastructure, and begin planning a permanent way to honor those lost.

Top: Lurynn Akasaki, who graduated from the Lee Business School two weeks after the shooting, stops at an impromptu memorial at the Alumni Amphitheater. Professor Jerry Cha-Jan Chang, who was killed, oversaw the internship program she participated in last summer.

Bottom: The Southern Nevada community shared in the campus' grief and offered messages of support.

Opposite: A memorial note is left at campus.



### BROKEN DOORS AND BUILDING PLANS

Some 500 doors were damaged as law enforcement officers swept through buildings to methodically clear thousands of people from lockdown. Temporary repairs were soon made, but supply chain issues, insurance filings, and the bidding process for vendors mean full repairs will take time. That also gives administrators time to fully consider upgrades.

A newly formed Committee on Campus Security and Safety was formed to develop ideas for immediate security enhancements. To supplement the University Police Department, for example, a highly visible team of security guards is now patrolling campus until 10 p.m. every day. Going forward, the committee will help ensure people have a forum to share their concerns about safety on an open, public campus.

Meanwhile, Beam Hall has been closed for classes and to the public, though some employees chose to return to their offices, finding comfort in that normalcy. The administration



will soon decide when classes and other operations might return to the 115,000-square-foot space. More space is a constant quest for the always-growing student body.

The building has long been home to the Lee Business School and a variety of other UNLV departments, including

World Languages and Cultures. The business school had already begun fundraising efforts to build a new space. A new business building is at the top of UNLV's capital funding request for the next Legislative session, along with facilities for the colleges of Education and Fine Arts.



### THE COMMUNITY'S EMBRACE

Rebel Recovery also acknowledges the outpouring of community support. There were many small businesses and restaurants on the outskirts of campus who took in scared students during the lockdown. The Strip responded with the messages of solidarity on their marquees and offers of food and rooms for students and families in need. In social media, students shared gratitude for the individuals who helped them — faculty, staff, fellow Rebels, and complete strangers.

The support continued in the weeks that followed, hundreds of people have contributed more than \$400,000 to UNLV's emergency fund and to the scholarship funds to honor professors Jerry Cha-Jan Chang, Patricia Navarro Velez, and Naoko Takemaru.

To start the spring semester, Tribal Nations members traveled from throughout the region to hold a private cleansing ceremony in Beam Hall before sharing traditional song, prayers, and a smudging ceremony for all. The event culminated with a communal circle dance in which more than a hundred faculty and students joined hands with the tribal members. The event underscored the power of gathering together to heal.

"I've seen a community shine bright with love, support, and encouragement," Whitfield said. "As I've said since I arrived at UNLV more than three years ago — and it's as true as ever today — this is a very special community. Together, we are UNLV Strong."

PHOTO: BECCA SCHWARTZ (@UNLVSTRONG)

## II: Mental Wellness

# 'A Cornerstone for Their Whole Life'

**Even before the trauma of Dec. 6, students reported high levels of stress. Here's why UNLV has expanded its resources to support mental wellness.**

**NEARLY 30 YEARS AGO WHEN JAMIE DAVIDSON LEFT** the University of Georgia to join UNLV, he didn't expect that he would so soon need to justify the need for student mental health services.

Shortly after he started as a staff psychologist, the campus counseling center's director quit; an administrator told him the center would likely be closed as a result. "I was like, 'How can you close a counseling center at a major university?' You know, that's unheard of."

Now the associate vice president for student wellness at UNLV — which includes the Student Health Center, Student Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), and the Behavioral Health Team — he can look back and see how far UNLV has progressed in prioritizing mental wellness.

"We still have a counseling center, so I guess you know that they decided to keep it open," he jokes.

But, at the time, he felt dejected. It took a conversation with his wife for him to "find my moxie" and confront the administrator about what it would take to keep the center open. "The administrator said, 'Besides helping students, I want to know the counseling's center's impact on academic success and on student retention.'"

Although such research is prevalent now, Davidson says he had to get creative to find the answer back then. His team dug in to make the connection to dropout rates. And they've been making

that case with stronger data ever since.

"By collecting the data, one of the things we showed is that by offering counseling — not only do students get better, which is what you'd expect — 85% said that counseling helped their academics. Because when you're struggling with a well-being issue, it's really difficult to focus and study."

### A NATIONAL ISSUE

The American Council of Education notes that students with a mental health issue are more likely to have lower GPAs, take longer to complete a degree, or drop out of college entirely.

Today, more and more students are grappling with mental health issues, according to the latest Health Minds survey of college students:

- 44% reported symptoms of depression;
- 37% said they experienced anxiety;
- 15% said they have seriously considered suicide.

Coming out of a pandemic, those were the highest rates in the survey's 15-year history.

"It's like Maslow's hierarchy," says Davidson. "When you help students meet their core needs, it can have a profound impact. Not only on their emotional well-being, but their ability to academically succeed. I like to think it's part of laying a cornerstone of wellness for their whole life."

Davidson no longer has to fight so hard to prove the relevancy of the counseling center, now called CAPS. President Keith E. Whitfield, a psychologist, placed supporting student mental, physical, and financial well-being as a top initiative when he joined UNLV amid the pandemic in fall 2020.

In 2022, he launched periodic campus mental health town halls to help faculty and administrators better understand

*“I want people to know this is a place that is centering mental wellness in our mission and in our everyday practices.”*

**Keith E. Whitfield**  
UNLV president

student needs. That event led to a group of students founding Project Wellness for peer-to-peer support. At the most recent town hall in February, he dispensed with the typical panel presentations to moderate a more interactive conversation.

“I think it’s vital that we talk about mental health, that we normalize caring for our mental well-being as much as we do our physical,” he said. “When we look at traditionally aged students, folks my age might think, ‘What do these kids have to be stressed about?’ To me the answer is clear: a lot.”

And that was true even before the Dec. 6, 2023, shooting brought trauma, grief, and anxiety to our campus.

#### **FROM REBEL RECOVERY TO RECONNECTION**

CAPS, along with several UNLV programs in social work, psychology, and counselor education have been integral in the UNLV Rebel Recovery program, launched by Whitfield after the shooting. In addition to expanding wellness resources for students, Rebel Recovery brought benefits enhancements, numerous pop-up wellness events, and other programs to students and employees alike.

In December, January, and February, Davidson said CAPS saw a 27% increase in the number of appointments over the previous year. About 40% of students making their first appointments cited experiencing trauma unrelated to abuse as a reason for their visit.

“But most striking to me was the increase in same-day crisis appointments — that jumped 492% after the shooting,” he said.

Similar jumps were seen among employees. UNLV’s human resources department has long offered work-life balance workshops and webinars. Sessions specific to trauma recovery were added in December, and all garnered above-average attendance.

The immediate need for counseling was overwhelming, so the university also tapped into the services at the Resiliency & Justice Center, which was created by county and state agencies after the 1 October shooting in 2017. Numerous practitioners in private



practice, many of them alumni, offered their services pro bono.

For those affected by trauma, Whitfield notes, healing can’t be rushed. But he says the hope comes in remembering that after recovery comes reconnection.

“I am so proud of how our university community has rallied together to support one another,” Whitfield said. “This is a place that understands compassion, and I’ve seen countless examples of people supporting each other and our students. But more than that, I want people to know this is a place that is centering mental wellness in our mission and in our everyday practices.”

#### **FROM OK TO THRIVING**

UNLV has increased CAPS staffing by 50% since a mental health fee of \$50 a semester went into effect in fall 2021. The increase was approved by the Nevada Board of Regents after strong support came from undergraduate and graduate student governments.

CAPS will employ 21 counselors, two psychiatrists, two behavioral health providers, two psychiatric nurses, and two wellness educators to serve UNLV’s 31,000 students. Davidson notes that the demand for psychiatric services has increased as more students come into college with previously prescribed medications. Most major mental illnesses, such as bipolar disorder, have their peak onset before age 25.

Last year, CAPS embedded two staff

members in the residence halls and is expanding to the Shadow Lane medical campus. Programming expanded to train faculty and staff proactively to respond to students they’re concerned about.

“CAPS services are a game changer for students,” reports Chelsie Hawkinson, a professor-in-residence in the College of Education. Her research is in college student engagement and success.

“We spend a lot of time in First-Year Seminar discussing the importance of developing psychosocial skills before we explore academic skill development. Without the strong foundation of positive psychosocial behaviors, it is very difficult to focus on learning and goal achievement.”

Like Davidson, Whitfield notes that it’s no longer hard to make the connection between student well-being and classroom success. But, he notes, the impact goes far beyond helping students get through their studies and on to graduation.

“Ultimately, what we’re doing here is preparing our students for success beyond us,” he said. “We give them skills and knowledge they need for their careers, of course. But we also are helping them learn how to establish strong relationships and to cope with challenges — to learn how to get help when they’re not OK and how to work their way from being OK to really thriving.”

### **III: Memorial Efforts**

## **A Collection for Healing**

#### **Special Collections & Archives launches preservation project to document Dec. 6 shooting.**

Though classes were cancelled for students and employees encouraged to work from home, many returned to campus the next morning, bringing flowers and vigil candles, religious tokens, and teddy bears. On their handwritten notes, they shared their thanks for the fallen professors and condolences to the families they left behind.

The memorials grew organically in the amphitheater next to Pida Plaza and at the UNLV sign marking the entrance to campus off Maryland Parkway. Even before the winter weather began to smudge the messages, what to do with them was clear to UNLV Special Collections & Archives.

“As archivists, we preserve records and artifacts that enable our community to share its story and future users to bear witness to history,” said Sarah Quigley, director of Special Collections & Archives. “This initiative was established to help us document the experiences of our university community, remember the victims and the impact they had on the lives of their students and colleagues, and learn how the university and our wider community responded in the aftermath.”

Special Collections & Archives began a central repository to preserve documents and collect stories and oral histories about the tragedy. The goal is to help both the university and future researchers understand how the tragedy changed the community.

“We gather documentation about all sorts of historical events in this line of work, but this one is different. This is personal,” said Aaron Mayes, visual



*“Throughout gathering, preserving, and describing these materials, our team worked with respect and compassion. We hope that this work will help our university community process, heal, and learn.”*

**Sarah Jones**  
head of technical services

materials curator.

Working with the president’s office, the team carefully began collecting materials left behind. Sarah Jones, head of technical services, led efforts to inventory and professionally preserve the materials. Unlike their usual preservation projects, many members of the team were directly involved in the event.

“Processing this collection is a challenge,” Jones said. “Throughout gath-

ering, preserving, and describing these materials, our team worked with respect and compassion. We hope that this work will help our university community process, heal, and learn.”

The team is also collecting materials such as videos of the UNLV vigil service held on Dec. 13, 2023; archived UNLV websites; and condolence items sent to university administration. Two members of the UNLV community donated their personal photographs and journal entries relating to the shooting. The items can be viewed in Special Collections at Lied Library.

“Eventually we would like to include items that further document the operations, activities, and procedures of organizations and individuals associated with the shooting and its aftermath,” said Quigley. “We’d also like to include more items documenting the lives of the victims and also collect more stories about the experiences of survivors and witnesses.”

**Sarah Jones of UNLV Special Collections & Archives sorts materials related to the shooting.**

**Still Strong**

**II: Mental Wellness**

**Still Strong**

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# UNLV

**REBELS MAKE IT HAPPEN**

That desire for more stories is helping to shape an oral history project on that tragedy, which will be conducted under the direction of Claytee White, director of the UNLV Oral History Research Center. She was part of efforts to collect oral histories following the 1 October shooting in 2017.

“While it’s unfortunate that we have experience doing this type of work, we are taking our time and building on the lessons we learned from that project to develop something that will collect the experiences of our students, faculty, and staff with care,” said White.

An official start date for the oral history project is still being determined. Information on how to participate will be shared on the Libraries website.

White stressed that great care would be given to support the mental health of both the participants and the historians who conduct the interviews. Project workers will meet with mental health counselors prior to conducting interviews, and additional mental health resources will be provided to interviewees at each oral history session.

Interested in donating materials? In addition to memorial artifacts left on campus, Special Collections & Archives is accepting a variety of Dec. 6-related materials, including:

- Artistic responses, such as poetry, music, and drawings
- Audio and video recordings, such as news coverage, documentaries, and witness recordings
- Correspondence (including emails)
- Memorial programs
- Photographs and scrapbooks

Organic matter, such as flowers, will be turned into mulch by UNLV’s Community Garden.

[> Learn more at library.unlv.edu.](#)

### MORE INFO

Visit the UNLV Strong website for updates on resources, campus operations, and links to donate to any of the scholarship funds or the UNLV Emergency Fund:

[unlv.edu/unlvstrong](http://unlv.edu/unlvstrong)



## A Tribute to Three Rebels

**HOSPITALITY PROFESSOR RHONDA MONTGOMERY’S** 30-year career here has entailed a lot of committee work. She’s been chair of the Faculty Senate (twice) and myriad strategic planning committees, hiring committees, and working groups.

So she long ago developed the skills for handling conflicting-yet-equally-valid opinions, finding points of consensus, and developing plans that put all that talk into action. But when the Faculty Senate called upon her for its latest assignment, “I felt terrified,” she said. “And then incredibly touched.”

She is chair of the Memorial Committee, charged with creating a permanent way to honor the three faculty members killed on Dec. 6, 2023.

“This will impact the well-being and healing of every student, every faculty member who was on campus that day,” Montgomery said. “As I told my colleagues [on the committee], we’ve published numerous textbooks, we’ve done lots of remarkable research, but this is what’s going to leave a lasting mark. The fruit of our work will be here for as long as UNLV is here.”

The committee began meeting in February, and Montgomery expects its work to be a long-term commitment.

“All the logistics aside, we know how important it is to get this right, and that will take time,” Montgomery said.

For context, the design selection phase for the 1 October memorial was completed just last September, nearly six years after the music festival shooting in Las Vegas.

The committee has started by surveying memorials around the world and the guiding principles behind creating them. The next step will entail a call for design proposals and then an extensive feedback process before selecting the design.

But one thing the committee is already clear about is the end result they want: a memorial that’s more than a memorial.

“Much thought must go into how this will help the community heal,” she said, “Ultimately we want this to be a place that, when someone is in a difficult situation for whatever reason, they will come here, to our campus, and find solace.”

“And what I really hope —” she started and then paused. “This was an attack on the very life and breath of who we are as an open campus, who we are as a public institution — so what I really hope is that this memorial reminds everyone that no one can defeat a Rebel!”



Jerry Cha-Jan Chang

## A Master in Balancing Family and Work

STORY BY BETH DEBOUCK

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOSH HAWKINS

**DURING WORKING HOURS**, it would've been unusual to find Jerry Cha-Jan Chang outside of his classrooms or Beam Hall office. After all, if a student had questions, the information systems professor wanted to be there in person.

That might also explain a quirk he had. At the age of 64, he did not use or own a cell phone.

His students often recounted this detail with amusement or admiration, but the reason he gave was clear: The people in his life would always take priority.

Mimi Xu, '17 BA Communication Studies and '20 MS Management Information Systems, took his graduate-level networking class. "The first week he let us know that, if we wanted time with him outside of class and office hours, we had to email and officially schedule it because he didn't own a cell phone. He didn't see the need for one since he had one in his office and one at home.

"He also told us he doesn't stay after class [in the evenings] because he wants to make it home on time so he and his wife wouldn't miss whatever show they were watching."

Tsion Melaku, '21 MS Management Information Systems, added, "When I asked him, as a tech person, why he didn't use a cell phone, he said that he wanted to show his appreciation for the people around him. He said that many people waste their time on their cell phones and neglect the people next to them."

Chang was looking forward to retirement within the next year or two.

Keah-Choon "KC" Tan, a professor of operations management, met Chang in 2001, when the latter applied to UNLV. Chang got the job and bought a home within two miles of Tan. They had children similar in age and became friends as their families spent time together.

Eventually Tan's favorite hobby became one of Chang's.

"We took our children ice fishing together back in those early days at [Sunnyside Wildlife Management Area]," Tan said at a press conference. "During one of our trips, both of us driving two different cars, got a speeding ticket — each at the same place by the same trooper. We learned our lesson."

Chang taught classes in database design and implementation, data communications, and database management at the Lee Business School. His research focused on the use and impact of information technology, human-computer interaction, organizational learning, and software piracy. He received multiple research awards and previously was ranked as a top

100 information systems researcher by industry journals.

"Jerry was a rigorous researcher and a good teacher who deeply loved his students and UNLV," Tan said. "In fact, he loved UNLV so much that he and his wife discussed some time ago the idea that he would like to donate his body to research."

The Chang family was able to honor his wishes by donating his body to a university in San Diego, California. "Even after he died, he continued to want to expand research and educate students," said Tan. "That's how serious he was about teaching."

Chang earned five degrees and previously held academic positions at the University of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Mellon University, and Fu-Jen University in Taiwan.

Colleagues at UNLV remember his kind and gentle nature and his influence on new faculty and emerging researchers.

"He was a mentor of the highest caliber, offering guidance and support — not just in words but through actions," said Ha-fen Hu, a professor in management, entrepreneurship, and technology. "He shared his experience and wisdom generously, patiently helping them navigate the complexity of academia."

His students remember his teaching style. "When any of us asked him a question, he would respond with a question instead of simply giving

us the answer," said Ashley Weckesser, '15 MBA and '15 MS Management Information Systems. "We'd all sit there feeling like nobody wanted to raise their hand and try to answer his questions — but that's how he taught. He would keep asking and help us get to the correct answer."

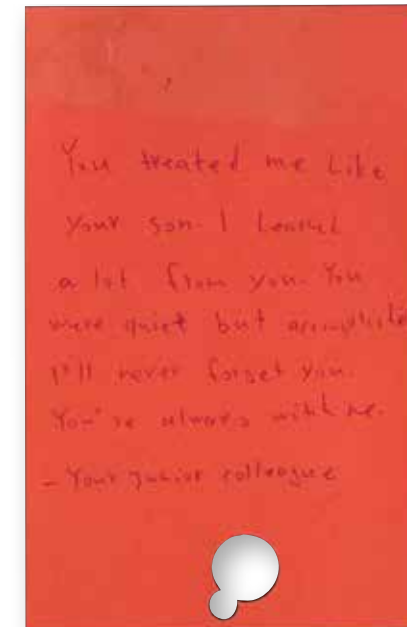
"He was patient, he was very genuine, and he was always happy."

Weckesser teaches part-time at UNLV. "I try to encourage my students the way he'd encourage us," she said. "I want to help them become independent learners and thinkers."

Outside of work, Chang worked on his computer, hiked, and fished. Survivors include his wife, Li; a son; and a daughter.

"We will miss him," said Tan, "But his legacy will live on, not just in the memory of those he touched but in the spirit of cooperation, dedication, and student-centeredness."

Xu, the grad student who explained his longstanding aversion to cell phones, will remember Chang as "a man that loves and prioritizes his wife and, even though he worked in technology, he still lives the simple life."



Still Strong

Those We Lost





Naoko Takemaru

# A Sensei They'll Always Remember

BY AFSHA BAWANY

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOSH HAWKINS

**B**ACK IN 2010, DEVON WHITAKER REMEMBERS standing in Naoko Takemaru's office holding his copy of her book, *Women in the Language and Society of Japan: The Linguistic Roots of Bias*.

The book wasn't even officially on bookstore shelves yet. He wanted to be the first one to buy it, and he wanted to do it in person, in front of his sensei. It was like getting the book signed by a celebrity author.

"We knew her as Takemaru-sensei," he said, going on to add, "She helped boost my spirits up to the point where I started to believe in myself more and more each and every single day. That drive and that passion she instilled in me is priceless."

Whitaker clutched that same book at the memorial service for Takemaru, 69, and two other professors killed in the Dec. 6, 2023, shooting on campus.

"Even rereading it for me is hard. Every word I read, it's like she's directly reading to me," said Whitaker, '12 BA Asian and Asian American studies.

This was to be her 20th year at UNLV, where she is credited for developing the Japanese language program and taught upper-division courses on culture and business. Her book and academic papers often explored how language both reflected and reinforced gender bias.

"Because of her modest and unassuming manner, many people do not know of Naoko's cutting-edge research," said Deborah Arteaga, a world languages and cultures professor. "It is not an exaggeration to say that she was born a socio-linguist."

She went on to tell a story of Takemaru, who as a child in her hometown of Okayama, questioned why Japanese children's stories always cast ogre-villains as women. That observation would lead to her book as well as numerous journal publications, conference presentations, and book reviews.

She first came to the United States as a foreign exchange student in 1974 and eventually returned for her master's and doctoral degrees. The College of Liberal Arts awarded her its William Morris Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2014. And she welcomed students into her office any time. The office was covered with the markings of a "cat lady" — calendars, pictures, and puzzles of felines.

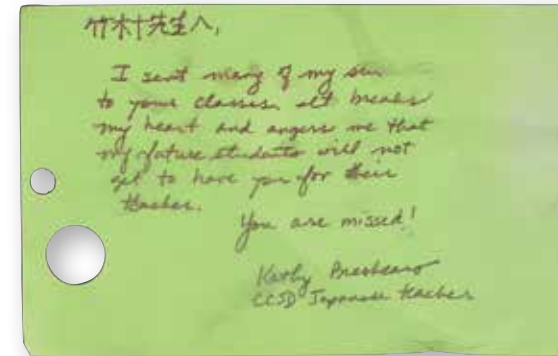
Melikabella Shenouda, '21 BA Psychology, often received congratulatory notes from Takemaru as she began her master's program and worked as a graduate assistant at UNLV. "We shared a love of linguistics, gender, intersectionality, and

education," she wrote on Instagram. She had planned to stop by Takemaru's office soon. "I was too embarrassed of how my Japanese speaking skills have regressed. I wanted to brush up on the language to show her that it wasn't just another class. That I held her teachings near. That I respected her time. That I loved learning from her."

Alexander Yurkov, '18 BA History, took Japanese from her in 2018. "She believed in her students and knew we had all the tools for excellence, and she expected us to reach that excellence. She was one of those teachers that brought something irreplaceable to the material. ... Even after many years, I'll know Takemaru-sensei was the one who taught me to be careful of this usage or that pronunciation. I'm eternally

grateful for her critical impact on my Japanese that will stay with me forever."

Susan Byrne, a professor of Hispanic studies and former department chair, noted the way that Takemaru had of drawing fellow faculty together. "Naoko was consistently and wonderfully kind, understanding, and supportive of me in my role as department chair. The same beautiful spirit persisted as I stepped down from that



role," Byrne said.

Takemaru's thoughtfulness required no translations, and they often came in the form of small gifts.

Alicia Rico, current chair for world languages and cultures, said when her father died and she had to go back home for services, Takemaru handed her a present. It wasn't for Rico, though; it was to give her grieving mother.

Spanish professor Germán Negrón-River once mentioned that his mother had Parkinson's disease, so Takemaru began sending her an annual gift and postcards. Her mother, too, had had the disease.

Takemaru had a patissier license and worked in a Tokyo restaurant. She also had lived in France.

Margaret Harp, an associate professor of French, remembered Takemaru as a "triple threat artist." "She was a professional concert pianist who left that career due to physical disabilities. She embroidered beautifully, creating her own designs. And every holiday season, she brought us her homemade chocolates."

"Naoko was frail physically; however, she was lionhearted in kindness, lionhearted in generosity, lionhearted in humanity — the point of liberal arts. And I have no doubt she was lionhearted in her final moments on Earth."

She is survived by her brother, Hisashi Takemaru of Okayama.

Still Strong

Those We Lost



Patricia Navarro Velez

# A ‘Larger-than-Life Personality’

BY NATALIE BRUZDA

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOSH HAWKINS

**TO START HER ACCOUNTING 409 CLASS LAST FALL,** Patricia “Pat” Navarro Velez asked students to share pictures of themselves. In turn, she gave them a glimpse of her life at home.

The photos helped students get to know each other in class. And she asked her graduate assistant to add them to her roster so she could better remember each individual.

But her merging in pictures of her life at home — a devoted wife and mother of four — with her life as a professor of accounting information also demonstrated that the path for students was attainable.

“Seeing her face light up when she talked about how much she loved cooking and her family was amazing,” student Kyra Larossa remembered. “In the photo she shared with us, she showed us how proud she was of her new 25-quart brazier in the kitchen.”

Navarro Velez, 39, was killed in the Dec. 6, 2023, campus shooting. She had joined UNLV as an accounting professor in 2019 after completing her Ph.D. at the University of Central Florida. She quickly got to work — unlocking a “promising and timely stream of research focused on cybersecurity and data analytics,” according to department chair Jason Smith. But just as important, “Pat immediately made a positive impact in the lives of students and her colleagues. She had a larger-than-life personality, an infectious smile, and a genuine kindness that made everyone around her feel like family.”

Originally from Ponce, Puerto Rico, she earned a master’s at Bowling Green State University. She worked for five years in risk assurance at PwC, an international accounting firm known as one of the “Big 4,” before pursuing her doctorate.

Her Ph.D. mentor, Steve Sutton, noted that her “unique and high-demand skillset” was difficult to replace, and her PwC managers tried to convince her to stay. “Pat did not waver. She wanted to be a teacher, mentor, and scholar; she knew what her dream was,” Sutton said.

Navarro Velez’s graduate assistant, Jennifer Lopez, likewise worked in the private sector after her bachelor’s degree before returning to pursue her master’s degree.

“It’s hard to talk about someone when they’re no longer with us,” said Lopez. “But it’s hard not to agree with a lot of the other sentiments shared about Pat. She was a larger-than-life person. She was approachable. ... She was always there to help her students and explore the career possibilities in accounting.”

Adrian Gordon, who will graduate this spring with his bachelor’s in accounting, said Navarro Velez was the first minority teacher he had in accounting. On the first day of class, Gordon, who is Black, asked to speak to his fellow classmates about joining Beta Alpha Psi, an honor organization for financial information students.

“She was really an anomaly,” Gordon said, adding that he sat at the front of the classroom for each class session. “It made me feel comfortable to stand out.”

“I remember that she looked at me like she believed in me. She was so interested in what we had to say, and in us as people.”

During the fall semester, he was developing a UNLV chapter of the National Association of Black Accountants and had planned to talk to Navarro Velez about their plans when she was killed.

“Obviously we can’t have professor Navarro back, but I hope that we can find some way to make sure that her spirit sticks — that we mitigate this loss as much as we can, and that we don’t allow this to take us back in terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion.”

Glori Roque-Melendez, a lecturer of accounting, connected to Navarro Velez through their shared backgrounds growing up in Puerto Rico and studying at Bowling Green State University.

“When we saw each other the first time, we embraced each other like we were friends forever,” she said. Glori quickly became the newest member of the Navarro Velez

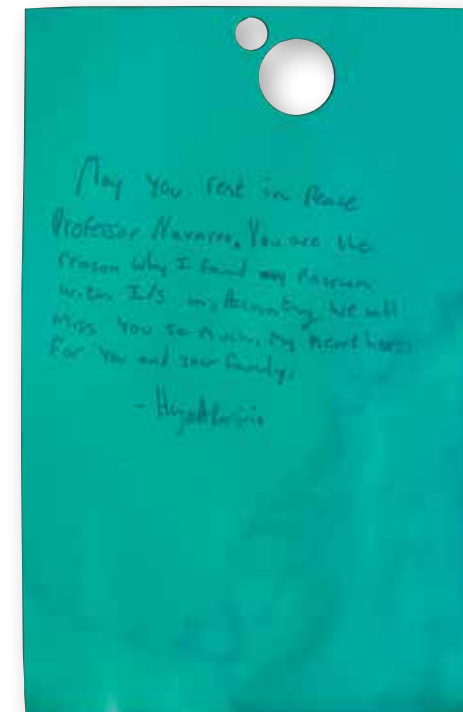
“Framily,” friends who become family.

“She always found excuses to get together,” said Roque-Melendez. “She has built a great community here of friends and introduced me to so many wonderful people.”

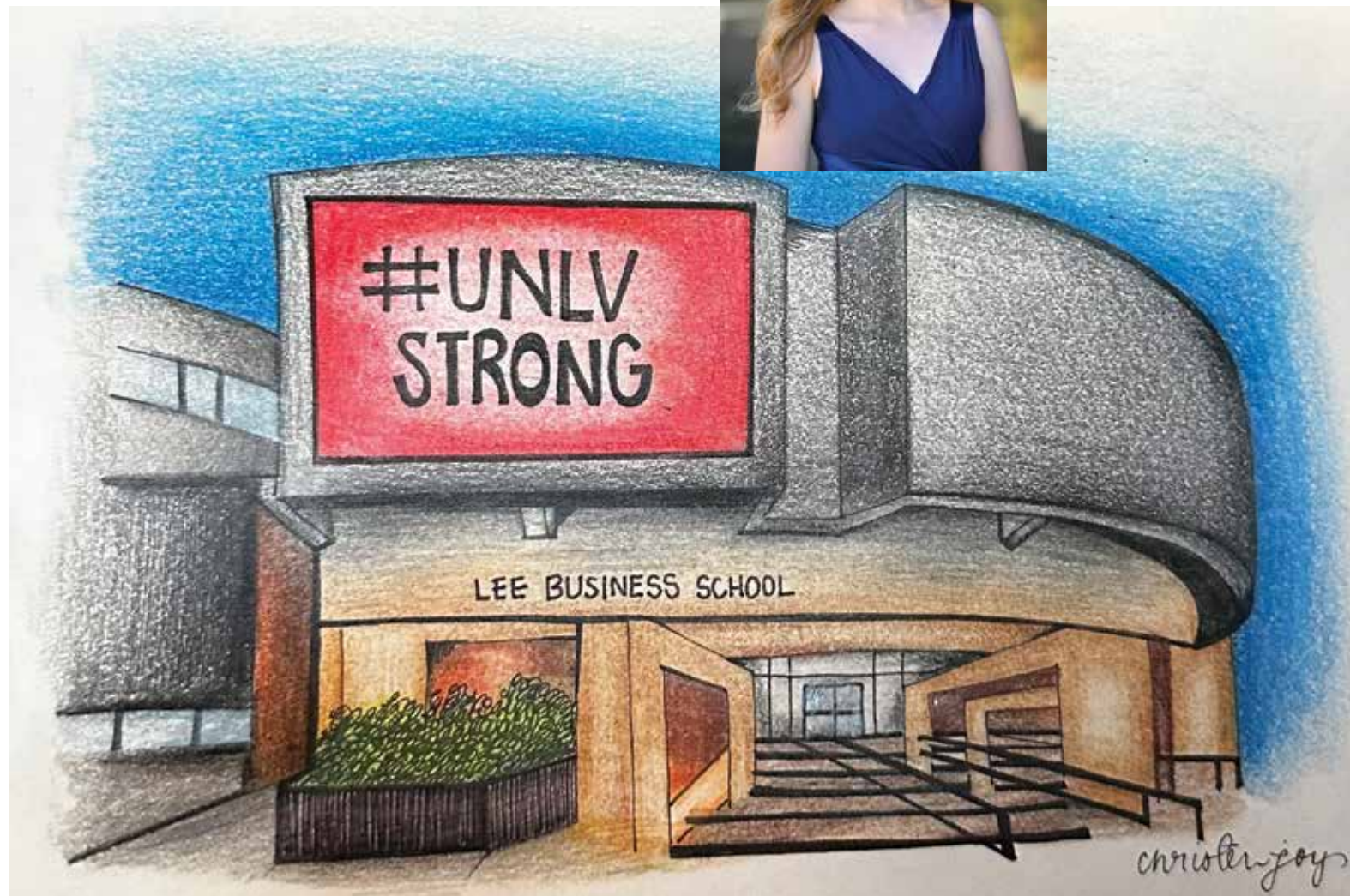
Survivors include her husband, David Robles, and four children.

At Thanksgiving, just two weeks before her death, Navarro Velez hosted a large blended group and asked everyone to wear burgundy. She was, perhaps, envisioning a color-coordinated photo of the Framily to share at start of classes this spring.

“I can’t even express how difficult this loss is. You could always feel that she was full of joy, full of life,” Roque-Melendez said. “She always excelled in everything she did as a proud Puerto Rican. I just want to make her proud and make sure that her legacy endures forever.”



**Still Strong**  
Those We Lost



# A Vision for Healing

Hospitality major **Christen Smith** uses journaling to plan for a successful future.

BY LOLA LOPEZ

**EVEN AS A KID, CHRISTEN JOY SMITH** would tote her own crayons around. She couldn't count on restaurants to provide quality crayons or have enough colors to deliver on her creative vision. "That's how serious I was," she says. "And I do have perfectionism tendencies, so I remember even as a little kid I needed it to be perfect, all my shapes and everything."

Soon, she was winning restaurant coloring contests and taking art classes. When her mother's friend began making handmade greeting cards, Smith followed suit. She liked to feature pets and places special to her, like Hospitality Hall, which she featured on the thank-you cards she hands out to faculty and students.

"Art for me is also a way of therapy; it can be my form of therapy."

So after the Dec. 6 campus shooting, she pulled out her Pentel Pointliner pens and colored pencils to draw Beam Hall, replacing the large banner on the face of the building with "UNLV Strong" message. "I drew that the day after [the shooting] happened, and it was very healing for me."

Megan Neri, then director of communications for the Lee Business School, spotted the image on Smith's Instagram post the next day. She later printed it on thank-you cards for

the many donors and supporters who helped with recovery efforts.

"When I saw Christen's artwork shortly after the tragedy," Neri said, "I was inspired by the hopeful colors and knew it would be meaningful to our UNLV community."

## NURTURING HER CAREER

The greeting cards have also lit an entrepreneurial spark for Smith. "Recently I did an internship in Montana at a fly fishing lodge, and I made souvenirs for the guests. I would draw fish on greeting cards of all the fish that they could catch and just give them out."

She has added minors in marketing and global entrepreneurship to her hospitality management major. After attending her first American Marketing Association meeting, she joined its Collegiate Case Competition team, and her team placed third nationally. She was offered an officer position and eventually became president of UNLV's student chapter. She is also marketing director for the Books, Beverages and Bites student club and vice president of the Honors College Student Council.

Smith is also a campus brand ambassador for stationary company Pentel. For UNLV's Troesh Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, she led workshops on goal-setting through journaling, and in January, delivered a TEDxUNLV talk on the subject.

And now she's diving into a new venture, having won a \$15,000 award with her partners in the 2023 UNLV President's Innovation Challenge. It provides seed funding for interdisciplinary student teams to develop sustainability solutions and launch new businesses. The app that Smith and her teammates developed, YouChef, is tackling food waste by helping users come up with recipes based on ingredients they already have on hand.

After she graduates, Smith hopes to attend the William S. Boyd School of Law and work in hospitality law. She believes that will set her up for eventual success with her own business.

"I like being creative and thinking of different ideas," she says. "I have this vision for myself and who I am in the future, and I want to resemble that success now."

## The Question

### What words of encouragement do you have for fellow Rebels after the Dec. 6 tragedy?

**"There are so many things out of our control, but we are empowered by being decisive regarding aspects we can influence. Stick together, do your best to lift each other up, and remember that one of the most meaningful ways to honor the victims of Dec. 6 is to come to campus hungry to learn and ready to challenge yourself, just as the professors who we lost would want and appreciate."**

**Dr. Addison Guida**, '15 BS, '23 MPH and '23 MD

**"There are so many wonderful people at UNLV who want to help and care. We see this with all the recovery efforts. I am so proud to be a Lee Business School alumna and equally as proud to continue serving this institution that has given so much to me."**

**Amber Foster Ford**, '12 BSBA and '16 MPA, UNLV Office of Online Education

**"Take advantage of the trips at the Student Wellness Center. They're well-prepared for emergencies and safety, and have guides for kayaking and hiking throughout Nevada and Arizona. Being able to get away from campus and the Strip is important for self-care."**

**Emily Kibble**, elementary education major

**"Tell the people who are important to you that you love them, remember to love yourself, and be kind to yourself. It is OK to take your time to process your emotions. Your emotions are valid and important."**

**Madi Sackett**, secondary education major

**"Where there's a will, there's a way to help and heal. Honesty, open mindedness, and willingness are the keys to this help and will allow it to work in our lives."**

**Jeremy Perry**, film studies major

*Still Strong*

# YOU ARE A REBEL



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**Ronald Husband**, '73 BA Art, was tapped to help with the launch of musician and designer Pharrell Williams' winter/fall 2024 collection for Louis Vuitton. Husband, who holds the distinction of being the first African American animator at Walt Disney Studios, was featured in film promotions for the new line illustrating a vision for America's first cowboy. His credits in his 38 years at Disney include animating Gaston in *Beauty and the Beast*, Jafar in *Aladdin*, and Pumbaa in *The Lion King*. He was inducted into the UNLV College of Fine Arts Hall of Fame in 2019.



Husband



Jezzini

**Denis Rudd**, '74 BA Education, MBA, and M.Ed., is a university professor.

**Marina Abodeely Jezzini**, '84 BS Hotel Administration, is with Urban Nest Realty and is in the top 2% in the valley as a broker/sales associate. She trained with Century 21, Re/Max and, in 2023, was nominated and won the award for "Top 25 Women in Real Estate." She has a 21-year-old son who graduated from ATP Flight School and is married to an avid outdoorsman, engineer, and race car driver. Jezzini enjoys traveling overseas, yoga, hiking, and making baklava for her friends.



Kohlasch



Serna

**David Kohlasch**, '84 Hotel Administration, started his executive search career in 2022 with his CDK Career Consulting company. After 30 years managing hotels and resorts around the United States, he gives back to the hospitality industry by offering guidance to uprising hoteliers along with assisting them in seeking their next opportunity. Kohlasch lives in Virginia with his wife and sons. He enjoys golf and strength and conditioning training.



Smith



Gallegos

**Michael Clark**, '89 BA Psychology, is the COO of Image Analysis Group in London.

**Chet Minetto**, '89 BS Business, is a retired Reno firefighter.

**Michael Serna**, '96 BA Theatre Arts, is the executive creative director for Disney Live Entertainment (part of Walt Disney Imagineering). He recently created a new experience for the World of Frozen land at Hong Kong Disneyland. Serna lives in Fullerton, California, with his wife and adorable dog. Keeping with the roots of his UNLV degree, he directs local theater, and productions he has directed have been nominated and won awards.



Carlyon



Radmanovich

**Mariaz Davis**, '99 BS Health Physics, is working in the nuclear power industry.

**Jon Becker**, '00 MS Civil Engineering, is finishing a book on the limiting magnitude of nuclear energy (number, size, and type of nuclear reactors) that can replace the magnitude of fossil energy (oil and coal) currently being consumed. The size of the recoverable oil reserves are used to determine the lifetimes of oil energy for the nine industrialized states and seven oil states. These comparisons and derivations define the necessity for world governmental support of the development and design of breeder reactors, and not dependency on financing by venture capital and index funds. Becker's hobbies include online research into current news events, historical events, paleontology, astronomy, evolution, and geology.



Henry



Silva

**Marion Smith Jr.**, '02 BS Education, is assistant state superintendent of Instructional Programs and Services for the Maryland State Department of Education. He has held education leadership roles in Washington and



Philippi



Blair

Pennsylvania and was the first Black administrator and first Black superintendent of schools for Summit School District in Summit County, Colorado. He began his career as a secondary English language arts teacher in Las Vegas. He is the co-author of the *Racial Equity Adaptive Leadership Framework*; the co-designer and co-facilitator of the "Coaching and Leading for Racial Equity" series; and founder and owner of Educate to Liberate Consulting.

**Homa Sayyar Woodrum**, '03 BSBA International Business and '07 JD, is general counsel for Nevada State Purchasing in the Department of Administration in Carson City.

**Christopher Aiken**, '07 BA Psychology, is an associate professor and head of the kinesiology department at New Mexico State University. He is married with two kids. His oldest daughter is named Scarlet in honor of his time at UNLV.

**Misty Lang**, '08 BA Theatre Design and Technology, is a personal care attendant with BrightStar Care.

**Steven Gallegos**, '11 BSBA Business Administration, is vice president at Mesquite Wealth Management Group, a private wealth advisory practice with Ameriprise Financial LLC. Licensed in 31 states. He was featured in *Texas Monthly* and *Fortune* magazines in 2023. Gallegos was born and raised in Las Vegas but moved to San Antonio in 2020. He is married and has two children. He's a fan of the Vegas Golden Knights and UNLV athletics.

**Matthew Carlyon**, '12 JD, is a partner at the firm, Foran Glennon. His practice is focused on commercial litigation, legal ethics, and insurance litigation. He offers essential assistance to creditors and debtors in Chapter 11 bankruptcy matters and adversary proceedings. Based in the Chicago office since 2021, he is licensed in Illinois and Nevada.

**Matt Radmanovich**, '12 MS Sport Management, joined Thrill One Sports & Entertainment as vice president of communications. Established in 2020, Thrill One is a content company bringing together Nitro Circus, Nitrocross, Street League Skateboarding, and SuperJacket Productions.

**Mia Renee Henry**, '13 BS Kinesiology, is a three-time Emmy nominee and native of Southern California. Henry developed a love

for storytelling through literature, film, and video games. She is expanding her experience with producing news segments, short documentaries, and feature-length documentaries. Henry's objective is to continue spotlighting BIPOC stories, women's stories, and the stories of people in marginalized communities through feature documentaries. She enjoys playing the bass guitar and flute, video games, and martial arts.

**Gregorio Silva**, '14 JD, a member at Baker Sterchi Cowden & Rice, has been named a Leadership Council on Legal Diversity Fellow for 2024. The LCLD Fellows program offers high-potential, mid-career attorneys from diverse backgrounds at LCLD member organizations with professional and personal development opportunities. Silva is a civil litigation attorney and has been with the firm since 2020. He is a member of the Hispanic National Bar Association.

**Bradley Werhun**, '14 BS Geology, a logging

truck driver, is a member of the UNLV boxing club.

**Breyen Canfield**, '16 BA Philosophy and '19 JD, accepted an appointment to a position in the federal government after law school. He published the book *Plato's Barbell: What Ancient Philosophy Can Teach Us About Olympic Weightlifting*. He started the book as an undergrad after many conversations with UNLV professors. The book, edited by **Shad Taylor**, '15 BA Philosophy, was published by Jailhouse Strong, a company devoted to promoting education in all sports of strength and is available on Amazon. He lives in northern Illinois with his wife and kids.

**Briana Philippi**, '18 BA Journalism and Media Studies, is a and social media manager at GYC Vegas, a public relations agency. In January 2024, she earned a Pinnacle Award for her campaign for the Las Vegas Science & Technology Festival. She also earned an award for research work she did for GYC Vegas' press release for The Little Vegas Chapel's Star Wars

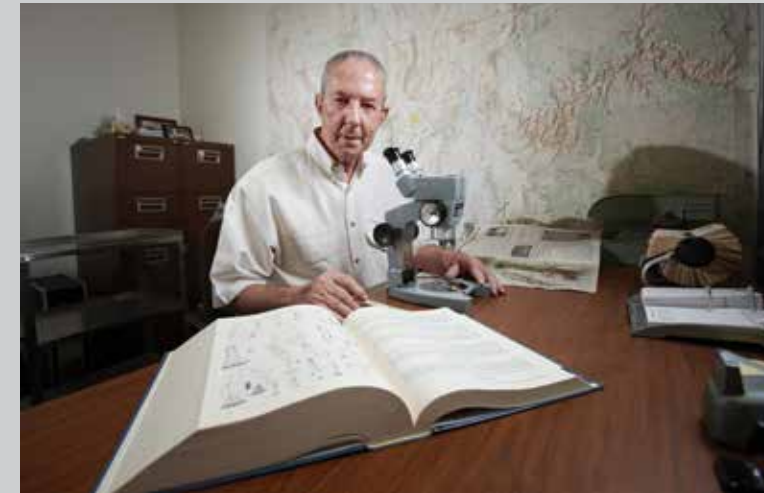
Day ceremony packages. That press kit was named Best of Show for tactics

**Joan (Camillo) Blair**, '19 BSBA Business Administration, is controller of the Las Vegas Global Economic Alliance and has joined the board of directors of Junior Achievement of Southern Nevada. By leveraging extensive experience in the nonprofit sector, financial planning, grant compliance, and fundraising strategies, she will provide valuable expertise that will complement the work of the financial literacy nonprofit's board.

**Joelle Silva**, '19 BS Hotel Administration, was promoted to convention sales manager for Mandalay Bay and Delano in 2023. She started her career as a hotel sales coordinator at Mirage in 2019 immediately following graduation before becoming executive meetings manager at Mandalay Bay, Delano, and Luxor in 2022.

**Yu-Wen Sun**, '23 BS Hotel Administration, is a wedding coordinator.

## Obituaries



**Wesley E. Niles**, professor emeritus in the School of Life Sciences, died Nov. 17, 2023. He was 91. UNLV had offered fertile ground to Niles when the biologist and plant taxonomist came here in 1969. There was little recordkeeping on native and non-native plant life in Southern Nevada. So Niles dug in, establishing an herbarium in 1970. His dedication led to the herbarium being designated a National Resource Collection by the American Society of Plant Taxonomists in 1974. Over the course of his career, the herbarium grew in size to roughly 75,000 specimens. Today it houses the most extensive scientific collection of Mojave Desert plants. Over the years the herbarium facilitated studies in plant systematics, ecology, succession, biogeography, climate change, and conservation biology. With his students and colleagues, Niles monitored and evaluated changes in the distribution of rare and endangered species as well as invasive plants with respect to public lands management. "One can get the history of the invasion of nonnative plants of Southern Nevada right here," Niles said in a 2003 interview. He continued to work part time in the herbarium and plant field surveys long after 2002 retirement. The following year, the herbarium was officially named the Wesley E. Niles Herbarium. It is now managed by the College of Southern Nevada.

**William "Bill" Daley**, '65 Political Science, died Oct. 26, 2023. He received a master's from Washington State University and had a career that spanned 40 years as a policy and



legislative expert in Washington's state government. He held senior policy positions for the superintendent of public instruction, the governor's office, and the state liquor board. He served three years as a deputy insurance commissioner and was mayor and city council member in Olympia. In 2017, he was recognized by Washington Community Action Network for his work to advance social and racial equity.

**Francisco Menéndez**, professor and founding artistic director in the film department, died Feb. 29. He worked as a stringer for *Time* magazine and liaison to Jane Wallace for CBS



News. He won a Dore Schary Award for his documentary *Los Niños: Thinking About Others*. He won a series of awards related to film and was in the vanguard of approaches to film teaching, mentorship, and pedagogy for three decades. As department chair, he brought in more than \$1 million in student initiative grants. He is survived by his children and wife, Valeriya.

**Geraldine (Gerrie) Cowden**, a master's student in Educational Counseling, died in January. She also served students and colleagues as



the office manager for the UNLV Honors College for nearly a decade. Originally from Fremont, California, Cowden came to Las Vegas in 2013 and worked in the William S. Boyd School of Law before joining the Honors College in 2014. She was also a veteran.

**Zachary Tyler DeShazo**, '18 BSBA Marketing, of Raleigh, North Carolina, died unexpectedly on Sept. 23, 2022, at age 25. DeShazo was born in



North Las Vegas. He graduated from Branson High School in 2014 and while at UNLV was in the National Society of Honor and Leadership, Golden Key International Honor Society, and Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society. DeShazo was a senior relationship banker at Truist Bank.

**Cyrill Pasterk**, professor of philosophy, died Dec. 5, 2023, at the age of 89 after a long illness. He taught at UNLV from 1967-99, serving as the department chair from 1974-84. Born in Austria of Slovenian ethnic background, he earned his doctorate at the University of Madrid. He is survived by his wife of 41 years, **Anne C. Wilson**, '86 BSBA; a daughter, Marie D'Amore; and a son, **George Pasterk**, '06 BA Art History.



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THANK YOU  
*for your support*

We are profoundly touched by the unwavering support we've received in the wake of the tragic events on December 6th. The loss of our cherished colleagues and friends is an indelible pain, but the outpouring of love and compassion from our community has been an incredible source of solace for our faculty, staff, and students during this incredibly difficult period. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

#unlvstrong



**REMEMBRANCE IN RED**

Walking along the academic mall north from UNLV's Student Union, it's hard not to be drawn to the oversized Flashlight sculpture resting between the Artemus Ham Concert Hall and Judy Bayley Theatre. But before you get to the stairs ascending to the Flashlight, the Lee Pascal Rose Garden quietly awaits. It was a fitting place of tribute during the campus vigil in honor of the victims of the Dec. 6 shooting — professors Jerry Cha-Jan Chang, Patricia Navarro Velez, and Naoko Takemaru.

In 1989, philanthropist and former UNLV Foundation trustee Elaine Wynn funded the garden's construction as a memorial to her mother. Its scarlet "Show Biz" roses were selected as a nod to our community's role as the Entertainment Capital of the World.

The garden also serves as a unique talking point for campus tours. It contributes to a unique distinction as a state arboretum, something that fewer than 10% of national college campuses hold.

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- Executive Master of Healthcare Administration (EMHA)
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