

UNLV

MAGAZINE | SPRING 2025

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UNLV

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Rebel Science Camp is among the many programs UNLV has developed to support public schools. [PHOTO: BECCA SCHWARTZ]

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Our flagship publication is free for alumni and friends but distribution is limited. Opt in now to keep getting the print copy or to request a digital version.

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“I am extremely grateful for all the scholarship opportunities that have come my way to help me succeed in my art career! Had it not been for scholarships, I wouldn’t have been pushed to chase my dream of becoming a creative director and full-time artist. Thank you to the Fine Arts Department and UNLV.

”

Aimee Coello, BFA ’25
Kenneth McMary Alice Devos Fine Arts Scholarship
and Rick Parks Scholarship Recipient

Generosity Creates Possibility

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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



With Purpose and Momentum

UNLV has been my home for more than three decades. I arrived in 1992, seeking to make a mark in my discipline of clinical psychology and sporting a full head of hair. While the hair didn’t last very long, what I’ve gained since then — community, purpose, and an abiding love for this institution — has far outpaced anything I imagined when I first walked through our doors.

I’ve had the privilege of serving in many leadership roles, and each has deepened my appreciation for the complexity and significance of our work. I’ve come to understand how UNLV operates, how its budget works, and, most importantly, just how much it matters in the lives of our students, our alumni, and the broader community we serve.

For my family, Las Vegas is where we’ve built a life connected to our community. My wife, Nancy, a proud Rebel alumna who earned a master’s degree from UNLV, recently retired after 32 years with the Clark County School District, including 18 as principal of Nate Mack Elementary School. We raised our two sons here and have built lasting connections through

neighborhood, school, and community initiatives. I’ve served as a homeowners association president, Nevada psychology board president, and as a Boy Scout troop leader, which was one of my most challenging but rewarding leadership roles. Such experiences grounded me and helped me understand how important leadership is to the health and vitality of any organization. And I’ve seen time and time again how much this university means to the people it serves.

My job is to create the conditions for others to succeed, most especially our students. I take that responsibility seriously and will work hard each day to help us keep moving forward with purpose and momentum in everything we do.

I’ve always believed that every operational gain we achieve should be reinvested in our students and academic programs. As chief academic officer, whenever I found a vacancy through administrative efficiency, I used it to hire faculty or staff who work directly with students. That approach will continue. I believe that to fulfill our mission, we must keep investing in

Interim President Chris Heavey celebrates with UNLV’s newest graduates during commencement in December.

student success, which includes hiring more teaching-oriented faculty who can deliver high-quality instruction. I also have championed an operational excellence initiative to modernize our systems and improve our processes. I plan to build on that work as president, helping set high expectations for how we operate across all parts of the university. Campus safety and security will remain a top priority. I’m committed to being proactive about enhancing our safety-related practices, systems, and communication across all areas.

In spite of current headwinds within higher education, we will remain focused on growing our research enterprise as a Carnegie R1 institution. This work is aimed squarely at improving lives and bringing innovation to our region. We’ll leverage our commitment to our mission and the strengths of our community to recruit top researchers to UNLV, and we’ll keep developing the support mechanisms they need to succeed.

In the coming months, I want to hear from you — our alumni, donors, and community members — about what you hope to see in the next phase of UNLV’s growth. From what I’ve already heard, it’s clear that this is a time to reflect deeply on who we are as an institution, what we stand for, and what we should prioritize in the years ahead. We will use this input to identify new opportunities for community collaboration and perhaps even refine our strategic plan. One thing I know with certainty is that our university is defined by the strength of our people and the richness that comes from our diversity. That will always be one of our greatest assets.

Thank you for all the ways you make our university what it is today. I look forward to working with you to grow our impact and shape the next great chapter in UNLV’s story.

Chris Heavey
Interim President

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PHOTO: BECCA SCHWARTZ

The Flashlight

THE REAL MAGIC BEHIND THE SCENES

Lily Burtis, a senior studying entertainment engineering and design, experiments with production effects. The degree program is a joint effort of the colleges of Engineering and Fine Arts. It combines elements of technical theater and engineering to prepare students for careers in the entertainment industry.

The program recently partnered with Cirque du Soleil to launch continuing education courses in 3D printing, carpentry, and emerging technologies. While the main goal is to help the company's employees remain current with their skills, it also expands opportunities for UNLV students.

"[The partnership] has strengthened our connection to the Las Vegas Strip in ways I do not think we planned," said Michael Hill, assistant professor-in-residence. "It has been a great opportunity to showcase our facilities to people in the industry and strengthen our connection to an industry leader. Cirque du Soleil offers us advice as to what is needed in the professional world, and also hires our students into their company through internships and permanent jobs." [PHOTO BY JOSH HAWKINS/UNLV]

SANDS INSTITUTE
STRENGTHEN UNLV'S
GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

In the last century, the relationship between the United States and China has become one of the most consequential on the world stage — shaping commerce and trade, foreign relations and diplomacy, science, and more.

UNLV's new Sands Institute for Chinese Language and Culture recognizes that connected history and interdependence of the two countries. The institute will offer Mandarin language education, cultural programming, and other opportunities for cooperative engagement. The institute collaborated on its first event with the Barrick Lecture Series, attracting an audience of 833 to hear journalist Thomas Friedman speak on U.S.-China relations.

"This initiative is about more than teaching a language — it's about opening minds, fostering cross-cultural understanding, and equipping our students with the tools to bridge divides and solve challenges on an international scale," said newly appointed interim President Chris Heavey.

BUILDING A WORKFORCE THAT
UNDERSTANDS GLOBAL ISSUES

Heavey was instrumental in developing the \$15 million philanthropic gift from Las Vegas Sands Corp. to create the institute. Situated in Las Vegas, the institute is uniquely positioned to leverage the city's international connections and thriving hospitality and tourism industries.

"UNLV is a unique institution with remarkable ties to global tourism, making it a natural partner for us," said Chase Whittemore, vice president of government relations at Sands.

Workforce development is a key goal. The institute's academic programs will equip students with skills, micro-credentials, and certifications for working in roles that interface with Chinese people and businesses.

Dozens of students have already applied for the institute's scholar program, which provides \$16,000 in scholarships over four years to take language and culture courses as well as access to internships, employer networks, and international travel opportunities.

WE ARE UNLV IZZY MCCLAIN ART HISTORY MAJOR

HOW STUDY ABROAD
SHAPED MORE THAN MY
UNDERSTANDING OF ART

Choosing to stay in Las Vegas for her college education didn't deprive Izzy McClain of worldly adventures. She came to UNLV knowing she'd tap into our study abroad programs. Here she shares what she brought back from the experiences besides souvenirs. *[As told to Lola Lopez]*



Our new Instagram series, **WE ARE UNLV**, highlights everyday Rebels who shape

I actually came to UNLV specifically for the study abroad program. As to how I landed on Spain? It was half my studies and half reconnecting with my culture.

When my grandmother left Spain, she was escaping a really bad situation. I didn't know anything about her history. I went to where her father was born in a city called Alicante, and I learned everything. That was the first time she opened up to me about her experiences. It was really special.

Traveling is a lot more affordable in Europe. I got to go to the Netherlands and the Van Gogh Museum. At the National Gallery in London, I saw my first DaVinci.

The amount of art I saw — pictures I'd seen for my whole life — I was seeing them right there, and I was like, "Wow." There's something about working directly with these masterpieces, you know?

I had an opportunity to lead some mini lectures. It was a click moment. Before that, I was just an art major with the focus on drawing printing. Now I'm an art history major, and I want to be a professor.

I'm really grateful for the opportunities I've been given that I wouldn't have had anywhere else.

My advice to other students? I really struggled with coming into college and not being sure — with feeling a little lost. That's normal. That's part of the process of figuring it out and finding yourself. So be patient. Enjoy the ride. Enjoy the classes you're taking. Enjoy the people who are around you and you'll get there eventually.

our community. > @unlv



Chris Heavey leads a discussion with New York Times journalist Thomas L. Friedman during the April 14 Barrick Lecture Series.

LONGTIME UNLV
ADMINISTRATOR NAMED
INTERIM PRESIDENT

In April, the Nevada System of Higher Education Board of Regents appointed Chris Heavey as interim president. A longtime campus leader, Heavey had been serving as officer in charge since Keith E. Whitfield resigned after four years at UNLV.

"I intend to use my platform to advocate for UNLV as broadly as possible," Heavey said. "I strongly believe that no university in the country is more important to its hometown than UNLV is to Southern Nevada. I'll be working to share that message with legislators, community leaders, donors, and others who can help us carry our mission forward."

Heavey rose from faculty through multiple administrative positions such as dean and senior vice provost before taking on the role of executive vice president and provost in 2019. As the chief academic officer, he led the campus response to the COVID-19 pandemic, supported the hire of faculty and creation of new academic degree programs, launched a variety of student success initiatives, and expanded data-informed practices across academic and student support areas.

"This decision was shaped by the voices of the UNLV community, and we listened," said Board Chair Amy J. Carvalho.

"Dr. Heavey has the experience, the institutional knowledge, and the respect of the campus community needed to lead UNLV during this important time."

The board conducted listening sessions with student leaders, faculty, staff, alumni, and supporters of the university before making the selection.

Heavey has earned numerous awards for both teaching and service, and he serves on a variety of external boards focused on higher education, economic development, and community engagement. He is a former president of the Nevada State Board of Psychological Examiners.

A tenured professor of psychology, he has produced dozens of peer-reviewed research publications and is considered one of the nation's leading scholars in the thoughts and feelings that make up the consciousness of people as they go about their everyday lives. He earned his Ph.D. and master's degrees in clinical psychology from UCLA and his bachelor's degree from the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Heavey's employment agreement runs through April 24, 2028. After one year, he is eligible to be considered for the permanent post by regents' direct appointment or following a national search process.

PHOTO: BECCA SCHWARTZ (MCCLAIN); JOSH HAWKINS (HEAVEY)

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CAREER ENGAGEMENT



For more information, scan the QR code or visit unlv.edu/alumni/career-engagement

REBECCA RICE'S READ & WATCH LIST

Catch and Kill by Ronan Farrow: Farrow's experience reporting on the Harvey Weinstein case was harrowing, and his findings demonstrate that a company culture of abuse can make scandals much, much worse.

Fyre: The Greatest Party that Never Happened: My students and I love this documentary demonstrating the power of social media and the importance of prioritizing safety communication.

WeCrashed: a podcast about the downfall of WeWork

Apollo 13: Yes, it's a throwback, but the movie demonstrates the importance of trusting and empowering your team to think creatively during a crisis!



THE COURSE

COM 313: THE CORPORATE SCANDAL

When workplace drama goes public, how should businesses respond? This class preps students to handle the heat.

BY AFSHA BAWANY

Students are grimacing.

Communication studies professor Rebecca Rice has lobbed a hypothetical at them: Your company is accused of mishandling food safety, and things are blowing up in social media posts.

Media requests are coming in. Emails from the legal department are popping up. One problem after another. Working in small teams, students have one hour to write responses and prepare for a media conference.

It was a hypothetical scenario, sure, but the situation still made communication studies major Scheherazade Pollins anxious. The scenario brought back real experiences from her work as a social

media manager.

"There were times when I would leave work and everything was fine only to come in the next day and everything was falling apart, and you have to fix things fast," Pollins said. "This simulation put us in that same frame of mind. It was stressful, but it allowed us to show what we had learned up to that point in the course."

The Corporate Scandal course prepares students to understand the ethics behind corporate responsibility and how to approach communications in emergency situations. Rice is an expert on how organizations work together during emergencies.

What motivated you to create this class?

I wanted to create a class about a common social problem — that companies misbehave, creating problems for themselves, employees, and consumers. Students in my organizational communication class were fascinated by the Elizabeth Holmes/Theranos scandal. I thought, "Let's have a whole class on it."

What themes do you address in this class?

Basically, we are asking, "Why do companies continue to get mired in scandals?" and "How can communication help them to design ethical companies that avoid scandals?"

Why are simulations important to teaching crisis communications?

Emergency managers often have tabletop exercises where they practice for hypothetical emergencies. It's a really good way to identify gaps in response capabilities. It's also important to feel what an emergency actually feels like. I want students to feel that adrenaline now so that if they ever encounter one in real life, they are used to those stressed feelings and can still function.

The class is open to any major. Why do you think it is important for all students?

Students are likely to face emergencies, crises, and scandals at work — even if they don't go into crisis communication. It encourages them to think about how clear and ethical communication can help their future workplaces to succeed.

PHOTO: JOSH HAWKINS



Performances by the UNLV Community Concert Band help raise funds for local organizations. The band is under the direction of music professor Tony LaBounty (bottom left) and is composed of current students and area residents, like trumpet player John Davis (bottom right).



Music for the Communal Soul

From current students to recent retirees, UNLV's Community Concert Band offers a venue for helping others.

BY REN MCMULLIN

Calling it the UNLV Community Concert Band is apt, because that's exactly what this group is — a community. The band's 70 members are of different backgrounds — current students and recent retirees, new transplants, and lifelong Las Vegans — all bound together by music.

For many, music has always been part of their lives, but careers, families, and other responsibilities took priority. As their schedules eased up, they felt the call of their instruments and their audiences again.

"[Music] is just something that's placed in your heart," says music professor Tony LaBounty, director and master conductor of the Community Concert Band.

"People will say 'Hey, I haven't played since the Vietnam War. Can I get my clarinet? Do you have a spot for me?' We have a former FBI agent who plays euphonium, a retired professor, a couple of surgeons, and small business owners. We have all kinds of players. The answer is always yes."

PHOTOS: JOSH HAWKINS



"Performing music for the soul's sake of doing it is good and fulfilling, but here we're also actually helping someone else."

Tony LaBounty
Music professor

The Community Concert Band musicians are dedicated. They practice individually throughout the week but on Wednesdays come together in the Lee and Thomas Beam Music Center for rehearsals.

"I came across this band through a series of connections," says John Davis, a trumpet player who joined the group after 50 years away from the instrument. "My rule is: On Wednesday nights, nothing happens because I'll be (at practice)."

"And then on Thursday, I start waiting for Wednesday again."

But don't let the come-all openness mislead, french horn player Patty Duffey says. Their concerts often feature guest vocalists and local entertainers and make affordable, professional-level performances accessible to locals.

"I always hear people sharing that they expected to hear a school band with squeaky clarinets and out-of-pitch horns; they're blown away by the level of musicianship that exists in the band," she says.

She credits that, in part, to the shared experiences of traveling to perform locally and in concerts as far away as Italy, Ireland, and Austria — and Mesquite.

"It's so much fun because you really get to know your band members more [on trips], and the more you build a relationship with your fellow band

members, the better you play together," she says. "It's on a different level than playing with a whole bunch of strangers, because now you've become friends."

Because the band has uplifted so many of its members through the shared joy of music, taking that music to help the community was the natural next step.

The band performs at churches and special interest clubs to raise money for such organizations as Helping Hands, Catholic Charities, the Foundation Assisting Seniors, the LEAP Alliance, the Sun City Italian American Club, and Jewish Friendship Club. In February, a performance raised funds for Friends in the Desert, a nonprofit dedicated to feeding the homeless.

Those charitable partnerships do more than provide the band venues throughout the community and drive concert attendance, LaBounty notes.

"Performing music for the soul's sake of doing it is good and fulfilling, but here we're also actually helping someone else."

As for the current students in the band, they can get credit for participating. But LaBounty notes the biggest benefit is that they become part of something bigger as Rebels. "I always tell them it doesn't matter if it's the golf team or this band or the debate team. If they're doing something excellent, the reputation grows. It brings value to your degree," he says.

WHAT'S YOUR PASSION?

Music isn't the only way to feed your soul long after graduation. UNLV's Division of Educational Outreach offers a variety of non-credit courses and lifelong learning programs.

Learn more: edoutreach.unlv.edu





Rebels Put a Title on Ice

Two decades after the program was formed, UNLV ice hockey reaches the pinnacle of club team success with a national championship.

BY MATT JACOB

Assistant coach Nick Robone lifts the Murdoch Cup as the UNLV hockey team celebrates winning the ACHA Division I national championship.

The UNLV ice hockey team had just pulled off its second Houdini act in as many days, and coach Anthony Vignieri-Greener was searching for a sign — any sign — that his players had enough gas in the tank for one more game.

Not just any 60-minute game, but one with everything on the line: history, leg-

acy, immortality.

So following his team's 5-2 come-from-behind victory over Liberty University in the semifinals of the 2024-25 American Collegiate Hockey Association Division I national tournament, Vignieri-Greener peered into the eyes of his players.

He liked what he saw.

"That's when I told the coaching staff, 'There's no way we're losing this next game,'" Vignieri-Greener recalls. "Maybe that was premature. But I could just see it in their eyes."

Fast-forward some 24 hours, and Vignieri-Greener was watching his players circle the rink at the Centene Community Ice Center near St. Louis, Missouri, with the Murdoch Cup hoisted above their heads.

Nearly 20 years after the club pro-

gram formed — and 10 years after Vignieri-Greener, himself a former UNLV player, took over as coach — the Skatin' Rebels were national champions.

"To win something this big — nobody really understands how hard it is until you actually get there," Vignieri-Greener says. "It was a long, long 10 years. But it was worth every second of it."

Making it all the more special: UNLV's 7-3 championship victory came against Adrian College, the Michigan liberal arts school that had defeated the Skatin' Rebels 3-0 in the title game the previous year.

THE SKATE TO A REMATCH

While there were a few tense moments early on in this year's finals, the stress was nothing like what UNLV endured in

its previous two contests.

After coasting to a 6-2 victory over Arizona in their first game of the ACHA Division I tournament, the Skatin' Rebels faced Maryville University in the quarterfinals. Trailing 2-0, UNLV finally got on the board early in the third period, buried the equalizer with 99 seconds left in the game, then found the net less than five minutes into overtime for a season-saving 3-2 win.

The Skatin' Rebels returned the next day for a semifinal matchup against Liberty University, and again, they found themselves down 2-0 entering the final period.

Then came the onslaught: five goals in the final 10 minutes. When the final horn sounded, UNLV had secured a 5-2 win and a much-desired rematch against Adrian College.

The team's mindset heading into the title game?

"For us returners, it was like, 'This can't happen two years in a row. They can't go back-to-back on us. That can't be our legacy — the team that could get close but couldn't get over the line,'" says senior defenseman and team captain Mattias Dal Monte. "Playing the same opponent, it definitely added extra juice."

Vignieri-Greener — who had 96 goals and 169 assists in four years as a player at UNLV from 2006-10 — leaned on some personal experience in his pregame speech.

"I truly believe the tightest and closest teams will go the furthest, and that's what I relayed to the guys," he says. "I told them, 'Listen, I've been doing this a long time, and the closer a group is, the farther it will go. And without a doubt, this is the closest group we've ever had. So go win a national championship.'"

In doing just that, UNLV capped an incredible season that saw the team post an eye-popping 30-2-3 record and achieve all four of its preseason goals: Win the Western Collegiate Hockey League championship for the first time in program history; defeat an NCAA Division I opponent for the first time; earn a top-four seed in the ACHA tournament; and win the Murdoch Cup, the trophy that goes to the tournament champ.



Defenseman and team captain Mattias Dal Monte handles the puck during the WCHL championship game against Arizona State.

A BIG BRAGGING RIGHT

While the national title obviously sat atop the wish list, it arguably ranked second in terms of the season's most difficult tasks, because on Dec. 28, UNLV — which competes at the highest level of non-NCAA-sanctioned collegiate club hockey — traveled to Colorado for an "exhibition" game against the University of Denver.

The same University of Denver that has won 10 NCAA Division I hockey championships, including the 2023-24 crown.

Two years prior, the Pioneers hosted the Rebels and rolled to a 10-0 victory. This time? UNLV skated into the reigning champ's arena and stunned the 7,000 fans in attendance by scoring a program-defining — and confidence-boosting — 7-6 overtime victory.

"After that game, we could've fallen into the mindset of, 'Oh, we just beat the defending NCAA Division I national champions; the rest of our games and winning our national championship wouldn't matter as much,'" says sophomore forward Heath Mensch, who grew up in Las Vegas. "But we stuck to our plan and had the mentality of, 'Well, we beat them. Now we

need to go out and show that we're legit and clearly the best team in the ACHA.'"

Mission accomplished — thanks in no small part to Mensch, who scored the game-winning goal in the comeback victory over Liberty in the ACHA tournament semifinals.

Following their title-clinching victory over Adrian College on March 18, UNLV's latest national champions returned home to a hero's welcome. In addition to celebrations on campus and around the community, the team was honored by Southern Nevada's two professional hockey franchises: the Henderson Silver Knights and their parent club, the NHL's Vegas Golden Knights.

The Silver Knights and Golden Knights each held a brief in-game ceremony recognizing UNLV's accomplishment. During each game, the players cruised around the arena concourses with the Murdoch Cup.

"That was amazing," Dal Monte says. "It was endless high-fives and congratulations from fans. It was really cool to see the broader hockey community in the desert showing love to us like that. That was a special night."

For a special, one-of-a-kind team.

"For us returners, it was like, 'This can't happen two years in a row. ... That can't be our legacy.'"

— Mattias Dal Monte,

defenseman and team captain

PHOTO: KAYLA FAASE

PHOTO: BECCA SCHWARTZ

Jennifer Pharr is changing the world.



Jennifer Pharr, Ph.D.
 Professor
 UNLV School of Public Health

Middle school girls are facing unprecedented levels of sadness and hopelessness.

Through the RUSH Program, Professor Pharr is partnering with the Las Vegas Raiders to teach young girls to use sports to transform their mental and physical health.

Faculty at the **UNLV School of Public Health** collaborate with community partners to make a difference in our local community and beyond.
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Learn more about the RUSH (Raiders UNLV Sports Health) Program:



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BIG WINS ON, OFF FIELD

BY MATT JACOB

From the gridiron and the hardwood to the fairways and the swimming pool, it's been another eventful — and in many cases highly successful — year for UNLV Athletics. Here's a roundup of some of the top team and individual accomplishments, as well as noteworthy comings and goings within the Rebel Athletics family.

FOOTBALL TEAM CONTINUES TO SHINE

One year after posting its best record since the early 1980s, the UNLV football team topped it with arguably its best season in school history. The Rebels followed up a 9-5 season in 2023 with an 11-3 mark in 2024 — the program's first back-to-back winning seasons in exactly four decades.

Among the highlights this year: a second consecutive trip to the Mountain West Conference Championship Game, a 24-13 victory over Cal in the LA Bowl, and appearances in the national rankings for the first time ever.

The bowl victory was UNLV's fourth all time and first since the 2000 Las Vegas Bowl. With the win over Cal, the Rebels finished the season No. 23 in the media poll and No. 24 in the coaches poll.

Prior to the LA Bowl, head coach Barry Odom resigned to take the same position at Purdue. Odom's 19 victories were the most in a two-season span in school



history — and just one fewer than the team had posted in the previous five years combined.

In mid-December, **Dan Mullen** was named head coach. He went 103-61 in 13 combined seasons as head coach at SEC

powers Mississippi State (2009-17) and Florida (2018-21).

"Everything is about player development this entire spring and making sure we, as a team, take huge steps in our growth," Mullen said as he began spring practices.

LADY REBELS TOP THE MOUNTAIN WEST AGAIN

The UNLV women's basketball team continued its impressive resurgence. The Lady Rebels won their fourth consecutive Mountain West Conference regular-season championship (becoming just the second team in league history to accomplish the feat). They also advanced to the second round of the Mountain West tournament for the fourth year in a row.

Although it fell short of setting a school record by making a fourth straight NCAA Tournament appearance, UNLV did earn a berth to the Women's Basketball Invi-

tation Tournament. In an opening round matchup against visiting Hawaii, the Lady Rebels rolled to a 63-46 victory — the program's first postseason triumph since 2003-04.

Following the regular season, coach **Lindy La Rocque** was named Mountain West Coach of the Year for the third time in her five seasons on the job (the only women's basketball coach in league history to be so honored).

On the court, forward Meadow Roland became the second straight Lady Rebel to win both the Mountain West Freshman and Sixth Player of the Year Awards.



PHOTO: LUCAS PELTIER/UNLV

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REBELS | **MAKE IT** | **HAPPEN**



MAKING A SPLASH IN AND ABOVE POOL

Two members of the UNLV men's swimming and diving team qualified for the NCAA Championships this season.

After helping to lead the Rebels to a fifth consecutive Western Athletic Conference team swimming championship, senior **Daniel Nicusan** (above, middle) competed in three events at the NCAA Championships.

Facing the best collegiate swimmers in the nation, Nicusan placed in the top 25 in both the 100-meter breaststroke (25th) and 200-meter breaststroke (17th). The latter was the best NCAA finish for a Rebels swimmer in the 200-meter breaststroke in school history. He also qualified for the 200-meter individual medley but did not reach the finals.

Above the pool at the NCAA Championships, sophomore Alex Vazquez took 25th in the 1-meter diving event. It was the highest finish ever by a Rebels diver competing at nationals.

RUNNIN' REBELS WELCOME NEW BOSS

It's been more than a dozen years since the UNLV men's basketball team last qualified for the NCAA Tournament.

Now it's **Josh Pastner's** turn to try to end that drought as the 13th head coach of the Runnin' Rebels.

The 47-year-old arrives in Las Vegas with a 276-187 coaching record accumulated over 14 seasons with Memphis (2009-15) and Georgia Tech (2016-23).

Pastner led those programs to a total of two regular season conference championships, four conference tournament titles, and seven postseason appearances (including five trips to the NCAA Tournament). He also earned Coach of the Year honors in both Conference USA (2013) and the ACC (2017).

"I have had the pleasure of knowing Josh for more than 20 years," Director of Athletics Erick Harper said at Pastner's introductory



news conference. "He is a fearless and relentless recruiter ... and also an exceptional communicator [who is] deeply committed to engaging with the Las Vegas community.

"We are confident that he will lead us to championships and return the Runnin' Rebels to the NCAA Tournament."



SENIOR GOLFER DRIVES HIMSELF, TEAM INTO TOP 25

For decades, UNLV men's golf was a fixture in both the individual and team national rankings. This year has seen a return to form.

Following six top-six finishes, including a pair of victories, the Rebels found themselves ranked 25th in the national poll in late March. It's the team's first appearance on the list since 2018-19.

Pacing the team has been senior **Caden Fioroni**, who reached the top 20 in the individual rankings. He earned his first career victory at the Southern Highlands Collegiate tournament, which featured several nationally ranked teams, including No. 1 Auburn.

Fioroni closed out March at No. 17 in the PGA Tour University rankings. He's one of just two golfers from a West Coast school ranked among the 35 best collegiate players. Another highlight: He made his PGA Tour debut in October at the Shriners Children's Open in Las Vegas.



Sky Island Forests

A REDWOOD-LOVING RESEARCHER ON WHY LAS VEGAS IS PERFECT FOR STUDYING THE LIMITS OF TREES

BY ERICA CORLISS

Growing up in California around some of the largest organisms on Earth — redwood trees — no doubt was a big influence on Drew Peltier’s career path.

“It’s hard to stand at the base of a tree like that, where it’s too tall to even see the top, and not think that’s something important to preserve,” says the School of Life Sciences assistant professor.

Peltier wanted to know more about how climate change affects those trees and soon realized that meant a career in research. While not known for its lush forests, he says, Southern Nevada offered a perfect opportunity to study how trees tolerate extremely dry climates.

His lab studies the mechanisms of tree survival and mortality, focusing on trees across the Western U.S. — from tiny pinyon pines to the tallest and larg-

est trees on earth, like coast redwood and giant sequoias.

The record of how trees respond to past climate conditions, like rainy periods, drought, and extreme heat, can be found in the tree’s rings. He also researches how trees store energy, in the form of sugars, for exceptionally long periods of time.

“Essentially, they save up for emergencies,” he says.

Las Vegas, he says, is at the hottest,

“My research shows many tree species are exceptionally drought resilient, but we need to take care of our urban trees.”

Drew Peltier
School of Life Sciences

driest southern boundary of a lot of forest types and species in the Western United States. “That is, the sky island forests around Las Vegas are the perfect experimental laboratory to learn about the limits of tree physiological tolerance to extreme climates.”

Moreover, Southern Nevada’s nuclear testing in the 1950s and ’60s left another important bookmark in time.

“Those bombs added what’s called radiocarbon to the atmosphere, and the incorporation of that radiocarbon into plant tissues allows us to track the age of sugars through long-lived trees,” he says. “This has shown that coast redwood trees use 50- to 100-year-old sugars to support recovery from fire.”

Peltier is principal investigator at UNLV for the Southwest Climate Adaptation Science Center, which focuses on actionable science to help communities in the Southwest adapt to climate change. Partners at the center include universities in Arizona, Utah, and California, as well as federal and tribal government agencies like the U.S. Geological Survey.

A recent research award will allow Peltier’s team in the lab — the Delta-14C Investigation of Carbohydrates in Ecosystems (DICE) lab — to bring nearly all steps for radiocarbon dating in-house at UNLV rather than outsource them to another lab.

“Las Vegas and the surrounding areas are the perfect experimental laboratory to learn about the limits of tree physiological tolerance to extreme climates,” says Peltier. “My research shows many tree species are exceptionally drought resilient, but we need to take care of our urban trees.

“In a desert climate, trees become very important for shading homes,

HOW DIABETES DISTORTS THE BRAIN’S, REWARD PROCESSING

BY KEYONNA SUMMERS

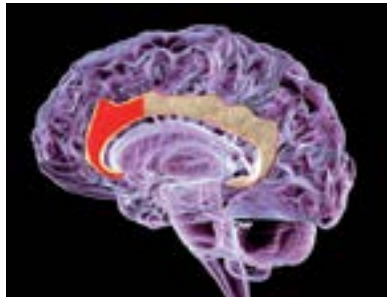
Type 2 diabetes may rewire the brain in ways that mimic early Alzheimer’s disease — and UNLV researchers say the “why” may lie in a previously unexplored connection between high blood sugar levels and a key part of the brain called the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC).

Scientists have long known that Type 2 diabetes patients are more prone to psychiatric and neurodegenerative disorders. But the exact link between the diseases has been poorly understood.

Based on a new UNLV study, it appears that diabetes weakens ACC function, suppressing reward perception and memory signals. It also induces mild cognitive impairment. “Diabetes may be altering the brain similarly to early stages of Alzheimer’s disease,” said lead researcher James Hyman, a psychology professor. “These findings have the potential to help researchers unlock clues to improved diagnostic or treatment strategies for the disease.”

This represents the first time scientists looked for clues within the ACC. To gain insight into the interplay between the ACC and high blood sugar levels, scientists observed brain activity and behavior in rodent models. The diabetic rodents’ anticipation of a reward, such as a sweet treat, was heightened in comparison to healthy brains. Additionally, healthy-brained subjects paused to savor, while the diabetics quickly move on to the next reward.

Hyperglycemic insulin levels appeared to impair the ACC’s information-processing ability when rewards were involved. The researchers pinpointed the weakened reward signal to a dampened input into the ACC from another key brain area for Alzheimer’s disease called the hippocampus,



which is involved in spatial and autobiographical memory.

“We think the hippocampus tells the subject where it is location-wise and the ACC tells the subject what it is doing and that it’s getting a reward,” Hyman said. “These things should come together and make the subject remember it was just in a special, rewarding location — but this doesn’t happen with the ones that have Type 2 diabetes.”

The research team indicated that their findings could be significant to developing diet and lifestyle interventions to manage diabetes. What’s more, study authors said, the hippocampus-to-ACC projection may be worth exploring as a treatment target for mood disorders to which the ACC is already linked. Hyman says this research reveals direct evidence of muted reward processing and behaviors that are consistent with anhedonia, or the inability to experience pleasure — a common symptom of both depression and Type 2 diabetes.

ABOUT THE STUDY

“ACC reward location information is carried by hippocampal theta synchrony and suppressed in a Type 2 Diabetes model” was published March 24 in the *Journal of Neuroscience’s* Computational Properties of the Prefrontal Cortex Special Collection.

PHOTO: BECCA SCHWARTZ

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Research

Does this scrub-jay make better decisions than you?

Study simulates thousands of generations to find out why humans and other animals evolved to prefer short-term gains.

BY TONY ALLEN

Are you the type of person who struggles to save for retirement but just wrapped up your third vacation of the year? Did you cash out that savings bond from grandma well before it had the chance to mature?

According to science, your tendency toward immediate gratification may not be your fault.

A study led by UNLV anthropologist Brian Villmoare and a nationwide team of researchers used mathematical models to simulate evolution over thousands of generations to find out why animals — including humans — have a tendency to prioritize short-term benefits over greater long-term returns.

Though the propensity to choose the quick win over future benefit — a term known as temporal discounting — is well established, the evolutionary processes that drive this behavior are less clear.

“For humans (in our evolutionary past) and most animals, the future is essentially unknowable, so they cannot know that a decision prioritizing the future will be rewarded,” says Villmoare.

MODELING GOOD (AND BAD) DECISIONS

The researchers created a mathematical model where organisms were forced to choose one of two options: a stable-but-lesser reward sooner or a larger-but-less-stable reward at intervals further into the future.

This model was run for thousands of

generations and allowed researchers to adjust the benefits and time between the short- and long-term gains to see what it would take for organisms to choose more distant future returns. Organisms tended to choose a somewhat more distant reward so long as it had a substantially higher payoff. Uncertainty in the future reward almost always led to choosing the short-term payoff.

“We were surprised how large even a modestly further away reward had to be in order for the population to choose it,” says Villmoare. “For instance, a 50% or even 100% better reward wasn’t enough. It really had to be multiples of the original in terms of value, including up to 20-times the reward in the more distant future.”

“The results show how natural selection, time, and unknown future risks and rewards interact to shape an organism’s behavior.”

CIVILIZATION HAS OUTPACED HUMAN BEHAVIOR

Humans are fairly similar to other animals in their economic decision-making, according to Villmoare. The need to have something now often drives poor decisions.

“This is despite the fact that you can explain the consequences of, say, purchasing consumer goods on credit to a human,” he says. “The underlying instinct easily overwhelms the intellectual knowledge of the long-term cost.”

The reason is tied to the fact human civilizations advanced at a much faster rate than long-held evolutionary behaviors could evolve. More than 98% of Homo sapiens’ existence pre-dated sophisticated food preservation techniques and agriculture, Villmoare notes.

“It is only since the arrival of complex agricultural societies just 5,000 to 7,000 years ago that humans could

make reliable investments in the future for most areas of their lives,” says Villmoare. “For example, they could only store food or, once we had invented currency, put money away for future use once we had agriculture and money-based societies.”

EVOLUTIONARY EXCEPTIONS

Though the models help explain why natural selection favors lower-value short-term rewards over more optimal distant rewards, there are some exceptions. The study points to scrub-jays that catch and store worms for future consumption. The authors suggest the birds must, in some sense, know that the food will be there when needed.

“If the scrub-jay caches food and the food is stolen or it forgets the cache location, the result ... would likely be negatively selected against,” study authors note. “But a cache that can be reliably accessed might enable the survival of an animal during a lean winter.”

For humans, Villmoare says, the effect can be mitigated if the cost of moving from the short-term reward to the better long-term reward is less potentially costly and more predictable. The key, he says, lies in making the benefits of long-term decision making more obvious.

Take the case of reproductive decision making: “Females are more careful because the burden on a long-term investment falls to them more than to men,” says Villmoare.

A recent example is in career choices. “Before the Affordable Care Act, the cost of quitting a job included the potential loss of health insurance for the entire family,” Villmoare says. “By providing a way for a worker’s family to remain insured, the potential cost of moving to a better job or taking the risk of opening their own business decreases.”



ABOUT THE STUDY

“Evolutionary origins of temporal discounting: Modeling how time and uncertainty constrain optimal decision-making strategies across taxa” was published Nov. 12, 2024, in the journal PLOS One.

AT YOUR SERVICE

[Programs](#) | [Community Partners](#) | [Origins](#)

More than just a place where Nevada's students can get their degrees and where faculty conduct critical high-level research, UNLV has long been a dedicated — and trusted — community partner. So much so that UNLV is designated a community-engaged university by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

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Spearheading many of these endeavors are Rebel students, who lend their newfound knowledge and expertise and, in return, gain valuable hands-on experiences.

Read about some of the many ways UNLV is positively impacting the health and well-being of all Nevadans.



PHOTO: JOSH HAWKINS

Program: Community Archives Workshops | **Community Partners:** Any local community group | **Origins:** 2023

PRESERVING THEIR OWN LEGACIES

UNLV workshops help families collect oral histories, memorabilia, and records to pass down through the generations.

BY SEAN KENNEDY

The camper still sits in the backyard of the Ortiz family home, just off the railroad tracks on the edge of Logandale, in the heart of Nevada's Moapa Valley. Weathered but sturdy, it's a humble relic of a time when life was lived on the road – following harvests and chasing opportunity.

"We were lucky," Juanita Ortiz said. "We had a camper. Some families only had tents or slept in their cars on the side of the road."

That small piece of history, a hand-built camper that once protected the Ortiz family across Nevada's rugged farmlands, is now drawing the interest of the Smithsonian Institution, which is considering it for preservation. But, the story of the camper is just one thread in a much larger narrative – one that often goes unrecognized – of America's migrant farm workers.

It wasn't until members of the Ortiz family attended a UNLV Special Collections & Archives community workshop that they understood the value of their own history. They had an epiphany: If we don't preserve this history, who will?

REACHING INTO THE COMMUNITY

The workshop grew from Special Collections & Archives efforts to expand its collections on Southern Nevada. Unlike traditional collections, which are often curated by academic or government institutions like UNLV, community archives are led by the people whose histories are being preserved.

Special Collections has held workshops for local groups, including Neighborhood Housing Services of Southern Nevada, Assistance League of Las Vegas, Westside School Alumni Foundation, and the Hong Kong Business Association of Nevada.

The workshop teaches individuals, families, and community groups how to safely store and organize their records. What they do with their archives is up to them.

"This project reinforces that records don't necessarily have to leave their communities or organizations to be preserved," said Sarah Jones, head of Special Collections Technical Services. "By working collaboratively, we ensure that these historical materials remain accessible and meaningful to the people and places they represent."

The Ortiz family attended UNLV's first workshop in March 2023. They received an archival kit – funded by donors through the Libraries Advisory Board – with the appropriate folders, gloves, sheet protectors, and writing implements for preservation.

Several members of the Ortiz family then began gathering photos and documents, including earnings statements for Pedro Ortiz Sr., recommendation letters from longtime employers, and funeral programs. They also conducted oral histories to detail their experiences as migrant farm workers and later as members of the Logandale community.

MIGRANT WORKERS IN NEVADA

The Ortiz family immigrated from Mexico during the post-World War II era, traveling with that hand-built camper to farming communities in the Southwest before eventually settling in Moapa Valley.

Originally inhabited by the Southern



Paiute people, the valley was later home to Church of Latter-day Saints settlers as well as Japanese-American families seeking new opportunities following land ownership restrictions in California. These early farms became thriving agricultural hubs, attracting Latino and Mexican-American farmworkers who supported the economy.

The groups developed strong ties, living and working together, and these relationships became an integral part of the history of the region. LDS leaders stepped up to support the Farm Worker Movement (migrant programs offered through the Economic Opportunity Board in the 1960s), which helped families like the Ortizes transition out of farm labor.

"Our home, it was purchased with a handshake," Ortiz said. "The Ozaki family that owned this area just really valued us. My father, they made a deal because they valued us enough to want us to stay."

And yet, family members also remember how the Latino community often felt like outsiders, estranged by cultural and religious differences.

"I think for me, I sometimes felt not acknowledged as a group," said Paulita Ortiz, Juanita's sister. "There's some painful memories here, but there's also

The Ortiz family of Logandale turned their family photos and papers into an archive documenting life as migrant workers in the Moapa Valley. Above: Paulita Ortiz. At right: Delfina Anchondo and Juanita Ortiz.



PHOTOS: BECCA SCHWARTZ

a community here that really does, in times of crisis, come together, and it made the difference."

The LDS church has a long tradition of helping families to document their histories. Through genealogies, personal diaries, letters, photographs, oral histories, and religious milestones, there is a well-preserved record of their contributions in the Moapa Valley. However, without a tradition, Latino family histories are limited.

"In doing this work and seeing and hearing our history, it is amazing to see how much our family has accomplished," said Delfina Anchondo, Juanita's niece.

A HOME FOR HISTORY

As the Ortiz collection grew, they realized their family's journey was emblem-

atic of so many others. The effort led them to work in coordination with the Nevada Department of Transportation's Cultural Resources Latino Project and national heritage institutions like the Latinos in Heritage Conservation and the Smithsonian.

The family chose to establish a collection at UNLV, however, because of its commitment to ensuring records remain in Southern Nevada while making them accessible to researchers anywhere.

"I told my aunts, if we don't put it at UNLV, no one will ever hear it. No one will ever see it," Anchondo said. "This is our story. This is Nevada's story. It belongs here. We know UNLV will preserve it, and it will be there for future generations to come."

Though the task may seem daunt-

ing, Anchondo said, "I just want to encourage everyone: If you have a story, if something has been passed down through your family, don't wait too long. Start now. Preserve what you can, because once it's gone, it's gone."

Late last year, Sarah Quigley, director of Special Collections, traveled to the family home in Logandale to pick up the materials.

"Meeting with the Ortiz family, listening to their firsthand accounts of life as migrant farm workers, and visiting the place they call home was incredibly powerful," said Quigley. "Their stories bring to life this unique history of Southern Nevada in a deeply personal and vivid way – one that can't be captured through official records alone."

PRESERVE YOUR HISTORY

For information on workshops, contact UNLV Special Collections and archives.

libraries.unlv.edu

BRINGING PEACE OF MIND TO NEVADA'S RURAL YOUTH

Program: UNLV PRACTICE Rural Youth Mental Tele-Health Program
Community Partner: Communities In Schools of Northeastern Nevada
Origins: August 2012 to present

With all the challenges that come with adolescence, it often can be difficult for middle and high school students to succeed academically. Add in a mental or behavioral health obstacle, and a teenager can become so overwhelmed that they may give up on school altogether.

And when these situations arise in areas where mental health services are severely lacking, the struggle can compound exponentially.

It's precisely why the UNLV PRACTICE Clinic — which gives master's and doctoral-degree students in counsel-

ing and psychology the chance to gain real-world skills by offering low-cost mental health services to the community — partnered with Communities In Schools of Northeastern Nevada.

Through the Rural Youth Mental Tele-Health Program, graduate student therapists and clinical doctorate students — under the supervision of licensed faculty and clinical experts — tend to the mental-health needs of middle and high school students in Elko and Humboldt counties. Both areas are served by Communities In Schools of Northeastern Nevada.

For more than a dozen years, these student practitioners — as many as 30 annually — have worked to help Communities In Schools achieve its primary mission: keep kids in school by providing necessary resources, from school supplies to tutoring to mental health support.

The program received a \$270,000 grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration in 2023 to establish the Nevada Rural Communities Mental Health Outreach Program. That allowed the PRACTICE to double its capacity to serve youth in Elko and Humboldt counties. The grant was renewed in 2024, which would have allowed for further expansion, but the funding was rescinded in March. The program will continue but

is unable to offer year-round services to the highest-need youth as planned.

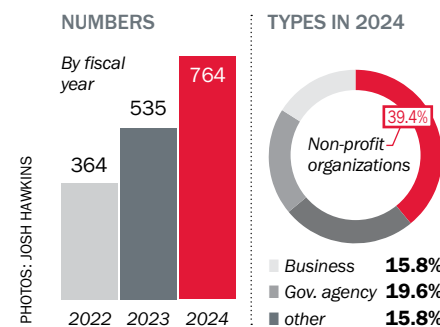
That's unfortunate news for students like a high-schooler who was recently referred to the program. The student experienced anxiety and depression symptoms so severe that they struggled to focus and often missed school. After regular therapy sessions with a supervised graduate student clinician, the high schooler began to implement coping techniques. The student's anxiety symptoms decreased significantly, and their overall mood improved — as did their attendance and participation in classroom activities.

Pride Point: It's all about expanding capacity for all of Nevada with home-grown practitioners. Once the student therapists graduate, they can become licensed mental health interns and then independent professional mental health practitioners in Nevada — a state where such professionals are in short supply.

Sounding Off: "This partnership has grown into a vital resource for rural students facing mental health challenges," says Michelle Paul, executive director of UNLV PRACTICE and assistant vice president of mental & behavioral health training in the Department of Psychology. "In the 2023-24 academic year alone, we expanded services by 56%, with a 67% increase in therapy hours delivered. Thanks to enhanced infrastructure, shared resources, and additional state funding, more than half of participating students no longer reported clinically significant symptoms by year's end — evidence of the profound impact this collaboration is having on youth and their futures."

— Matt Jacob

COMMUNITY PARTNERS



STRIKING BACK AGAINST HUNGER

Program: UNLV Farmer's Market
Community Partner: Three Square Food Bank
Origins: February 2022 to present



As Southern Nevada's population has grown, so too has the need to feed the less fortunate.

Enter the UNLV Farmer's Market, which channels student volunteerism into supplementing the resources of Las Vegas' leading community food pantry, Three Square Food Bank.

Each month, as many as 50 students work the Farmer's Market, distributing 6,000 to 10,000 pounds of food — and offering nutritional information — to those dealing with food insecurity.

Now in its fourth year of operation, the UNLV Farmer's Market started as a student project and is now a permanent offshoot of the campus' own food pantry, which serves students and employees. The Farmer's Market is aimed at residents who live directly around the main campus. This strategy helps Three Square meet its mission to distribute food within specific Southern Nevada ZIP codes.

And because students and the UNLV Food Pantry handle the planning and

execution for the Farmer's Market, Three Square is able to spread its resources further.

Although the Farmer's Market is relatively young, it has already grown to the point where more than 30 UNLV units have become involved and are helping to expand resource offerings. Also joining the effort each month: multiple local healthcare organizations, which bring additional services and information to the community.

Pride Point: As of April 2024, the UNLV Farmer's Market had fed nearly 13,500 individuals from more than 4,000 households.

Sounding Off: "This pantry is a testament to the university's commitment to uplifting our community beyond education, by providing basic needs that allow all neighbors to thrive," said Marissa Shoop, Three Square's vice president of programs and partner services. "Our partnership with the UNLV Farmer's Market brings us one step closer to a future where no one goes hungry."

— Matt Jacob

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HAPPY CAMPERS EXPLORE WONDERS OF SCIENCE

Program: Rebel Science Camp | **Community Partner:** Clark County School District | **Origins:** 2017 to present

When Alison Sloat recognized that there was no formal science curriculum for elementary school students in the Clark County School District, she was puzzled. Then the College of Sciences professor quickly became inspired.

That inspiration led Sloat to collaborate with CCSD on the wildly popular Rebel Science Camp. The program targets fifth-grade students enrolled in the district's Title 1 schools (those in economically disadvantaged areas of Southern Nevada).

On Fridays during the spring semester, about 70 of these youth take a field

trip to the Maryland Parkway campus, where they spend four hours participating in interactive science-related activities led by College of Sciences students.

Each activity is real-world based, with science undergrads teaching their younger counterparts about climate change causes and solutions; water use and conservation; carbon footprint reduction; chemistry uses in everyday life; and the responsible use of Earth's finite and renewable resources.

The fifth-graders are then encouraged to take the principles they learned on campus and actively apply them at

school and home.

In return, UNLV students gain valuable job and leadership training while also developing teaching strategies and professional etiquette skills in a diverse context. College of Sciences students also learn about the importance (and impact) of community engagement.

The short-term goal of Rebel Science Camp is to supplement the general classroom science instruction that fifth-grade students receive, and promote critical thinking through interaction with different fields of science.

The long-range mission? Create a

A field trip in March to UNLV gave students from Bracken STEAM Academy a chance to explore the composition of Earth and ponder the wonders of the universe.

spark within the young students to want to someday attend college — and perhaps even pursue a career in science or another STEM-related field.

So far, the grand plan appears to be working. Assessment data compiled in 2024 revealed that 94% of the fifth-grade students who attended Rebel Science Camp expressed a desire to attend college.

Additionally, 58% of camp attendees said they were interested in pursuing a career as a scientist — a 14% increase compared with the interest level prior to attending the camp.

Pride Point: A bonus to the program is that it builds the resumes of the undergraduate leaders. Four former student leaders are now nearing completion of medical school; three have full-time environmental education jobs in the nonprofit sector; two are full-time high school science teachers; and six have entered or completed graduate school in STEM-related fields.

Sounding Off: “In addition to having the opportunity to step on a college campus, the camp’s engaging environment has sparked curiosity and excitement for science, inspiring many students to explore future opportunities in STEM fields,” says Angela Phelan, STEM strategist at Roger D. Gehring Academy of Science and Technology and CCSD’s Rebel Science Camp liaison. “This memorable experience has fostered in our students both learning and a passion for discovery.”

— Matt Jacob



PHOTOS: BECCA SCHWARTZ; ADOBE STOCK (DENTAL WORK)

A REASON TO SMILE

Program: Seal Nevada South and Oral Health Education Program

Community Partner: Clark County School District

Partnership Origins: 2001 to present

Nothing lights up a room quite like a young child flashing a toothy ear-to-ear smile.

Unfortunately, a child's socioeconomic background can prevent them from receiving the proper dental care needed to maintain that smile.

That's where the UNLV School of Dental Medicine and its students step in.

For more than two decades, the dental school and the Clark County School District have collaborated on the Oral Health Education Program (and, since 2011, the Seal Nevada South component).

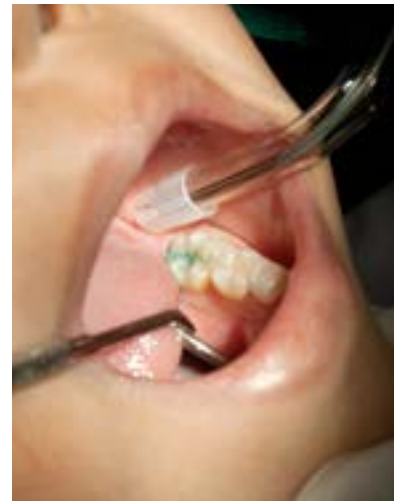
Through the outreach initiatives, School of Dental Medicine students offer much-needed free dental services and instruction to young students who don't receive regular dental care. The students, who range in age from pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, primarily attend local Title 1 schools (those in economically disadvantaged areas). However, upon CCSD approval, the program can expand to children at other schools.

In addition to providing oral health screenings, dental sealants, and fluoride varnish treatments, UNLV predoctoral dental students and postdoctoral dental residents share oral hygiene instruction and nutritional guidance. There's also an education component designed to teach kids how to better care for their teeth.

The Seal Nevada South and Oral Health Education Program is led by Dr. Christina Demopoulos, a professional dentist and professor of biomedical sciences at the School of Dental Medicine. Along with three additional faculty and one staff member, Demopoulos oversees the 180 students who participate each year.

Those students gain hands-on opportunities to practice their craft along with a better appreciation for their community's dental needs.

And the support doesn't end with initial cavity fills and oral screenings. In



fact, CCSD students who don't have an established dental provider can schedule follow-up care at the School of Dental Medicine — including, if needed, sedation for more serious procedures.

It's all made possible through diversified funding from the State of Nevada Department of Health and Human Services, Liberty Dental Plan and a five-year federal grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration that approximates \$1.5 million.

Pride Point: During the 2023-24 academic year, the dental school provided nearly \$1 million in pro bono services to hundreds of Clark County School District students attending schools that participate in the Seal Nevada South and Oral Health Education Program.

Sounding Off: “We're extremely grateful to the UNLV School of Dental Medicine for consistently addressing special considerations for vulnerable Clark County School District student populations,” says Sheri McPartlin, chief nurse for CCSD Health Services. “The school's collaborative work to combat barriers in monitoring oral disease and prevention has resulted in high-quality dental care being delivered to our students.”

— Matt Jacob

True North

Amid clouds of uncertainty, UNLV's core mission remains clear to a professor who has observed its development from many seats. **BY JOHN L. SMITH**

Talk about an unseasonal storm. It only starts with the mid-semester transition of the university's president. The departure comes as the Nevada Legislature is meeting in a year riddled with economic uncertainty at the campus, state, and national levels. Then throw in the search for a new Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) chancellor, stiff financial headwinds for grant funding, and an atmosphere of political polarization at all levels of government.

In such a tempest, it's easy to go off course and lose direction. But William S. Boyd School of Law professor John V. White has been around long enough to see the horizon beyond the clouds.

White has experienced all manner of metaphorical weather in his 18 years here. The former Boyd Law School dean has stepped in as an intrepid meteorologist, placing himself in the eye of previous storms as UNLV's executive vice president and provost, the acting chancellor of the state's higher education system, and a strategic advisor to the president.

White reads the troubling skies as well as anyone, and he's unshaken by the current changes and challenges facing UNLV and higher education generally. His response to those who might fear the worst is striking in its simplicity: Storms come and go, but steering by your true north will see you through.

"For UNLV in particular, it's transformed so much over the recent decades that knowing your true north is the challenge," White says. "You have to know what your values are and what priorities to stick to. And I think for a community, both the campus and our larger community, it is necessary and difficult to know what university leaders have come to understand the main issues to be. Those issues might not be quite the same for somebody who's been on the faculty for just a year, for example, as for somebody who's been on the faculty for 30 years.

"But I think the main point — for all of higher education — is that this is a time to redouble your efforts to support your values."

And those values? "Academic freedom, focusing on student success, and the pursuit of knowledge, no matter where it takes you — those are the things that have defined institutions and made them valuable," White says.

The March departure of university president Keith Whitfield after 4½ years — a time that included the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and an on-campus shooting that left three faculty members dead — certainly leaves an immediate void.

In just the past two months, UNLV has seen international students unexpectedly lose their visas. A research grant on veterans affected by Alzheimer's disease was cancelled, even as it neared completion, because the study included their LGBTQ



"Our goals need to be about stability and continuity. We have challenges to face — and we'll have to work hard to face them — but staying the course is about making sure we serve the people of Nevada and the ideals of the pursuit of truth."

John V. White
Law professor

caregivers. And students, who naturally reflect Southern Nevada's diverse community, have shared their concerns about losing much-needed financial aid and support services that help them to get to college in the first place.

But White also believes this time presents an opportunity for new leadership to renew UNLV's relationship with its stakeholders.

"These jobs require vision, and the vision has to be adapted to the times," White says.

The next university president's tenure is likely to be compounded by political pressures as the federal administration pushes its own policies and agenda.

"A huge transformation has happened, or at least is being urged, from the presidential administration. You can't just sort of lay down and wait for it to happen. You have to get ahead of it on the one hand and push back on the other hand. And doing that is quite difficult. But if that's all you're doing — laying down and waiting for it — then you're not helping the community to grow and go forward."

UNLV's new president will need to articulate a vision that fits the community and our times, White says. "Essentially, that's what all of higher ed needs these days."

The good news is, UNLV has matured into a top-tier research institution with a breadth of academic, research, and service programs. The university's presence transcends the notable symbolism of a Las Vegas that's growing into its own as a community, White says.

"Our wins are substantial. We've gone through three cycles now of the [Carnegie] R1 process, where we've been included in that top level. What that means is, we've built a faculty that is doing productive research, [one] that is advancing knowledge.

"But I think for the consumer, the Nevada citizen, it means that if your child chooses to come to UNLV, they'll have access to distinguished scholars and researchers, working on cutting-edge issues, who can situate the student's education in the most recent trends in technology and scholarship.

"I think that the critical role that UNLV plays in Las Vegas and for the broader state is to provide high-level education and research and to do so at a reasonable price, so people don't have to leave the state to get that kind of education and, in most instances, never come back," he says.

In a fast-paced world, higher education sometimes appears to move slowly, he notes. But by remaining true to the values that helped raise UNLV to a high level in a relatively short time, the university will be able to ride out any storm.

"Our goals need to be about stability and continuity," White says. "We have challenges to face — and we'll have to work hard to face them — but staying the course is about making sure we serve the people of Nevada and the ideals of the pursuit of truth."

John L. Smith is a longtime Nevada journalist and author. A member of the Nevada Press Association Hall of Fame, his latest book is *Saints, Sinners, and Sovereign Citizens: The Endless War over the West's Public Land*.

PHOTO: JOSH HAWKINS

THE QUESTION

How can UNLV rise to the challenge of building public trust in higher education?

To answer that, we turned to three alumni who’ve handled their fair share of turmoil in their respective industries. Here they share the story behind one of their biggest challenges and the lessons they hope other leaders can learn from. **BY CAROLYN KRESSER**

TONY SANCHEZ

'88 BA Political Science

- Executive vice president of business development & external relations | NV Energy
- Chairman | UNLV Foundation Board of Trustees

The Challenge: In 2016, and again in 2018, Nevada voters were asked to weigh in on Question 3, a proposed state constitutional amendment to deregulate the state’s energy market. NV Energy, the public utility that supplies energy to 90% of the state, remained neutral in 2016 but when the question passed with a 70% majority, the future of the company was on the line. Sanchez led a year-long, statewide campaign opposing the initiative, resulting in a stunning reversal in public opinion with the measure being voted down in 2018 by a 67% majority.

Lessons Learned: “We won because of our statewide relationships. Some of our partners would normally not be on the same side of an issue, but we were united in this one cause. We had the Sierra Club, labor unions, police officer’s associations, environmental organizations — you name it. We assembled the largest coalition the state had ever seen. We also had 2,500 employees who stood up and said, ‘Tell us where to go and what to do.’ And they weren’t just fighting for their jobs; they knew it was the right thing to do for the future of energy and economic development in Nevada.”

Engineered for Success: “Utilities are often run by engineers, and engineers have this mantra: ‘Plan, Execute, Measure, and Correct.’ You plan and execute it, you measure effectiveness, and then you fix issues. After we won the campaign, I remember giving a speech in Washington, D.C., to a hundred utility CEOs; I brought the house down when I said, ‘It’s the first time I’ve ever seen a campaign modeled on an engineering concept.’ But it worked.”

Advice for UNLV: “First, this moment of change is not a reflection of UNLV and what an incredible institution it is. These things happen, and it’s nothing to take personal. Second, don’t overreact. As a university community, we can’t lose focus on our mission — and that’s to educate our state’s citizens. And third, this is an opportunity for a fresh start. UNLV is an under-appreciated state leader. It’s one of the largest drivers of the Southern Nevada economy. UNLV has the expertise and the thought leaders to navigate through this time. Don’t forget that.”



JON MARSHALL

'98 BSBA Finance

- Owner and President | Marshall Medical Billing

The Challenge: As CEO and CFO for major healthcare systems, Marshall navigated escalating financial pressures, steered organizations through shifting regulatory and policy landscapes, and led through complex public health crises. But now running his own Reno-based medical billing company, he’s realized that a healthy company starts with the employees. When a senior executive overseeing client relations departed suddenly, Marshall stepped in, stabilizing the business by rebuilding key relationships, safeguarding revenue, and addressing inefficiencies. He turned a potential setback into an opportunity to strengthen the company’s foundation.

Communication is Continuous: “Communication was probably the first five things we did. It comes down to who you communicate with, how you do it, and when you do it. We communicated with our clients directly, including holding brainstorming sessions to identify what we could be doing better. And we communicated often with our team, enlisting the help of some champions of change, which really helped create momentum toward a positive outcome.”

Culture Comes First: “We foster a culture of teamwork and positive reinforcement. We call out victories at the beginning of each meeting, and people get to celebrate their accomplishments. Yes, there will be challenges, but we’ll work through them together. Given our historical focus on teamwork, I think it was pretty easy for us to pull the team together during the difficult transition of the senior executive and make them feel heard.”

Lessons Learned: “People want to be challenged, they want to grow, they want opportunities to show what they can do. This [leadership change] reinforced my learning about delegation and asking people to do some work that they may not be accustomed to doing. Also, embrace change. We already had a culture of change: We accept it, we drive it, and we run toward it. That meant in this moment of crisis, there was no panic. It was just a matter of working through it.”

Advice for UNLV: “99% of everything out there in the world is just noise. Ignore the noise. Know where you’re headed, and keep your foot on the gas pedal. I don’t do any social media; I just stay focused on my business. We know our goal is to be the best medical billing company out there, and that’s what we hold ourselves accountable to.”



SHELLEY BERKLEY

'72 BA Political Science

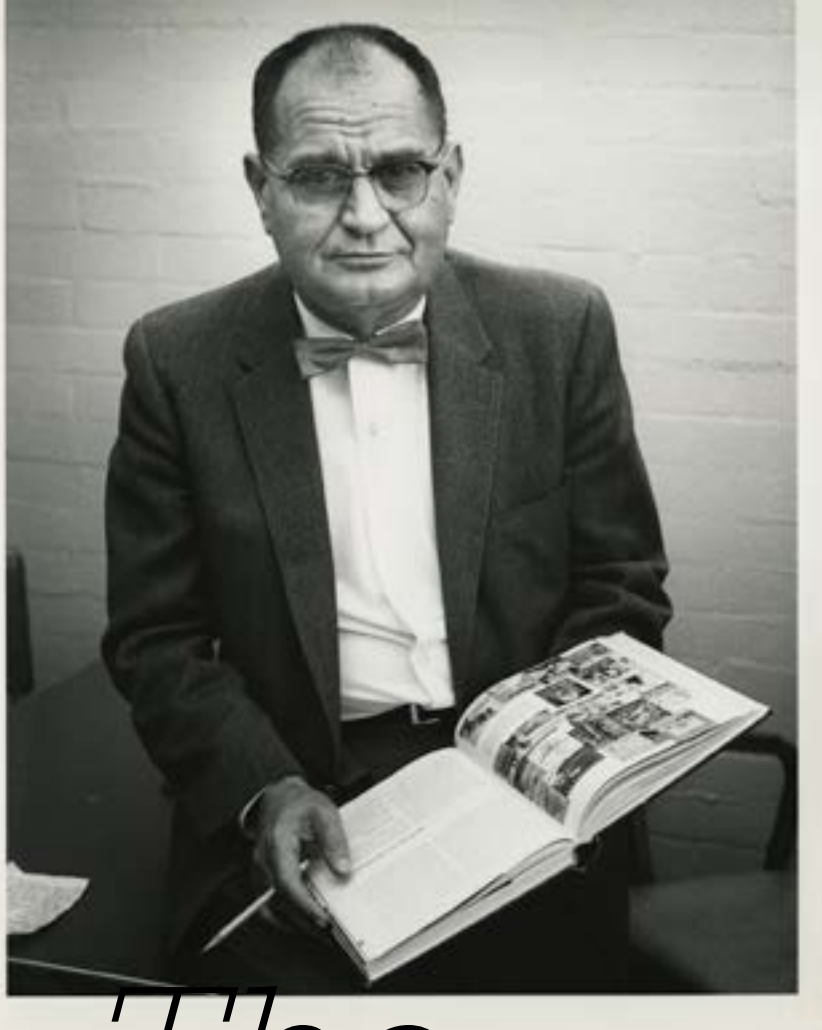
- Mayor | City of Las Vegas

The Challenge: In the early 2000s, veterans in Southern Nevada had few healthcare options and were often forced to travel to California for treatment. Determined to change that, then Congresswoman Berkley made it her mission to bring a full-service VA hospital to the region, an uphill battle for funding given that the opposing party was in the White House and controlled both houses of Congress. Berkley and her team partnered with the federal government to transfer 150 acres for the project and secured \$406 million in the 2006 federal budget to build the valley’s first VA hospital, outpatient clinic, and long-term care facility. The 1 million-square-foot facility opened in 2012 and now provides healthcare to more than 90,000 veterans every year.

The Commitment: “When the idea was brought to me, my first thought was, ‘How in heaven’s name are we going to do that?!’ But once we decided we were going to do it, it became an all-encompassing commitment. Everyone on my team committed to the goal. In the end, we convinced the Bureau of Land Management to donate the land, the first time that land had been donated to the VA, and we secured the largest single earmark in the 2006 budget.”

Lessons Learned: “You need to build trust before you need people. I maintained good relationships with my [Congressional] colleagues. So when I went to them with this need, they knew it was a legitimate need, and I wouldn’t be asking if it wasn’t critical to the people I represent. And be honest with people and articulate your vision. If they don’t understand what you’re doing, they’ll be less inclined to be a part of it.”

Advice for UNLV: “Know who you are and why you’re doing what you’re doing. Keep your eye on the prize. The purpose of UNLV is just as important today as it was when I went to school, and I was a part of UNLV’s 10th graduating class! Stay true to the mission of educating the next generation of Nevadans and the school will remain an important part of the Las Vegas community.”



The Loophole that Made Us UNLV

UNLV'S ORIGIN STORY TRACES BACK TO ONE VOTE BY ONE MAN, **HERB DERFELT**. HIS LEGACY CONTINUES THROUGH THREE GENERATIONS OF REBEL EDUCATORS.

BY MATT JACOB

IF YOU'RE A UNLV REBEL, DESPISING THE "SCHOOL UP NORTH" COMES AS NATURALLY AS BREATHING. And, to be fair, the feeling is mutual for those who have ties to the state's second largest university.

Such regional rivalries have been woven into the fabric of American collegiate culture for more than a century.

Few of these rivalries, however, have an origin story as unique as the one shared by UNLV and UNR. And even fewer can trace that origin story to one man and one (seemingly trivial) vote.

Before Herb Derfelt joined UNLV's College of Education (as likely its first full-time faculty member) — and long before his children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and multiple in-laws would go on to earn nearly a dozen UNLV education degrees — Derfelt was a professor at the state's only university in Reno.

Soon after arriving in Reno in the mid-1950s, Derfelt was asked to move south to lead the new Off-Campus and Evening Division programs at UNR's satellite location in Las Vegas, then known as Nevada Southern.

Administrators in Reno wanted to ensure that Nevada Southern remained a feeder school rather than attain degree-granting status as an institution in its own right. That began to change, though, when Nevada Southern's dean, William Carlson, sought to launch a two-year radiology program at the behest of local radiologists who were dealing with a technician shortage and a growing population to serve.

Rather than go through the usual protocol of seeking approval of UNR's administration, the dean exploited a loophole in the university's bylaws — bylaws that required a vote of "all faculty concerned" before any academic program could be added.

Enter Derfelt, who Carlson concluded at the time constituted the entirety of Nevada Southern's faculty. So when the dean put the new radiology program up for a vote, the decision — yay or nay — was Derfelt's alone to make.

One thumb's up later, Nevada Southern had its radiology program. More importantly (at least in a historical context), Derfelt's vote tipped over the first domino that eventually led to independence from UNR and paved the way for

a full-fledged university for Southern Nevada's growing population.

And, yes, eventually, a full-fledged in-state rivalry.

A PERENNIAL TEACHER SHORTAGE

As much as Derfelt played a key role in UNLV's history — including starting the first graduate degree program for teachers — it's just as important to note that he was a dogged champion of education.

Shortly after arriving in Las Vegas, Derfelt recognized that the service and blue-collar industries were the primary drivers of the local economy. As a result, he knew the growing region would struggle to recruit and develop qualified primary and secondary school teachers.

In fact, by the 1960s, Southern Nevada already was dealing with a significant teacher shortage. As a result, it was difficult for educators — especially those stationed at Nellis Air Force Base and in rural parts of the Las Vegas Valley — to add to their professional development or pursue higher education opportunities.

To address the issue, Derfelt helped launch an ahead-of-its-time program — one that leveraged television broadcasts to provide educational courses remotely.

The target audience for these distance-learning courses: aspiring and current teachers throughout Southern Nevada — including Clark County School District educators interested in additional training and certification — as well as officers stationed at Nellis Air Force Base who were looking to transition to education careers after fulfilling their military obligations.

According to Pate Thomas — Derfelt's great-grandson and one of the family's numerous UNLV education graduates — both UNLV professors and experienced CCSD educators served as the instructors for the remote classes. (The former dealt with higher-level subject matter, while the latter handled practical classroom instruction techniques.)

How did the remote aspect of the program work at a time when the words "internet" and "WiFi" were still decades from being part of society's vernacular? By accessing television airwaves.

With a UNLV-affiliated television studio serving as home base, instruc-

tors would teach courses at specific times of the day and participants would follow along with printed materials or assignments. They would either tune in for live instruction or access a recorded version of lessons at a later time.

In the end, Derfelt's highly innovative initiative achieved its intended goal of expanding the pool of public school teachers in Clark County and helping existing teachers enhance their skills.

"We've always had a teacher shortage problem, which was one of the things [my great-grandfather] focused on," says Thomas. "In reading his doctorate, it was clear he was always about, 'How do we get more [quality] teachers into the profession?'"

Ironically, it's a question that Thomas is now committed to answering.

A lifelong Las Vegas, Thomas has worked as a teacher and administrator in the Clark County School District for more than a decade. [See story, next page.]

His objective is no different than the one that inspired Derfelt to begin teaching in a one-room Kansas schoolhouse in 1925; to become a county school superintendent; and to instruct college students in Colorado, Arkansas, Kansas, Reno, and, finally, Las Vegas.

That is: Spread the word about the power of education and the immense positive impact that enthusiastic educators can have on future generations.

Educators like Herb Derfelt; his wife, Olive; and the three generations that came after them. Combined, the entire Derfelt-Thomas clan has earned eight undergraduate and three graduate degrees from UNLV.

None of it happens, of course, if not for Herb Derfelt's historic vote nearly three-quarters of a century ago.

It is fitting, then, that Derfelt was named professor emeritus upon his retirement from UNLV in 1972 and that he was honored when Herbert A. Derfelt Elementary School opened in northwest Las Vegas.

"He wasn't someone who cared about recognition," Thomas says with confidence of the great-grandfather he never got a chance to meet. "He was someone who simply believed in the work and the importance of educating young people."

A FAMILY OF REBELS

Herb Derfelt would not be the only member of his family to stroll the UNLV campus. Derfelt's direct and indirect descendants include great-grandson **Pate Thomas**, '12 BS Education (see next page) and:



► **Lavetta Derfelt Starlin**
'88 M.Ed.
(daughter)



► **Robin Starlin Thomas**
'82 BS Education and '86 M.Ed.
(granddaughter)



► **Patrick Thomas**
'84 BS Education and '88 M.Ed.
(grandson-in-law)



► **Dr. Herb Starlin**
'85 BS Biology
(grandson)



► **Lisa Starlin**
'92 BS Education and '96 M.Ed.
(granddaughter-in-law)



► **Roxane Garcia Thomas**
'13 BS Education
(great-granddaughter-in-law)



► **Starlyn Thomas Olson**
'15 BS Special Education
(great-granddaughter)



► **Lily Garcia Petrelli**
'17 BS Education
(great-granddaughter-in-law)

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LEARNING TO LOVE THE FAMILY BUSINESS

Pate Thomas had no desire to add his name to the long list of family members who became Rebels. Now? He's a difference-making grad and the boss of a new high school.

BY MATT JACOB

By the time he reached his mid-teens, Pate Thomas was well-versed on his family's deep roots as both educators and Rebels.

They traced back to his great-grandparents: Olive Derfelt, who taught in the Clark County School District, and Herb Derfelt, a UNLV education professor who happened to cast a key vote that helped establish UNLV.

As he was completing his time at Cimarron-Memorial High School — where his parents were longtime teachers — five family members had already earned seven UNLV degrees, almost all in education.

Thomas appreciated his family's legacy. He respected it. And he wanted none of it.

"I didn't understand why anyone would want to be a teacher," Thomas says of his mindset at the time. "You spend all your time at school; you don't make any money — it didn't make any sense to me. ... But my parents would often say to me, 'One day, you'll learn why.'"

Spoiler alert: He learned. He also took their advice about the practicalities of staying in his hometown. And two years into his studies, he switched from pre-law to education.

After his first education class at UNLV, Thomas says, "I kind of knew right then what I was going to do with the rest of my life."

Now some 15 years later, he's holed up in a temporary office while construction of South Career Technical Academy finishes up. Thomas, '12 BS Secondary Education, was named the new school's

principal in September 2024.

Technical academies are geared toward students who want to get a jump-start on their field of choice and those looking for something different from a traditional high school.

"Most of your kids want to be there," he says of technical academies. "So if you're not on your A-game every day, the kids will let your supervisor or their parents know, and then you're going to [hear about it]. So I learned that I needed to perform every single day."

Now well into his second decade as an educator, Thomas has worked almost exclusively at CTAs. He has been a social studies teacher, recruitment counselor, assistant principal, and now principal.

As he prepares for South CTA's fall opening, Thomas is grappling with a lengthy to-do list. "It's a little nerve-racking because so much needs to be done and everything is happening so fast," he says.

But he always makes sure to carve out time for promoting UNLV.

"I want people in this community to feel the same way that I do about UNLV," he says. "When I recruit local students to go to UNLV these days — which is something I still do — one positive that I highlight is how you're able to get the full college experience while also being close to home when something breaks down and you need that family support."

"I didn't realize that when I was choosing a college. I just wasn't mature enough to see it. But now that I'm older, I get it."

So, too, does his wife.

A first-generation college student, Roxane Garcia Thomas met her future husband at Cimarron-Memorial High School, joined him at UNLV, and earned the same secondary education degree in 2013. She is an assistant principal at Northeast Career Technical Academy in North Las Vegas. They have two sons who they hope continue the UNLV family legacy.

Both Thomases, and the three gen-



"I didn't understand why anyone would want to be a teacher ... But my parents would often say to me, 'One day, you'll learn why.'"

Pate Thomas

principal of South Career Technical Academy, holding a picture of his great-grandfather Herb Derfelt (see previous page).

erations before them, understand that a community will never be able to consistently nurture its citizenry unless it first cultivates quality teachers.

"Once you're in this profession long enough, you begin to realize that improving education is not really about people in leadership positions; it's about having great teachers," Pate Thomas says. "The more great teachers we have, everything else starts to take care of itself."

RIGHT PLACE RIGHT TIME

ALUM TAKES THE LESSONS HE LEARNED STARTING HIS OWN TECH COMPANIES TO HELP TODAY’S NEW GRADS STEP UP THEIR CAREERS IN SOUTHERN NEVADA.



PIOTR TOMASIK
'09 BS Computer Science

Positions: Chief operating officer and co-founder of TensorWave, a cloud-computing company for AI; co-founder of Vegas Tech Summit; co-founder of the nonprofit StartUp Vegas

Career quoteable: “I like to say, sometimes you win, sometimes you learn.”

Family: wife, **Kristin Tomasik**, '09 BS Computer Science; two children

BY NATALIE BRUZDA

Piotr Tomasik is all in on Las Vegas’ burgeoning tech startup scene. And he’s an advocate for the homegrown talent produced by his alma mater. Now, he’s syncing the two.

As a member of the College of Engineering’s Computer Science Advisory Board, he frequently had conversations with current students.

“I always heard students coming and talking about how they wanted to work at Google or Microsoft, one of these big tech companies, right? Meanwhile, they’re speaking to a room of business owners from the community,” said Tomasik, a tech entrepreneur. “I was thinking, they don’t even realize that there are opportunities at home — you don’t have to move or leave town to build a career in tech.”

That idea led to the 2023 launch of StepUp & StartUp, a signature program that connects students with competitively paid internships at local companies. Buy-in came from the Governor’s Office of Economic Development, the nonprofit StartUp Las Vegas, and City of Las Vegas officials.

In fall 2024 alone, 111 UNLV students interned at 37 local tech startups or small businesses through the program. And a number of internships have translated to job offers at companies like Wrebotics, RIOT Edge Solutions, and Capital Velocity.

It was easy for Tomasik to see the program’s potential; he, too, used to be one of those students who assumed the best opportunities



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were elsewhere. A first-generation American and college student, Tomasik came to UNLV in the mid 2000s to earn a degree in computer science and land a stable job at a big tech firm.

But the mentorship of former computer science professor Thomas Nartker led to another path. Tomasik wrote code for a project involving automated drones and in his senior year met a business executive who was launching a green energy startup.

"Instead of going a traditional path, I joined him and traveled the state," he said. "We were looking at different places to put solar panels, vertical axis wind turbines. I was also working on the website and doing basically anything and everything — and I was very excited to do so many different and dynamic things."

After that, he said, "I could never see myself in a corporate 9-to-5."

Tomasik would go on to positions in other startups before co-founding Influential, a company acquired by Publicis for \$500 million. He's now the chief operating officer of TensorWave, an AI computing solutions company he co-founded in late 2023. Last fall, the Las Vegas-based startup raised \$43 million in SAFE (Simple Agreement for Future Equity) funding, the largest in Nevada's history. The company currently employs over 30 individuals, with plans to scale up to 100 by the end of 2025.

"We sell the picks and shovels to people who want to do AI," Tomasik said, equating his company's product with the tools used by gold miners in the '49er days.

"It comes in the form of servers — data center GPUs — that are made available over the internet to these companies. Any company that wants to do generative AI or ChatGPT-like stuff, they need these special data center GPUs."

And Tomasik believes that TensorWave is in the right place at the right time as an alternative to larger companies and with its headquarters in Las Vegas.

Tomasik credits much of his ability to persevere in the sometimes volatile startup market to the support of his wife, **Kristin Tomasik**, '09 BS Computer Science. They met at UNLV and married right out of college. Kristin's early career in defense contracting gave him the flexibility to explore startup opportunity after startup opportunity. But soon enough, she caught the bug herself.

"She's made a career in both startups and larger companies and scaleups as a programmer, CTO, and engineering leader. And now she's investing in startups locally as a venture capitalist," he said. "I was able to convince her that it was a whole lotta fun."

He's hoping UNLV students — through programs like StepUp & StartUp program and other mentorship opportunities — can be convinced, too.

"What I say to our young talent in the valley is to try to say yes more than you say no about unique and interesting opportunities that surface around you," Tomasik said. "Investigate it and see if it excites you. Instead of watching Netflix tonight, go out and see what this person has to say. Standing still is not an option."

Class Notes

1960s



Carter, '73

Jill (Flemington) Schutte, '64 BS Education, was an elementary teacher at schools in Los Angeles, Anaheim and Temecula, California, as well as Oklahoma and Virginia. She earned a master's in guidance and counseling from the University of Oklahoma in 1986 and a special education certificate in 2014. She's taken 230 hours of technology training and has been a mentor to many young teachers. Schutte has traveled extensively to all continents except Antarctica. Her hobbies are sewing, travel, painting, community service, Rotary, and church activities.



Semola, '81

1970s



Derrick, '88

Gregg Lee Carter, '73 BA History, was awarded professor emeritus status after 40 years of teaching at Bryant University in Smithfield, Rhode Island. He earned his MA, M.Phil., and Ph.D. degrees in sociology at Columbia University. He has authored or coauthored 25 books, including *Gun Control in the United States*, *Guns in American Society*, *How to Manage Conflict in the Organization*, *Population and Society*, *The Gun Control Movement*, and *Working Women in America*. His writings on contemporary social issues have also appeared in more than a dozen academic journals. He lives in Rhode Island with his wife, Lisa, and enjoys family time with his four children and three grandchildren. His hobbies include underwater photography and researching the effects of social class on health.



White, '90



Shubert, '91

Alex Sugden, '73 BS Hotel Administration, has worked full time since 1966 at Desert Inn, Bali Hai Motel, Frontier Hotel, Tropicana Hotel, and Rainbow Vegas Hotels. He started AJS Management Corp. and owned and managed several apartment communities and self-storage properties. He retired in 2021. Sugden enjoys playing golf, scuba diving, and riding his ebike.



Packer, '95

Dot Winter, '74 BA Education, is a retired teacher.

1980s

Eric L. Scow, '81 BS Business Administration, worked in his parents' general merchandise store, Scow's, from 1970-2007 and then became the full-time caretaker for his elderly father until 2017. Since August 2019, he's been a clerk at Ace Shopper Stopper in Boulder City.



Schrieber, '95

Sal Semola, '81 BS Hotel Administration, is CEO of Gun Lake Casino Resort and has led the property through three expansions over the last seven years. Semola is married and serves on the board of directors for Special Olympics of Michigan. As a former adjunct professor for gaming at UNLV, he always looks forward to hearing from past students.



Sway, '99

Richard Derrick, '88 BS Accounting and '02 MPA, retired as Henderson city manager after 26 years working with the city. In 2024, the city received the 2024 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, the nation's only presidential award for performance excellence. Successful public-private partnerships under his stewardship brought professional sports teams, including the Henderson Silver Knights, Vegas Knight Hawks, Vegas Thrill, and Las Vegas Desert Dogs, as well as the Raiders Practice Facility to Henderson. He spends his free time cruising with his wife, enjoying the outdoors at his cabin in Utah, and staying active. He has three children and five grandchildren.



Weiss, '00

Colette (Hill) Kraemer, '89 Business Management, is a certified real estate appraiser.



Hooe, '01

1990s

Ken White, '90 BS Marketing, is an economic development specialist and main street director for the City of Eden in North Carolina. White enjoys spending time with his sons and their families, including his 2-year-old grandson.



Spotleson, '03

Kristen Shubert, '91 BS Hospitality Management, was named captain of the United States Wine Tasting Team for the 2024 International Blind Wine Tasting Competition, sponsored by La Revue du Vin de France. This is Shubert's sixth competition, finishing as high as third place against 40 countries. She's completed certifications of WSETIII, Spanish Wine Scholar, and French Wine Scholar. She is the president of the nonprofit Cellarmasters of Los Angeles, and makes wine for three different labels in California. She also represented the United States as a jet ski racer 2000-03 in the Pro Women's class of the USBA World Finals.



Naughton, '04

Bradley Packer, '95 BS Hotel Administration, is a senior director of public relations and communications, overseeing Four Seasons Resort Bora Bora and Four Seasons Hotel Houston. He has been with Four Seasons for 18 years, working at its hotels in Lana'i and Hawaii island,

Paul Gutierrez, '94 BA Communication Studies, is a columnist for Raiders.com. He previously worked as a reporter for ESPN, *Sports Illustrated*, the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *The Sacramento Bee*, as well as the Raiders and A's insider for CSN Bay Area. He is the author of *Tales From The Dodgers Dugout*, *100 Things Raiders Fans Should Know & Do Before They Die*, and *If These Walls Could Talk: Stories from the Raiders Sideline, Locker Room and Press Box*, co-authored with Lincoln Kennedy. He served as a voter for the Baseball Hall of Fame from 2009-22 and is a selector for the Pro Football Hall of Fame.



Bora Bora, Nevis, Westlake Village and Santa Barbara, Houston, and New Orleans. He enjoys live music, cooking, cocktail making, and traveling with his wife and young sons.

John Schrieber, '95 BS Business Administration and '00 MBA, is the chief financial officer at NuStep, LLC. He is married with two daughters.

Marty Baier, '99 BA Hospitality Administration, is a regional director of sales and marketing for KG Hotel Group. He enjoys cycling, spending time with his kids, wife, and two dogs. Two of Baier's children attend UNLV while the third will graduate from UNR in spring. Says Baier, "We try not to hold that against him."

Eric Sway, '99 BA Communication Studies, is a salesman with 13 years in the steel industry and 10 years in building products for commercial and industrial buildings in Ohio. He is head coach for girls and boys soccer at Crestwood High School in Mantua, Ohio, and for the U17 and U19 girls at Canton-Akron Force Soccer Club, who won the U17 Ohio State Championship. He coached in the national championship in July 2024 in Denver. He is married to **Stacey (Appiano) Sway**, '01 BS Business Administration. Their son, **Andrew Sway**, '24 Kinesiology and Exercise Science, was a goalkeeper for the 2023 UNLV men's soccer team.

2000s

Brad Weiss, '00 MA Communication Studies, is a brand and operations manager for 92.9 FM ESPN. He was selected as the No. 1 Mid-Market

Sports Radio Program Director for 2024 by a Barrett Media panel of broadcast executives across the country. This is Weiss' second time being recognized as a top mid-market program director. He was on-air as "Brad Kelly" at KMXB-FM (Mix 94.1) in Las Vegas from 1998-2000.

Leslie (Summerville) Hooe, '01 BM and '05 MM Music Education, works as an assistant principal in Palestine, Texas, and plans to start an education law program in 2025. She is a volunteer soccer coach for the YMCA and music director for the local community theater. She and her husband have two boys, a cat, two dogs, and eight chickens.

Jaime Spotleson, '03 Journalism, joined the development team at the ACLU of Nevada. She previously worked in media and public relations in Chicago, Nashville, and Las Vegas. Her personal advocacy and volunteer efforts have focused on gun violence prevention, reproductive justice, local libraries, and public education. She is married with two children.

Patrick W. Naughton, Jr., '04 BA History and '13 Emergency and Crisis Management, recently published, *Born from War: A Soldier's Quest to Understand Vietnam, Iraq, and the Generational Impact of Conflict*, which provides a fresh perspective on Vietnam for a new generation who just went through 20 years of their own wars and for their children who will one day struggle to understand war themselves. He is a husband, father, U.S. Army officer, and historian who lives in Leavenworth, Kansas.

Wanda Brister Rachwal, '04 Doctor of

Musical Arts, earned a master's and attended an elite performing arts school. Brister Rachwal has performed around the world but came back to teach at Baylor University, the University of Arizona, and Florida State University. In February 2024, she had a double lung transplant due to pulmonary sarcoidosis. She encourages others to become an organ donor and to see doctors when they sense something is wrong.

Timothy Rainey, '04 Communication Studies, was named one of the top contemporary hit radio program directors in the country for 2024. Rainey works for iHeartMedia, based in Portland, Oregon, and programs radio stations like Z100 Portland, JAMN 107.5 Portland, and V101.1 Sacramento. While attending UNLV, he was an on-air personality at 98.5 KLUC.

Heather Richardson, '04 BA Interdisciplinary Studies and '11 MSW, retired from UNLV as the program coordinator of the UNLV Fostering Scholars Program. Richardson spent 19 years dedicated to public service at UNLV and Clark County working with young people who have experienced foster care. She and her husband have five children — including Aspen Cable, '23 BA Criminal Justice, and **Alayna Richardson**, a junior at UNLV in the College of Education — and a new grandchild.

LaTosha (McGill) Strickland, '04 BA Communication Studies, is a mindset transformational life coach, motivational speaker, and mentor. She helps individuals identify and change limiting beliefs and thought patterns to cultivate a more positive and productive mindset and achieve their goals by working through personal challenges and developing new strategies to overcome obstacles in their life. Strickland coaches individuals and groups and also does speaking engagements.

Stacey D. Hardy-Chandler, '06 Law, is the CEO of a nonprofit serving the social work regulatory community across the U.S. and Canada. Her 35-year career has included working in direct clinical practice; as academic faculty member and administrator (UNLV and George Mason University); and in human service senior management in Fairfax County and the City of Alexandria. She'll enter the fourth phase of her career as a leader in bi-national social work regulation. She was twice elected president of the National Organization of Forensic Social Work.

Megan Lanz, '06 MM and '10 DMA, published a textbook with Cognella Academic



Rainey, '04



Richardson, '04



Hardy-Chandler, '06



Hatcher, '08



Maxson-Kobayashi, '08



Holmes, '16

Laurie (McRitchie) Eden, '00 BA Communication Studies, co-created the book series, *Tater Tot and Shadow*, with her mother, a retired Clark County School District teacher. The series follows the travel adventures of her two jet-setting rescue chihuahuas as they explore exciting and historic locales across the United States. Her fourth book, *Tater Tot and Shadow Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas*, is a top seller on Amazon's Top Wishlist Travel Books for Nevada. She and her husband live in Austin, Texas.



Publishing titled *Music and the Human Experience: A Guide for Informed Listening*. This textbook is part of a larger paradigm shift in music appreciation instruction, leaving behind a Western-centric historical approach to a more inclusive application of how all music is used in our everyday lives.

Yvonne Randall, '06 Ed.D. Special Education, returned to Touro University in August 2024 as the director of academic partnerships. She works with undergraduate institutions to recruit students into Touro's graduate programs for physical therapy, physician assistant studies, and osteopathic medicine doctoral program.

Jennifer Hatcher, '08 BS English and '16 J.D., was made partner at Shook, Hardy & Bacon LLP.

Hillary Maxson-Kobayashi, '08 BA History, has started an editing business. She received her Ph.D. in Japanese history from the University of Oregon in 2018. She taught East Asian history at Pacific University for two years. In 2020, Maxson-Kobayashi moved to Japan, where she worked as a freelance writer and editor. She lives in Japan with her husband, daughter, and cat. The family loves to travel around Japan and internationally. She volunteers for a organization that grants scholarships to women and people with visual impairments. She enjoys reading books and cooking new recipes in her free time.

Paul Bruno, '09 MA History, released a new book, *The Original Jeeps*, Vol. 2. It's the true story of how three companies competed from

1940 to 1942 to develop America's first all-terrain, quarter-ton 4x4 vehicle, the Jeep, helping the allies emerge victorious in World War II. Bruno is an expert on the earliest history of the origins, design, implementation and worldwide delivery of the iconic Jeep vehicle.

2010s

Angela Brown, '10 BS Workforce Education, is a gaming lab assistant for the hospitality management department at College of Southern Nevada. She published a book of poetry, titled *Poetry*.

Brian Jones, '11 BS Recreation and '14 MS Hotel Administration, is the associate director for the PGA Golf Management program at UNLV. He earned his PGA Master Professional Designation, the highest education designation a PGA of America Golf Professional can obtain.

Jessica Landram, '12 BS Business Management, is a licensed clinical social worker.

Joseph Kielminski, '13 BA History and '19 M.Ed., is a special education teacher at Foothill High School in Henderson and received the 2023-24 Milken Educator Award. The award was presented by Milken Educator Awards Senior Vice President Jane Foley, Gov. Joe Lombardo, and CCSD Superintendent of Public Instruction Jhone Ebert and comes with a \$25,000 cash prize.

Mary Vail, '13 MBA, was selected by Safarini

Obituaries



Benyshek Blythin Hodge Mann Paculan Satterwhite

Daniel C. Benyshek, emeritus professor of anthropology, died Feb. 11, after a long battle with brain cancer. His research on maternal and infant health and nutrition advanced understanding of the developmental origins of health and disease. He explored the biocultural factors influencing diabetes and the role that developmental environments play in metabolic health and often worked in partnership with Native American communities. He was an accomplished technical climber, ice climber, and mountaineer and also enjoyed skiing, cycling, and fly fishing. He is survived by his wife, **Alyssa Crittenden**, vice provost for graduate education and dean of the UNLV Graduate College, and daughter.

Evan Blythin, professor emeritus of communication studies, died Jan. 3, at age 82. He was an author, musician, artist, 50-year resident of Blue Diamond village, and an unabashed mischief-maker.

Vernon (Vern) Hodge, a chemistry professor, died Jan. 24. He joined

the UNLV Environmental Research Center in 1982 and later the chemistry department in 1988. He was instrumental in forming the first graduate program in environmental analytical chemistry and helped develop UNLV's radiochemistry program.

Stuart Mann, dean emeritus of the William F. Harrah College of Hospitality, died March 12. Under his leadership from 1998 to 2010, the college's Singapore campus and the PGA Golf Management concentration were established. He launched the Master of Hospitality Administration degree, one of the first online master's programs at UNLV. Prior to UNLV, he served as director of Penn State's School of Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Management.

Anthony Paculan, '24 Journalism and Media Studies, died Dec. 15, 2024, at age 28. At UNLV, Paculan was vice president for the Public Relations Society of America, a contributor to the Urban Adventure program, a volunteer for Rebel

Media Group, and staff writer for the *Scarlet and Gray*. He was the assistant director of communications for the UNLV College of Engineering and district runner-up of the National Student Advertising Competition.

Rian Satterwhite, director of Service Learning Leadership, died Feb. 12 at age 43. Since 2017, Satterwhite helped to advance leadership development and community service, civic learning, and democratic engagement initiatives; created programs to help students with basic needs; and played a central role in sustaining the institution's Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement. He was involved in industry organizations; published 14 publications in the past year; co-edited the 2018 book, *Innovation in Environmental Leadership: Critical Perspectives*; and authored *Sustainability Leadership*. Prior to UNLV, he held positions at the University of Oregon, Kennesaw State University, the University of Wollongong, and the University of Arizona.



From the Editor: To this day, one of my favorite memories from 24 years at UNLV was a breezy winter day doing this cover shoot in 2006 featuring geologist Peg Rees. As we drove past Searchlight to where UNLV now manages the historic Walking Box Ranch, Rees explained some of the issues that ranchers, scientists, and land managers must grapple with — the tensions that arise in making use of our natural resources without overuse. She patiently answered my naive questions. Over the years, I'd run into her in meetings. For someone who clearly loved the outdoors, she struck me as uncommonly adept at navigating the internal workings of administration. And with a wry sense of humor, she would let you really know how she felt about things. As she neared retirement, I asked what she would miss. "The students," she said, "and the research and all the work getting things done. All of it, just not the bullshit."

— Cate Weeks

Margaret (Peg) Rees, professor emerita of geology, died Feb. 5. In her 32 years at UNLV, Rees served as department chair, vice provost for Educational Outreach; senior vice provost; associate vice president for research and community outreach; vice provost for faculty excellence; and associate provost for academic budget, facilities, and personnel. As executive director of UNLV's Public Lands Institute, she worked with federal, state, and non-profit leaders to develop land management solutions. She was a specialist in carbonate sedimentology and produced seminal studies on the early Paleozoic strata of western North America and Antarctica. She was awarded the U.S. Congressional Polar Medal for Scientific Service in Antarctica in 1985, and a mountain in Victoria Land, Antarctica, was named after her: Mount Rees. She donated her collection of 4,000 pounds of rocks to the U.S. Polar Rock Repository at Ohio State University. Rees was a fellow of the Geological Society of America, received the Distinguished Alumni Award from Sonoma State University, and received the Erasmus Haworth Distinguished Alumni Award from the University of Kansas.

PHOTO: UNLV SPECIAL COLLECTIONS & ARCHIVES (RIVERA, MAXSON, CARTER); AARON MAYES (WYNN)



Elaine Wynn and developer Irwin Molasky discuss their reasons for supporting the university during the 2011 UNLV Foundation annual dinner.

Elaine Wynn, a legend in the world of hospitality and longtime UNLV supporter, died on April 14 at the age of 82. She was a founding member of the UNLV Foundation Board of Trustees, twice served as board chair, and was involved in establishing the Kirk Kerkorian School of Medicine. She helped raise millions of dollars and made significant personal contributions to UNLV scholarships, fine arts, and education programs. She also advocated for state elected leaders to better support the institution. She funded the creation of the Lee Pascal Rose Garden near Alta Ham Fine Arts Building in honor of her mother. It is planted with "Show Biz" roses in a nod to her gaming and hospitality roots. The Elaine P. Wynn & Family Foundation called its leader "a force of nature — a curator of dreams in a city built on aspirations." As co-founder of Wynn Resorts, she was instrumental in shaping modern Las Vegas. Her business ventures included The Mirage, Bellagio, Wynn, and Encore properties, all of which she infused with her impeccable taste and vision. Earlier this year, the Lee Business School named her among the inductees for its latest Nevada Business Hall of Fame class. Wynn was a former trustee of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Smith Center benefactor, and key partner in developing the future Las Vegas Art Museum. Through her family foundation, she supported educational reform and improving children's lives. She also served in leadership roles for Communities in Schools, the Nevada State Board of Education, and Nevada's Blue Ribbon Education Reform Task Force.

Lyle Rivera, former general counsel and founding vice president of the UNLV Foundation, died Jan. 25. He was 82. Prior to UNLV, Rivera served in the Clark County district attorney's office and as Nevada's chief deputy attorney general after earning his law degree at the University of Utah. He married Mary Ann "Timbuck" Rivera in 1967. He joined UNLV in 1979 as chief development officer and assistant general counsel for the statewide university system. In 1981, he was elected to oversee fundraising through the university's new Foundation, which he led as UNLV's vice president for development and university relations until 1995. He went on to fundraise for and help establish the William S. Boyd School of Law. He was also instru-



Lyle Rivera, center, is with UNLV President Robert Maxson and former President Jimmy Carter in 1988. Carter was a speaker for the Barrick Lecture Series.

mental in bringing Jerry Tarkanian to UNLV's basketball program and the Nationals Finals Rodeo to Las Vegas.

Class Notes



Dyer, '17 Orwoll, '17

Leadership to provide virtual strategic consulting services focused on public relations and marketing initiatives.

Adriana Osorto, '14 BS Hotel Administration and '21 MS Hospitality Administration, is a director of talent practices and performance enablement at Aristocrat.

Sven Peery, '14 DMD, is a private practice owner.

Brooke Holmes, '16 JD, and **Emily Dyer**, '17 JD, were elevated to shareholders at the law and lobbying firm Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck.

Robin Burke, '17 BA Social Sciences, is a development coordinator for UNLV's College of Liberal Arts.

Andrea Orwoll, '17 JD, launched the business Your Legal Doula, which helps families understand, assert, and protect their birth rights. As a Nevada-licensed attorney, Orwoll wants to expand what the law can do for moms.

Keith Dussell, '19 Grad Certificate Career and Technical Education, is the associate director of administrative services at the University of Oregon's Lundquist College of Business. Dussell is preparing to enroll in an Ed.D. program in 2025.

2020s

Myrra Smith, '20 MBA and J.D., joined the Las Vegas office of Ogletree Deakins as counsel. Her practice focuses on labor and employment law. She counsels employers on claims involving Title VII, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Family & Medical Leave Act, the Uniformed Services Employment & Reemployment Rights Act, and the Fair Labor Standards Act. Her experience extends to negotiating and litigating class and collective action matters.

Kimberlyn Davis, '24 Hospitality Management, started a position with the LA28 Olympic organizing committee for summer 2028.



THE SCARLET LETTERS WERE ONCE PINK

There is simply no other UNLV. Indeed, no other university that can lay claim to our initialism. In the past decade, the big UNLV letters have become an Instagrammable staple at events. But they weren't part of a grand branding plan, at least not by UNLV itself.

Back in 2014 — when “Normcore” entered the English language and super-skinny jeans were everywhere — the PINK brand offshoot of Victoria Secret was targeting the college-age demographic. The company brought their PINK Nation “Crazy for Campus Bash” to the intramural fields with Iggy Azalea as the headliner. The point, of course, was to build enthusiasm for its college-branded clothing line. They had UNLV letters fabricated in heavy plywood and painted hot pink for the photo opps.

After the concert, the letters were left behind, and staff had a scrappy idea. Instead of hauling them to the trash, they took them to the paint

shop. Several coats of red and a dozen years later, they're still carted out for Homecoming, Premier UNLV, and graduation.

“Those letters have seen some stuff,” said Savannah Baltera, who is now director of Orientation, Transition, and Family Programs. “Before one Premier event in 2018 or 2019, one of the letters shattered in a bunch of pieces, and the theatre department’s scene shop rebuilt it.

“Another time, the V was stolen from the intramural fields — we thought it was gone forever — but the next day it showed up in front of the alumni center.”

This spring, student government helped fund a proposal from the university’s central marketing team to produce an additional set. It will be lighter and easier to move around. The university is also working on plans for a permanent installation near Valerie Pida Plaza.

— Cate Weeks



The UNLV letters (inset, top) at their first campus appearance in 2014, along with Victoria’s Secret models Rachel Hilbert and Elsa Hosk.

PHOTOS: JOSH HAWKINS; DENISE TRUSCELLO/GETTY IMAGES (TOP INSET)

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