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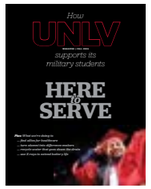


PHOTO BY
JOSH HAWKINS



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MAGAZINE | FALL 2026
Vol. 34, No. 2

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POSTMASTER
Please send address changes to
UNLV Magazine
4505 Maryland Parkway Box 1024
Las Vegas NV 89154-1024
UNLV Magazine is published by the University of Nevada, Las Vegas
702-895-3036 | www.unlv.edu
UNLV is an AA/EEO institution.

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 (noo-woo), Southern Paiute (pai-oot) People.
Full statement:
unlv.edu/land-acknowledgement



President Chris Heavey and his wife, Nancy, share their Rebel Pride during this year's Homecoming golf cart parade.

PHOTO: BECCA SCHWARTZ

Growing, With Shared Purpose

I am deeply honored and humbled that in October the NSHE Board of Regents named me UNLV's 12th permanent president. I join a distinguished list of leaders entrusted with shepherding UNLV into the future.

Having served at UNLV since 1992, I believe our momentum is as strong as it's ever been, and we're still growing. UNLV recently reached record graduation rates and achieved national recognition as both a top-tier research institution and one dedicated to using its resources to serve our community. Our research spending — which brings dollars into the state through federal and private grants — has also hit an all-time high.

These achievements, and many others, are indicative of a university on the rise, and they reflect the deep commitment of our talented faculty, staff, students, alumni, donors, and other supporters who believe in the power of what our university can become.

What UNLV means to our community cannot be overstated. I've often said, and believe more strongly than ever, that UNLV is more vital to Southern Nevada than any other institution is to the region it serves. More than half of our students are the first in their families to earn a degree, and our academic and service programs provide vital resources every day.

As you can see on these pages, we're educating a workforce equipped to support and lead the economy of the Entertainment and Sports Capital of the World (see Page 12). We have partnered with our military community to improve healthcare for all Nevadans (Page 11) and ensure veterans receive the support they need to transition to civilian life (Page 24). And our Office of Economic Development is helping fast track the commercialization of research, including recent breakthroughs in lithium batteries and water resources management (Page 18).

From major research grants and emerging technologies to new programs and initiatives that enrich the student experience, our people continue to advance UNLV's mission in meaningful ways. Working together, we are building UNLV's brand, expanding our reach, strengthening our national reputation, and creating new opportunities for our students and the communities we serve.

I've dedicated my career to this institution and, like many of you, have seen it grow alongside Southern Nevada. I believe deeply in the power and impact of public higher education, the vital mission of UNLV, and the people who make this university extraordinary. But there is much work to be done and much greater heights to be reached in the coming years.

As president, I believe in what we can continue to accomplish working together with a shared purpose. I remain steadfast in my commitment to serving the university that means so much to me and to working with our talented faculty and staff — and with all of our alumni and supporters — to ensure that UNLV continues to grow and thrive for years to come.

Thank you for your partnership and support, and Go Rebels!

Chris Heavey,
UNLV President

I've often said, and believe more strongly than ever, that UNLV is more vital to Southern Nevada than any other institution is to the region it serves.

REBEL ʻOHANA

Las Vegas has long been nicknamed the “Ninth Island” for its large community of transplants and robust tourism from Hawaii. So it’s no surprise that UNLV draws a large number of students from our 50th state. Nearly 570 current students list the state as their home address. When they graduate, they’ll join the ranks of some 1,500 Rebels living in the state. The UNLV Alumni Association is currently forming an official Rebel Regional Network club.

▸ unlv.edu/alumni

A dancer performs in front of the Rebels CU, a division of Aloha Pacific Federal Credit Union, which opened on campus in 2025.

[PHOTO BY JOSH HAWKINS]

3 Reasons to Be Proud

"Rebel CAP was a standout in UNLV's application. It reflects a clear understanding of Southern Nevada and gives the university a practical way to respond to the sustainability issues that matter most in the region."

Amy Halvorson
Director of the Carnegie Elective Classification for Sustainability

1 UNIVERSITY EARNS NATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY DESIGNATION: Extreme heat and water scarcity are part of life in Southern Nevada. At UNLV, they also shape how the university approaches sustainability, from research and classroom projects to campus operations and community partnerships.

That work helped UNLV become one of 14 institutions to earn the new Carnegie Elective Classification for Sustainability.

"Earning this classification is a big moment for UNLV because it recognizes how sustainability connects our campus with the Southern Nevada community," said Tara Pike, sustainability manager. "For those of us who work in this area every day, it's especially rewarding to see that effort recognized on a national level."

Here's what Carnegie cited as strengths in UNLV's application:

- **Southern Nevada focus:** UNLV's sustainability work reflects the region it serves, including local environmental challenges and their impact on underserved communities.
- **Regional research:** That local focus also carries into research on climate and resilience, supported by partnerships with government, industry, and community partners.
- **Sustainability in the classroom:** UNLV faculty have incorporated sustainability in the curriculum through many real-world projects, including energy audits and community gardens.
- **Career pathways:** Internships, mentorship, applied research, and partnerships connect students with fields such as water, energy, healthcare, and hospitality.
- **Rebel Climate Action Plan (CAP):** Carnegie commended the university's roadmap for a more sustainable and climate-resilient campus.

The classification is hosted by the University of Colorado Boulder in partnership with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the American Council on Education (ACE).

2 FROM WAITLIST TO WELCOME: **For dozens of local families, the expansion of the Marlow Early Childhood Education Campus is bringing an end to their wait for access to a high-quality preschool. Home to the Lynn Bennett Early Childhood Education Center and UNLV/CSUN Preschool, the facility now serves more than 300 children from ages 6 weeks to 5 years — an increase in capacity of more than 35%. The expansion also supports research and public policy work of faculty and College of Education majors. Observation rooms let them see learning as it naturally unfolds without disrupting the classroom environment.**



3 FIRST NAMED DEPARTMENT AT UNLV HONORS THE MOLASKY FAMILY: In the 1960s, developer Irwin Molasky donated 45 acres at Maryland Parkway and Flamingo Road to extend UNLV's campus and later served as founding chairman of the UNLV Foundation. Today his family is extending his legacy by establishing an endowment for the Department of Economics and Real Estate to support scholarships, curriculum development, and research. The department is being renamed for the Molasky family.

The family has provided internships and hired UNLV graduates through Ovation Development, a company that was started by Irwin's son, Alan, and is run by his grandchildren, Jess and Josie. Christy Molasky, '88 BSBA Finance, Jess and Josie's mother, also contributed to the family's most recent gift.

"We want the Molasky Family Department of Economics and Real Estate to be the incubator for the next generation of placemakers in Las Vegas," Jess said. "Our grandfather, our father, and now us — each generation has treated this city as ours to build. We hope every student who graduates from this school walks out feeling the same: that Las Vegas is theirs to shape."

The renamed department brings together areas closely tied to Southern Nevada's economy, including economic development, public policy, real estate, housing, and finance.

"Southern Nevada is a remarkable place to study economics and real estate because many of the issues we discuss in the classroom and examine through our research are unfolding around us every day," said Ian McDonough, department chair. "This gift will create new opportunities for our students and faculty, support research tied to the region's most pressing issues, and strengthen our connections with industry and community leaders."

WE ARE UNLV **AVA CARIÑO** MASTER'S STUDENT IN HISTORY

HOW MY STUDIES ARE MAKING ME A HERO

Ava Cariño's superpower is storytelling. Her choice to double major in Asian American studies and history as an undergraduate was influenced by tales her family told around the dinner table. Now she's working on a doctorate exploring history through culinary culture. *[As told to Lola Lopez]*



PHOTOS: BECCA SCHWARTZ (CARIÑO, SUSTAINABILITY); JOSH HAWKINS (CHILDHOOD CAMPUS)

Growing up, I wanted to be a journalist, à la Clark Kent. I am obsessed with Batman and Superman, but I was not gifted with billionaire money. So I thought, you know what? I want to tell stories — Clark Kent it is!

My grandfather immigrated from the Philippines to America with his family, and he's always been a historian through and through. He was born the same day as the Pearl Harbor attack. Every year on his birthday, he would tell me stories about Pearl Harbor, World War II, and everything that happened post-World War II in the Philippines.

There's not a day that passes where I don't miss my grandfather's cooking. There would be glimpses of my family history through his soups, his stews, through his fish dishes.

He later worked at the Pink Pony at Circus Circus as a pantry chef. As a little girl, I would get to see behind-the-house in the kitchen.

That's why, after college, I want to create a living museum here in Las Vegas.

I would love to create a public history museum, based on oral history, where folks can have a digital and physical archive of dishes from various [Asian and Pacific Islander] communities and cultures. They would be able to sit down with the local grandparents or the local aunts and uncles and have an intimate one-on-one conversation with them.

I do what I do because at the end of the day, I understand that history will always be personable through food. ... Let's break bread and talk about your family. Let's talk about the cultural similarities

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ENROLL NOW

Military (Medical) Build Up

UNLV, UMC, and the military are on a mission to strengthen healthcare in Southern Nevada.

BY CAROLYN KRESSER



PHOTO: UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER

Dr. Jeremy Kilburn, right, a retired Air Force pulmonary critical care physician and UNLV faculty member, helped develop the Las Vegas Military-Civilian Partnership (MCP), which brings military medical personnel into civilian healthcare settings.

Every day, hundreds of patients are seen at University Medical Center of Southern Nevada (UMC), tended to by the hospital's thousands of doctors, nurses, and other clinical staff. And while most patients probably wouldn't notice the difference, on any given day, some of those medical professionals are likely to be active-duty military members.

That's thanks to the Las Vegas Military-Civilian Partnership (MCP), which brings military medical personnel into civilian healthcare settings. For the Kirk Kerkorian School of Medicine at UNLV, the program offers medical students a valuable opportunity to learn and work alongside people with different clinical experiences and perspectives, particularly when it comes to critical care and disaster response.

"UNLV provides the academic structure that makes much of this partnership possible — the residency programs, faculty, medical education, and research infrastructure," says Dr. Jeremy Kilburn, a retired Air Force pulmonary critical care physician who helped develop the program. He remains on faculty at the medical school and is employed at UMC. "UMC provides the clinical environment and patient volume, and the military brings personnel, funding, and operational experience. We need all three to make this work."

A PARTNERSHIP BUILT AROUND TRAINING

The relationship between UNLV, UMC, and the military is particularly significant when it comes to graduate education. The military sponsors and funds 41 resident positions in UNLV programs. Military physicians also serve as UNLV faculty, providing clinical supervision, bedside teaching, and mentorship to medical students and residents.

"There is value in simply working together every day," Kilburn says. "Civilian trainees get a better understanding of military medicine, and military personnel learn from the breadth and complexity of the patients we care for at UMC. Both become better clinicians through that exposure."

That's one reason Dr. Taylor Schanda chose Las Vegas for her military surgical residency.

"In medical school I did a rotation at a military hospital, and we took care of young airmen and their families and occasionally a VA patient. But these are young people without a lot of health issues," Schanda says. "It wasn't the best training. I figured if I'm doing this residency to learn to become a surgeon, I wanted to work hard and see complicated patients."

Schanda served as a general surgery resident with the 99th Surgical Operations Squadron at Nellis Air Force Base while completing her five-year residency at UMC, where knife wounds and gunshot trauma cases were common. "If you're thinking like a military surgeon, those are the injuries you're going to see while deployed."

After completing her UNLV surgical residency at UMC, she served four years of active-duty service at Nellis Air Force Base and became UNLV faculty, continuing to train residents while keeping up her own skills for deployment. When Schanda separated from the Air Force, she chose to remain in Las Vegas, joining the Kirk Kerkorian School of Medicine at UNLV.

Her path from military physician to faculty member illustrates another benefit of the partnership: a way to strengthen Southern Nevada's healthcare community.

"Healthcare [infrastructure] here hasn't grown at the same rate as the population," Kilburn notes.

The partnership has helped integrate military and civilian emergency medical services, including the Mike O'Callaghan Military Medical Center, which is the only Air Force facility in the country that treats civilian critical care and trauma patients.



A Game Plan for Success

Two new degrees set up graduates for careers in the sports and entertainment industry.

BY REN MCMULLIN

UNLV has launched two new degree programs to meet the Entertainment and Sports Capital of the World's workforce demands.

BIG LEAGUE JOBS

As Las Vegas grows as a global sports destination — home to NFL, NHL, WNBA, UFC, and soon the MLB — so does the demand for a well-trained workforce. The Bachelor of Science in Sport Hospitality Management was developed along with industry executives for students who want access to careers related to the city's dozens of professional sports organizations, tournaments, and championship events. The degree pulls back the curtain on the sport industry and teaches students the essentials of business operations and the guest experience.

"A lot of people love sport, have played sport, and are fans of sport, but may not think of it as a business, an entertainment product, an experience, or community engagement tool," said Michelle Coyner, who teaches in the program.

While working for a major professional franchise may immediately come to mind, she said, students can also build careers in minor league sports, intercollegiate athletics, venue management, and events production.

"Las Vegas has done [sports entertainment] bigger, better, and stronger than a lot of other places," Coyner said. "Formula 1 is a really good example — some of the best hospitality you can ever imagine embedded into a sporting event. We're excited to get our students involved with our local market."

That local market is an extension of the classroom. Field trips and guest lectures are a regular feature of classes, and the program includes a required internship, so students develop professional experience and industry connections before graduation.

THE BUSINESS OF CREATIVITY

The Bachelor of Art in Creative Practice was designed for the professionals behind the spectacles. From music festivals to sporting events and entertainment companies to nonprofit arts organizations, the Las Vegas economy relies on professionals who can combine artistic vision with organizational leadership.

This is the first fully online undergraduate degree within the College of Fine Arts and one of the first in the nation to combine arts management, leadership, and entrepreneurship in one degree.

Some of the topics, like marketing and entrepreneurship, are taught through the Lee Business School while classes in the College of Fine Arts cover everything from fundraising and grant writing to human resources and the role of AI in the field.

This program culminates in a capstone course and a six-credit internship that serves as a bridge to the local industry, allowing students to leverage UNLV's "only in Vegas" advantages.

Past internships included City of Las Vegas Cultural Department and Junior Achievement; grassroots nonprofit theaters and architecture firms; and major local powerhouses like world-class Strip productions and the Nevada Ballet Theatre. But the internships aren't limited to Las Vegas: One student worked as a landscape architect for the Oklahoma City Comets Minor League Baseball team.

Recent graduate Jasmine Mariz said her degree led directly to a job as an interior designer at the Cuningham Group, an architecture firm. "Having a diverse network, education, and range of work experiences helped me stand out to employers, who often recognized the breadth of my background," she said.

Mariz took advanced architecture courses where she focused on healthcare and residential and commercial design. "It was especially rewarding to expand my experience into a different industry and develop a new appreciation for hotel and resort environments," she said. "There are so many ways to have a career. It's as varied and exciting and plentiful as you are able to be creative about it."

With so many opportunities in Las Vegas, students have the flexibility to build a career as creative as they are.

"Las Vegas has done [sports entertainment] bigger, better, and stronger than a lot of other places. Formula 1 is a really good example – some of the best hospitality you can ever imagine embedded into a sporting event."

Michelle Coyner
UNLV assistant professor

Through the Harrah College of Hospitality's Insider Tour series, students observe operations at Allegiant Stadium, home to the Las Vegas Raiders and host to sold-out concerts and other major events.

PHOTOS: BECCA SCHWARTZ (SPORT HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT); JOSH HAWKINS (COMMENCEMENT)



UNLV's Destination Degree program is helping remove hurdles that led to students putting a pause on their academic goals.

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO GET THAT DEGREE

Know a Rebel who didn't quite finish? Maybe a financial setback or family obligations led to a "just a semester off" — and that semester somehow turned into several.

"Earning a college degree is rarely a straight path — but there is a path forward to a UNLV degree," said Barb Roberts, associate vice president for enrollment management.

UNLV launched Destination Degree, an initiative to help students re-enroll and complete their bachelor's degree. Under its umbrella are several programs specifically for returning students, including those who paused their education with 30 or fewer credits remaining to graduate; who have a long past-due balance keeping them from re-enrolling; or who aren't sure how to overcome past academic challenges.

Those with past-due UNLV balances may qualify for assistance under a partnership with the nonprofit Earn to Learn. Eligible students can "learn down" their debt by re-enrolling and contributing up to $500 toward their balance while receiving an 8-to-1 match of up to $4,000 per year.

Kate Hoffman, founder and chief executive officer of Earn to Learn, noted that UNLV is the first of the nonprofit's institutional partners to address institutional debt as part of the pathway back to college. "By helping students address past-due balances, repair their credit, and access financial education, financial support, and success coaching as they return to the classroom, we can create a pathway not only to degree completion, but to greater financial stability, career opportunity, and economic mobility."

LEARN MORE

Visit the UNLV Destination Degree Admissions page:

➤ unlv.edu/admissions/destination-degree



In his final three seasons as UNLV's place-kicker from 1992-94, "Nick the Kick" Garritano made nearly 80% of his field-goal attempts, including two from 54 yards — at the time the longest kicks in school history. In all, Garritano set more than 10 place-kicking records for the Rebels.

PHOTO: UNLV ATHLETICS

Safe at Home:
HALL OF FAMER NICK GARRITANO RETURNS TO CAMPUS

More than three decades after a record-setting career as a UNLV place kicker, the Las Vegas baseball coaching legend is tapped to lead the Hustlin' Rebels.

"When I start talking about this, I literally get goosebumps and have little hairs standing up on my bald head. Because this university, this community, means the world to me."

BY MATT JACOB

Life is little more than one thick scrapbook composed of "what-if" choices and moments that link one page to the next.

Which is why Nick Garritano can't help but take a stroll down "what-if" lane as he sits in his office at UNLV's baseball complex, mere days after being named the eighth head coach in Hustlin' Rebels history.

What if his parents didn't move to Las Vegas when he was 5 years old?

What if he accepted a scholarship elsewhere, rather than sign with his hometown university?

What if, at age 26, he had succumbed to his inner doubts when Las Vegas baseball coaching icon Roger Fairless urged Garritano to succeed him at Green Valley High School in the late 1990s?

What if he hadn't reluctantly left an extremely successful (and comfortable) gig at Green Valley to test himself in the junior college ranks — where he would cement his legacy as one of the most accomplished baseball coaches in Southern Nevada history?

If any of those snapshots are missing from his scrapbook, Garritano would not be UNLV's new head baseball coach — and thus would not be sitting in that aforementioned cramped office, a few dozen steps from the football practice field where Garritano developed into arguably the greatest place-kicker to wear the scarlet and gray.

"When I start talking about this, I literally get goosebumps and have little hairs standing up on my bald head," Garritano says. "Because this university, this community, means the world to me.

"I'm a 53-year-old grown man who is tearing up right now — that's how much this means."

'NICK THE KICK' DELIVERS

As a two-time all-state selection in both football and baseball at Las Vegas' Chaparral High School, it's no surprise that Garritano received scholarship offers from multiple universities. He accepted the one offered by then-UNLV football coach Jim Strong for two reasons — the first being he's from a family of diehard Rebels fans.

"We watched [UNLV Hall of Famers] Randall Cunningham play football at Sam Boyd Stadium and Armon Gilliam play

basketball at the [Las Vegas] Convention Center and Matt Williams play baseball back when it was Roger Barnson Field," Garritano says. "So I wanted my mom and dad to have an opportunity to watch me play. This was way before every game was on ESPN."

The other reason Garritano decided to stay home: an opportunity to be a multisport athlete, as both Strong and Fred Dallimore — the most decorated and longest-tenured baseball coach in UNLV history — agreed to let Garritano wear both uniforms.

"That was the whole goal: to play both sports."

Unfortunately, Garritano's mule-like right leg didn't get that memo.

As the Rebels' primary place-kicker during his freshman season in 1991, Garritano made 18 of 20 extra-point tries but whiffed on half of his 16 field-goal attempts. That led to a postseason heart-to-heart with his father.

"We made a decision that I needed to get better as a kicker, otherwise I might end up being the backup and lose my scholarship." So Garritano, whose first athletic passion was baseball, hung up his spikes for good — a decision that pains him to this day: "My biggest regret in sports is not playing baseball here at UNLV."

There was a silver lining, though: Garritano swiftly regained his kicking form, making nearly 80% of his field-goal attempts (49 of 57) in his final three seasons as a Rebel.

By the time his career ended in 1994, Garritano was the second-leading scorer in UNLV history and held more than 10 program records, including longest made field goal (54 yards, accomplished twice). In fact, the 1994 Rebels won the Big West Conference championship and Las Vegas Bowl thanks in large part to the player who came to be known as "Nick the Kick."

In 2010, Garritano's gridiron success was celebrated when he was twice enshrined into the UNLV Athletics Hall of Fame as an individual athlete and a member of the 1994 squad.



After playing for his father at the College of Southern Nevada, Nicky Garritano transferred to UNLV in 2025. He appeared in 30 total games over two seasons.

CLIMBING THE DUGOUT STEPS

A lot of teenagers don't have an answer — or at least a realistic answer — to the age-old question "What do you want to do for a living?" Nick Garritano was one of the exceptions.

"I knew in high school that I wanted to be a physical education teacher and a coach," he says. "When I was young, those were my mentors; I looked up to my coaches."

So when Garritano got to UNLV, he enrolled as a kinesiology major with an emphasis on education. Soon after earning his undergraduate degree in 1995, he returned to his high school alma mater as a P.E. teacher and assistant coach with Chaparral's football, baseball, and wrestling programs.

A few years later, Fairless hired Garritano to serve as his understudy at Green Valley High School. In addition to his baseball chores, Garritano taught P.E., was an offensive line coach with the football team, and later coached the girls' golf squad.

It was during those early days at Green Valley when Garritano faced one of his "what-if" moments: After resigning in February 1999 to take the head baseball job at the Community College of Southern Nevada (now College of Southern Nevada), Fairless was eager to hand the Green Valley reins to his top assistant.

"I told him, 'No shot. I'm 26 years old," Garritano said. "I'm getting married in a couple of months, I'm working on my master's degree, we're buying our first house — no way. I can't do this.'"

Fairless kept pushing, though. So Garritano once again sought the counsel of someone he refers to as "the greatest man I've ever met."

"I asked my dad what he thought, and he said, 'It's going to be tough. But you've been tough your whole life; I've raised you this way.' So I took the job."

And promptly hit it out of the park.

Over 12 seasons at Green Valley, Garritano compiled a 316-118 record, led the Gators to two state championships (2001 and 2003), and produced six high school All-Americans and 10 Major League Baseball draft picks. (For good measure, he also coached the girls' golf team to the 2002 state title.)

In 2011, Garritano was one of a half-dozen candidates to throw their hats in the ring to succeed Tim Chambers as head baseball coach at College of Southern Nevada after Chambers left to take over at UNLV.

CSN initially passed on Garritano, only to double back several months later after the coach who got the job was dismissed amid rules violations. This time, it was Garritano's turn to say, "Thanks, but no thanks."

"I told them, 'You had your opportunity. I told you I was the best man for the job — not the best baseball guy for the job; you hired the best baseball guy. But I was the best man. So I don't want to do it.'"

Word of that rejection quickly got to Chambers, who urged Garritano to reconsider. The rest, as they say, is history: Building on the foundation constructed by mentors Fairless and Chambers, Garritano went 632-217 in 16 seasons leading one of the nation's top junior college baseball programs.

During Garritano's tenure, the Coyotes won numerous conference titles, earned a pair of Western District Championships, and twice made the National Junior College Athletic Association World Series (2017 and 2024). Along the way, Garritano earned nine conference Coach of the Year honors; had 22 players selected in the MLB Draft; and produced eight junior college All-Americans.

He had every intention of adding to those totals at CSN in the coming years. Then his alma mater threw a curveball.

'IT'S NOW OR NEVER, BUDDY'

While at CSN, Garritano shipped 190 of his players to four-year universities, with dozens of those landing at UNLV (including his son, Nicky, who played the past two seasons with the Hustlin' Rebels). Yet despite his immense on- and off-field success at the high school and junior college levels, Garritano never really considered the possibility that he might someday make "the leap" himself.

That is, until Hustlin' Rebels coach Stan Stolte retired this spring following 10 seasons at the helm.

"It's now or never, buddy," Garritano told himself.

So he polished his résumé, landed an interview, and within a couple of days was offered a four-year contract. This time, Garritano didn't need any outside convincing to take the job — even though he recognizes he's now playing a whole different ballgame.

"This is a huge jump for us. This is the big-boy game," Garritano says. "This is the transfer portal and the NIL world, and I'm not used to that.

"We have a lot to learn in a short amount of time to give ourselves the chance to be competitive. But we are going to compete. I wouldn't have come here — as much as this place means to me — if I didn't think we could win. I'd have gone the safe route and retired."

At least one person firmly believes that the skipper who owns a 948-389 career record will quickly learn the nuances of Division I, rebuild the Rebels' 34-player roster, and soon have UNLV in position to earn its first college baseball playoff berth since 2014.

"Nick Garritano is a proven winner, a respected leader, and a true Rebel," UNLV athletics director Erick Harper said. "His record of success speaks for itself. Nick has developed championship programs, prepared young men for success on and off the field, and built lasting relationships throughout Las Vegas. We are excited to welcome him back to campus to write the next chapter of Hustlin' Rebel baseball."

A FULL-CIRCLE HOMECOMING

It's been 35 years since Nick Garritano slipped on a UNLV jersey, first doing so on Sept. 7, 1991, when the Rebels opened the football season at UNR.

A week later, the 1991 squad played its home opener against Oregon State, and with his parents in the Sam Boyd Stadium stands, Garritano literally kicked off the scoring with a pair of first-quarter field goals as the Rebels rolled to a 23-9 victory.

Flash-forward to mid-February 2027, when Garritano will slip on a UNLV jersey for the first time in more than three decades as he leads the Hustlin' Rebels onto the field for Opening Day.

It's a full-circle moment that undoubtedly will be filled with mixed emotions. Yes, plenty of his supporters will be cheering at Earl E. Wilson Stadium that day. However, two important people won't be present: his father, who died in 2020, and his mother, who is dealing with dementia.

"I told my wife, 'The only thing I wish is that I could've shared this moment with them,'" Garritano says. "But I know my dad is looking down and is very proud of me, and I know my mom is proud, too."

As he says this, Garritano once again leans back in his desk chair and chokes back tears. Rest assured, when Opening Day rolls around, more tears will be shed — only this time, he'll be able to wipe them on his scarlet and gray sleeve.

"Outside of my first year coaching at Chaparral back in 1995-96, I've worn royal blue — Green Valley High School's royal blue and CSN's royal blue — for my entire professional career. So to don these colors again? Man, oh man. It's surreal."

PHOTOS: LUCAS PELTIER (GARRITANO); JOSH HAWKINS (STOLTE)



A TIP OF THE CAP TO STAN STOLTE

In today's ever-changing world of college athletics, it's rare for a coach to remain in one spot for more than a decade. Which makes Stan Stolte's 16-year tenure with the UNLV baseball program all the more impressive. Stolte departed this summer as the second-winningest head coach in UNLV baseball history, recording 278 victories in 11 seasons at the helm.

Stolte joined the Hustlin' Rebels in 2010 as the assistant head coach to Buddy Gouldsmith, and then he stuck around as the right-hand man to Tim Chambers for the next five seasons. In 2016, Stolte was officially hired to lead the program.

Stolte coached 22 All-Americans over the course of his collegiate career. Among the players he coached before their selection in the Major League Baseball draft: pitchers Erick Fedde (Chicago White Sox) and Dean Kremer (Baltimore Orioles); infielder Bryson Stott (Philadelphia Phillies); and outfielder Kyle Isbel (Kansas City Royals).

In stepping down, the 64-year-old Stolte noted that the modern rules governing college athletics — including the transfer portal and NIL — played a part in his decision.

"It's just time. The new system of how to build championship-quality programs … makes it tougher to also build lifelong lasting relationships with kids, which is the No. 1 reason I got into this business," he said.

"I put every ounce of energy I could into the kids daily, holding them accountable, knowing right from wrong, developing them on the field, and trying to win as many baseball games as we could along the way. I have zero regrets and will always support the Rebels in all sports."



Michael Pravica, a physics professor and founder of the startup X-Regen, is exploring the use of X-rays for lithium ion battery regeneration.

The Fountain of Youth for Lithium Batteries

A physics lab is harnessing the power of X-rays to extend the lifespan of batteries in electric cars and cellphones.

BY JOHNNY DOMOL

Open the battery health settings on your phone, and chances are pretty high that you'll be disappointed. And the amount of time squeezed from a full charge only decreases from there.

That depreciation might seem unstoppable. But new UNLV-led research may prove the contrary, adding years to the lifespan of our beloved battery-powered electronic devices.

"A Tesla can drive for on average 340 miles on a full charge, but after a decade, maybe it only goes 200," physics professor Michael Pravica said. "My lab is trying to regenerate the battery's capacity so that it's basically very close to new and usable for much longer."

The regeneration is applicable to any other device dependent on lithium-ion batteries, including electric cars and trains.

"Replacing battery packs on electric vehicles can cost tens of thousands of dollars," Pravica said. "Instead of getting 10 years of use from these cars, drivers may now be able to get 15 or 20 years, and save money in the process."

In modern battery technology, lithium ions move from anode to cathode to power electronics, or the reverse when recharging. Through repeated use, ions become stuck, reducing battery health.

The Pravica lab is looking at a novel way to use a familiar technology — X-rays — as a chisel for the stuck ions.

"We realized that X-rays would be a good way to force out lithium ions that get caught in microscopic fractures as these batteries degrade," he said. "And we would be able to free them back into conduction instead of being stuck and reducing capacity."

Historically, high pressure and temperature are used to bring molecules together and initiate this sort of chemical change. Pravica observed that X-rays are capable of doing the same, and have become a third mechanism for transforming chemicals.

"With X-rays, we can realize novel states of chemistry using very high energy," he said. "As X-rays ionize, they strip electrons from molecules and atoms. But they're so much higher energy that they can access new regions to achieve what we can't through conventional chemistry."

CHARGING THE ECONOMY

Nevada's lithium industry includes the Tesla Gigafactory, Redwood Materials, Dragonfly Energy, and Lithion. The state is one of the largest national sources of raw, mineable lithium. In harnessing and developing this research, Pravica's goal is to help position Nevada as an unmistakable lithium powerhouse — enabling the manufacture, recycling, and regeneration of batteries entirely within state lines.

"The tech will allow electric vehicles and battery-powered products to hold their value longer. If articulated well to business owners, I think they'll come around to seeing X-ray regeneration as a win-win," he said. "Moreover, regenerating batteries will have enormous environmental impacts because it will delay, if not obviate, the need to dump them into landfills."

Pravica says any technology that could potentially slow the replacement of batteries is of high value to both the environment and economy. Battery dumping can cause intense lead or acid leaks.

He recently founded the startup X-Regen and is working with the UNLV Office of Economic Development (OED) to bring the technology to market. Through OED, he has participated in the Aspire, Gener8tor, and Zerolabs entrepreneurial business startup training programs.

"Patents lend credibility to your ideas. They show that people believe in what you're doing," Pravica said. "It helps that the office has tremendously streamlined itself — you can just tell them about your idea to get it off the ground."

The next step for his lab is to complete the fundamental experiments needed to demonstrate that X-rays have positive effects on battery capacity. These include toying with the brightness or intensity of the X-rays to see what changes.

"There are always going to be hurdles, but to have a feeling that I did something useful for humanity is just priceless," he said. "I'm hoping the tests are all going to work, and that I'm able to make a good contribution to this community soon."

PHOTOS: JOHNNY DOMOL (PRAVICA); JEFF SCHEID (ENGINEERING)

PUTTING DISCOVERY ON A FAST TRACK

UNLV earns National Science Foundation grant to accelerate the pace of innovation.

BY TONY ALLEN

Many innovations we take for granted every day – from flat-screen TVs to life-saving medications – started in university research labs. For its part, UNLV has several promising projects starting to make their way into the marketplace. But the path to getting good ideas from the depths of a campus lab into your living room is complex and costly.

To help close that gap, UNLV now has the National Science Foundation (NSF) in its corner.

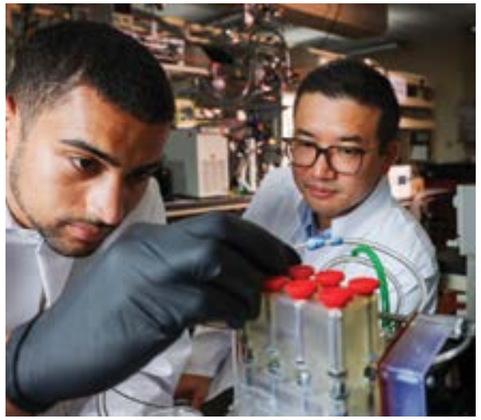
UNLV was among just eight U.S. universities to earn funding through one track of NSF's Accelerating Research Translation programs. Over the next four years, UNLV's Office of Economic Development will receive nearly $6 million to further support entrepreneurs.

The NSF grant was awarded to universities with strong research portfolios that displayed "a high potential and desire to substantially elevate the overall level of research translation to unleash innovation and create significant opportunities for sustained economic and collective impacts," according to the NSF grant website.

In 2025, UNLV research spending reached record levels, and patent activity continues to rise. Recent UNLV research-based startups include:

- Quantum Copper, a company leveraging an innovative fire-retardant polymer to improve safety in batteries and other materials
- Heligenics, a pioneer in the field of personalized medicine
- WAVR Technologies, which is engineering a new process for capturing water from the dry desert air
- X-Regen, which harnesses the power of X-rays to extend the life of lithium-ion batteries

The NSF grant will help establish an industry advisory council to monitor the progress of grant-related projects and to connect researchers with potential partners and investors. It will also supplement UNLV programs supported by the Nevada Governor's Office of Economic Development, including a successful entrepreneurship-in-residence program, which embeds business leaders within the economic development team to help researchers navigate the nuances of commercializing their work.



Undergraduate researcher Benjamin Sabir, left, works with mechanical engineering professor Jeremy Cho. Cho's research has led to WAVR Technologies, Inc., a UNLV startup focused on solutions for water sustainability.

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IN BRIEF

TRANSGENDER IN THE MILITARY RESEARCH: As public debate surrounds transgender military service members, UNLV researchers found there is no evidence to support claims that their service harms unit cohesion, causes undue financial burden on the healthcare system, or that accessing gender-affirming care makes a person any less ready for deployment than other service members.

Social work professor Kati McNamara and Urban Affairs librarian Susie Skarl co-authored "Transgender Service in the U.S. Military: A Scoping Review" in the International Journal of Transgender Health. The review included findings from 58 studies on transgender service related to demographics, gender-affirming healthcare access and use, mental and physical health, workplace climate, perceptions by others, and impacts on readiness, cohesion, and cost.

McNamara, who served 12 years in the U.S. Air Force, was the only psychotherapist for a joint military base in the Horn of Africa. Her past academic research includes studies on diversity and inclusion in the military, and mental health among service members and veterans. Her next step is to study the effects of how military members are coping with the sudden change in their career due to policies affecting transgender personnel.

—Afsha Bawany

NATIONAL HONORS: UNLV was designated as an Innovation and Economic Prosperity institution by the Association of Public & Land Grant Universities. UNLV earned the designation after a rigorous, independent review process. It and recognizes institutions for working with public and private partners to spark innovation and propel regional economic development.

CAREER BOOST:





Computer scientists **Chuck Tessler**, left, and **John Businge** earned prestigious CAREER awards from the National Science Foundation. Tessler's work examines the theory of dynamic memory and its application in real-world safety situations. Businge researches the maintenance challenges of the "clone and own" technique in software development. The awards are among the most selective research-based honors for faculty early in their careers.

REBELS ON GENESIS MISSION:



A project led by engineering professor **WooHyun Jung** has been selected for the U.S. Department of Energy's Genesis Mission, a national initiative designed to double America's scientific productivity by accelerating breakthroughs in energy, discovery science, and national security. Jung's project introduces modern AI techniques to make nuclear power plant analysis faster and less expensive, potentially accelerating the deployment of nuclear energy.

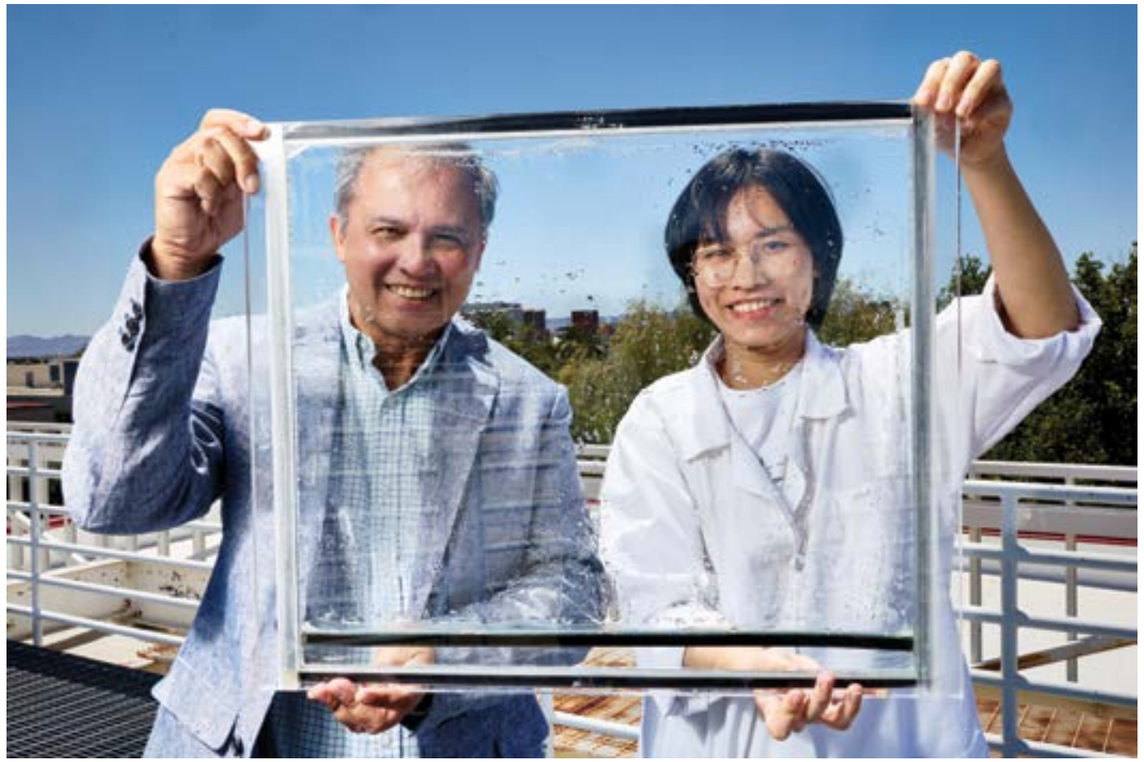


PHOTO: JOSH HAWKINS

Saving Every Last Drop

That water that disappears down the drain? Here's a way for rural Nevadans to reuse it.

BY NATALIE BRUZDA

UNLV researchers are working on a solution to ensure that none of our water ever truly goes to waste.

At the center of their innovation is graywater — the water that comes from showers and kitchen sinks, and contains many soap byproducts like dish and laundry detergents. And their focus is on systems to serve rural communities.

"We're taking something that people don't want — wastewater — and making it into something they want," said civil and environmental engineering professor Eakalak Khan. "It used to be labeled as waste or something that needs to be discarded. People think it's yucky, right? Now, we're trying to change that mindset so that it's viewed as a resource. It's usable, or reusable."

Khan recently received more than $650,000 from the Cyrus Tang Foundation to continue exploring solar-powered wastewater reuse systems for rural households.

FROM GRAYWATER TO CLEAR WATER

The team, which includes research partners from Northwest A&F University in China, developed a lab-scale model that treats the graywater. In the first step of the process, the water flows through five naturally sourced and affordable media — including sand, woodchips, and biochar. The second step involves a solar still, which uses the desert sun's powerful rays to purify the water through evaporation and condensation.

In Khan's Advanced Engineering Building lab, postdoctoral researcher Thi My Hanh Le demonstrated the early success of the lab-scale model by holding up three test tubes. The vials display a subtle gradient of colors: from untreated graywater to slightly lighter filtered water to clear, purified water that looks like it came straight from your kitchen tap.

"The quality that is coming up is

Engineering professor Eakalak Khan and postdoctoral researcher Thi My Hanh Le display part of the water treatment system they are developing for use in rural communities.



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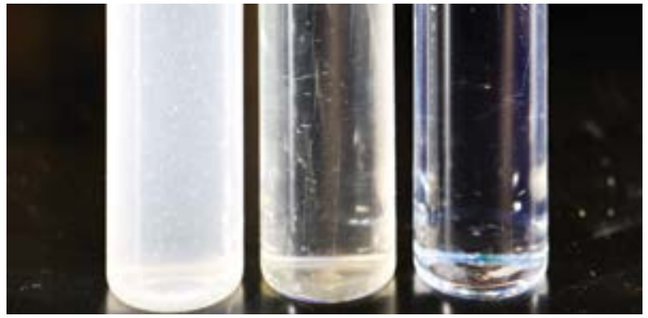


Learn More

UNLV | ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



(Above) Naturally sourced filtration media, including woodchips, biochar, and sand, help clean household graywater in a solar-powered wastewater reuse system. (Below) vials show stages of filtration from untreated graywater to clear, purified water.



PHOTOS: JOSH HAWKINS

superb," Khan said. "It's definitely drinkable, though our current focus remains on non-potable reuse to be safe."

The lab unit is set up to filter four liters of graywater, but the household unit — to be deployed in the coming months with the buy-in of a community partner — will be scaled up to filter 100 liters of water.

The household unit is being developed by David Rouhani, research laboratory manager for the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering and Construction, and will employ a cassette system with drawers. Khan calls it "a plug-and-play system" designed for rural households to easily isolate the different media layers for cleaning or replacement.

THE NEXT PHASE

Now that they're ready to move into onsite testing, there's one question the research team has to answer: Which community is open to a partnership?

Khan and his team have met with several rural communities in Southern Nevada and identified three potential partners. But they know they need to work with the community to overcome public perception concerns over the safety of the treated wastewater before they begin installation. Project collaborators from Northwest A&F University are also scouting for rural communities in an arid region of China that mirrors the climate of the Southwest United States.

"Looking at all the water quality parameters, they are great," Khan said, adding that he hopes the chosen Southern Nevada partner can take a page from a neighboring community's progress.

"San Diego has a full-scale wastewater reuse plant almost completed," he said. "It took many years for the project to be accepted, but San Diego residents eventually realized, 'Hey, we either drink this, or we don't have anything else to drink.' We'd like to achieve a similar level of comfort here in Nevada."

ENGINEERING SAFER MILITARY STRUCTURES WITH NATURAL FIBERS

There's nothing artificial about the intelligence that UNLV and collaborators are gathering to support safe military operations around the globe.

The interdisciplinary team, led by UNLV mechanical engineering professor Brendan O'Toole, received a $4.8 million grant from the U.S. Army Engineer and Research Development Center to generate an advanced AI-driven database of manufacturing materials research.

The goal is to provide the public and military officials with suggestions for natural materials found in different regions of the world that can be used to manufacture biodegradable and ultra-lightweight temporary structures, and protection panels that can withstand blast and impact loads.

Fiberglass fibers have typically been used in composite materials for infrastructure reinforcement. But there are natural fibers from around the world — hemp, for example — that could replace fiberglass in some of these temporary structures.

"Hemp is a byproduct of a plant that can be processed into fairly strong fibers," O'Toole said. "It's been used as ropes for hundreds of years, but it could also be used as reinforcement in polymers for composite structures."

The use of locally sourced materials would simplify the task of quickly building safe shelter while reducing the risks and costs associated with transporting supplies typically used in current construction practices.

"The U.S. Army is already very resourceful," O'Toole said. "But part of the project would be determining what processing method would work best for these materials and be fast and efficient to use in a temporary manufacturing facility."

The team will review and build upon existing worldwide data for well-known materials like hemp, but also potentially identify lesser-known materials that could be useful. The research will include studying ways to enhance the performance of these materials and understand how their characteristics would change under local conditions, such as exposure to heat, humidity, or bacteria.

—Natalie Bruzda



Along with a dedicated graduation celebration, veterans and active-duty personnel receive a special cord to wear when they cross the commencement stage.

PHOTO: JOSH HAWKINS

MILITARY & VETERAN SERVICES CENTER

Building Belonging

With a suite of services, UNLV is helping our 2,300 military-affiliated students access their educational benefits and juggle their responsibilities.

STORIES BY CAROLYN KRESSER

STARTING COLLEGE CAN BE INTIMIDATING for anyone. New routines. New subjects. New friends. But for military veterans, the transition can be even harder. Where's the structure? The rules? The squad?

Many haven't been in a classroom for years, and now they're navigating everything on their own. They may be 20 years older than many of the students sitting next to them. They may have spouses, children, and full-time jobs.

That's why UNLV created the Military & Veteran Services Center (MVSC) in 2012 — to make sure military veterans have the support, resources, and community they need to successfully earn a degree.

Today, the center serves 2,300 military-affiliated students and family members, up from just 800 when it opened. The average age of UNLV's veterans is 28. Sixty percent are married. Half have children. And while many receive funding to attend school full-time, most still need a side job to make ends meet.

Those statistics show the need for academic, social, and administrative support specifically for the military-affiliated student population.

THE MVSC ECOSYSTEM

Staffed by experts in VA education benefits, many of whom are veterans themselves, the center helps students navigate the complex benefits process, while also providing support relating to admissions, certification, and campus resources.

"In the military, people told you what to do, but you had support," says Ross Bryant, director of the MVSC. "In civilian life, you don't have anyone telling you what to do, but now you don't have that support anymore. We are the team that can provide that support."

For many veterans, accessing their VA education benefits is the main hurdle to success.

That's where Melissa Barber, associate director of certifying operations at the MVSC, comes in.

Barber's team handles five different VA benefit chapters, each with its own rules, funding structure, and eligibility requirements. "The most common questions I get are: How do

"I don't know if other universities have a Ross (Bryant), but we do, and he was the game changer for me. I instantly knew I had someone on my side who wanted me to succeed."

Christina McGregor

I get certified? How do we get started?"

Barber notes that any university accepting VA education benefits has a team like theirs. But what sets UNLV apart from other universities is its programming beyond the initial paperwork to help ensure a student's success.

"If there is anything we see that might impact the student's benefit payments, we reach out," says Barber. "For example, maybe they're required to do at least one class in person, and we notice they're signed up for all online classes. We take our role seriously. If we mess up, it might impact their payment, which might impact whether they can pay their bills."

Once a student has been approved for their benefits, the team's focus shifts to assisting them with navigating the sometimes-abrupt transition into college life.

The MVSC operates Peer Advisors for Veteran Education (PAVE), a peer-to-peer support program founded at the University of Michigan and operating on 23 campuses nationwide. UNLV is the only university in Nevada that offers it.

"[The program's organizers] realized that veterans getting out of the military and into higher education were dropping out of school," says Dwayne Gordon, associate director of veteran outreach who oversees PAVE. "Higher education was a little too much for them, and they were dealing with a lot of transitional issues. So, they said, let's find a solution."

PAVE pairs incoming student veterans with peers who have acclimated to campus. "They help pave the way, literally" Gordon says.

Another thing that sets the MVSC apart? The amount of proactive outreach its team conducts.

"Anytime someone notes they're using VA education benefits on their admissions packet, we invite them to student veteran orientation," says Gordon. "We've found that the most successful student veterans are the ones who get connected quickly and know the resources are here. The ones not so successful tend to isolate or not connect with their peer advisor."

UNLV also operates a full-time office at Nellis Air Force Base, extending the MVSC's mission directly onto the base and providing academic advising, admissions support, and degree exploration for active-duty service members and their families.



After their own careers in military service, Ross Bryant, left, and Dwayne Gordon are now leading UNLV's Military and Veteran Services Center.

▸ For a deeper look at the university's relationship with Nellis Air Force Base, see "UNLV @ Nellis" story on Page 31.

REBEL VETS STUDENT ORGANIZATION

Veterans often arrive on campus carrying a distinct set of experiences and needs.

"Veterans have academic rustiness," Bryant says. "They've been in places where a crowd isn't a good thing. They are anxious about walking around campus. Also, it's hard to relate to anyone. If you were in the military for 20-plus years like me, you used to be somebody. But now you're just a regular student."

Gordon sees similar patterns. "We used to see a lot of transitional issues, like, 'I'm in over my head.' But the last few semesters there have been a lot of issues related to anxiety, stress, balancing coursework with family, and student financial issues."

For Christina McGregor — a veteran student herself and the president of Rebel Vets, UNLV's nationally recognized chapter of Student Veterans of America — the number one challenge is combating the isolation many veterans face.

"Veteran students just want to find a community where they belong," she says. "We're coming in at a later stage in life. We've had children. We've deployed. We've lived in other countries. And we're going into classrooms with kids who are our kids' age. So where do you fit in? I realized there was a need for connection and community."

Working alongside the MVSC, Rebel Vets helps fill that void. With more than 180 active members, the student group holds monthly meetings, community events and professional development workshops, and partners with local veteran organizations.

"For Rebel Vets to be successful, we need the teamwork with MVSC and PAVE," says McGregor. "It's an ecosystem. The center provides the benefits and resources. We build that camaraderie, that connection, and make them feel like they're not alone."

Nathan Rosas, Rebel Vets vice president, agrees. "For veterans, community is very important. It's dangerous for veterans to be alone. Getting involved, having a support group of peers, having resources available is crucial to success not just on campus but in life."

WHY THIS WORK MATTERS

The MVSC's staff has countless stories of students whose lives were transformed by the support they received.

PHOTOS: BECCA SCHWARTZ



Christina McGregor, center, is a graduate social work student and Air Force veteran.

A TOP-DOWN CHANGEMAKER

CHRISTINA MCGREGOR JOINED the Air Force in 2002, hoping to make it her career. Two years later, an injury during a deployment led to a medical discharge and an unclear future.

Her husband remained in the Air Force, so she and their three children spent the next decade following his career before settling in Las Vegas in 2014 when he left the military.

"We tried several business ventures, including real estate and flipping homes, but it wasn't fulfilling," McGregor says. "I knew I wanted to go into social work and that I wanted to serve, but I didn't know how."

Then she found UNLV's Master of Social Work program. As part of her graduate studies, McGregor completed her practicum with Peer Advisors for Veteran Education, or PAVE, a student support program that helps ease the transition to college life.

"Destiny put everything in my path," she says. "I learned about PAVE at the student veteran orientation and immediately asked if they had room for me to do my practicum there."

She also joined UNLV's student veteran organization. Now as Rebel Vets president, she is advocating for a dedicated veterans lounge.

"My goal is to make sure veterans know they have a safe space," she says. "If someone goes unseen, or if they don't have that support system — we know what happens. Getting involved in any organization opens doors you didn't know existed."

Once she earns her master's degree in the spring, McGregor hopes to pursue a Ph.D. and eventually set up a nonprofit focused on veterans experiencing homelessness.

"I love the therapy side of social work and getting to help individuals, but I think I can make a bigger impact behind the scenes changing how the policy works," McGregor says. "If you want to disrupt something, you have to do it from the top so it trickles to the bottom."

Bryant recalls one veteran severely injured in Fallujah when his vehicle hit an IED. “Everyone in the vehicle was killed except him,” Bryant says. “Anywhere along his journey he could have said, ‘I have a disability check now for the rest of my life. I’ve done my time.’ But he’s driven to not allow that day to destroy him.”

That veteran went on to earn a graduate degree at UNLV and became a family practice doctor at the VA.

Gordon remembers another student going through a marital separation. “He slept in his car for a month and a half before he came to see us. We got him out of his car and into a dorm room on campus and provided him resources to help with his mental health. Seeing him at the veteran graduation reception a year later, it touched my heart to know we’d been able to help him be successful.”

McGregor, who was a PAVE mentor, recalls watching one of her paired students slowly rebuild his trust and confidence. “I saw this person make so many changes. That’s when I knew I was in the right place. Day by day, week by week, he slowly started to trust the community that was there.”

McGregor also has her own personal testimonial as a military veteran student who utilized MVSC’s services when she first started graduate school.

“When I stepped into that office, my favorite person in the world, Ross, greeted me,” says McGregor. “You never think the actual director is going to take the time to sit with you. I don’t know if other universities have a Ross, but we do, and he was the game changer for me. I instantly knew I had someone on my side who wanted me to succeed.”

TOP RANKED VETERAN FRIENDLY SCHOOL

UNLV has been ranked a Top 10 Military Friendly School in the country three out of the past five years, and was named a Military Spouse Friendly School for the first time in 2024.

“The term ‘veteran friendly’ means something,” graduate student Christina McGregor says. “It means there’s a system in place for you, there’s a pathway for you to feel welcome.”

UNLV’s veteran friendly practices include:

- Improving UNLV cashiering practices to align with VA benefit payment schedules
- Establishing priority enrollment
- Installing a veterans memorial prominently on campus
- Holding annual ceremonies and concerts to honor veterans
- Sponsoring a UNLV contingent in the annual Operation Battle Born walk

A CHANGING POPULATION

When the center first opened in 2012, most of the students it served were recently separated veterans returning from combat deployments. But the population has shifted dramatically in recent years.

“As a retention tool, the military allows you to transfer your education benefits to your kids if you stay in long enough,” Bryant explains. “So now 50 percent of the students we serve are family members.”

Many of those dependents thrive on campus. “They moved around a lot as kids and learned how to transition. They seem to be more adaptable, they make friends faster, and get connected faster.”

Gordon sees the same trend and has changed his hiring approach for the PAVE peer mentoring program to meet the evolving need. “I now hire students who don’t have a military background so they can relate to the children of the veterans.”

One of those students is Julia Edwards, whose story reflects the new generation of military-affiliated learners. Edwards didn’t grow up in the military, but her mother was an Air Force veteran who had been medically retired after a serious car accident. That made her eligible for Chapter 35 education benefits, which she didn’t even know existed until the VA sent her a letter just before she started college.

“I had found the office online and made an appointment to talk to Ross about my situation,” she says. “He explained the whole process. Overall, it was pretty straightforward because I had Ross helping me. If I had done it on my own with no guidance, it would have been much more confusing.”

Edwards used her benefits to complete her undergraduate degree in biology, eventually becoming a student worker in the MVSC.

“When I first walked into the office, I was like a deer in the headlights. I didn’t know if I should even be there because it’s heavily military focused,” says Edwards. “But the team does a great job explaining why military family members are important too.”

LOOKING AHEAD

Despite the support UNLV is already providing to the military-affiliated community, students and staff alike see opportunities for continued growth, including the possibility of a dedicated veterans lounge.

“I would love to see a veterans lounge,” says Rosas. “To have a big space where veterans can hang out, where you’re guaranteed to be surrounded by veterans so it makes it more comfortable — I would love to see that.”

Rebel Vets president McGregor agrees. “In comparing our university to others, everyone is trying different things. UNR has a veterans lounge, but we don’t yet. We have UNLV’s support, so we continually bounce ideas off each other, there is always more we can do.”

Both McGregor and Rosas just hope that prospective students understand there is a vibrant veteran community at UNLV.

“We’re ready to greet you and help you along that journey,” McGregor says. “You’re not alone.”

Rosas echoes the sentiment: “There are a lot of unknowns going to school, especially as an older student. But the MVSC goes out of its way to get rid of those unknowns for you.”

As for Bryant, who has led the MVSC since its inception 14 years ago, it’s all about serving those who have selflessly served their country. “I want more of these veterans to be successful, graduate, and have the life and career they deserve. I want to see one become the next governor.”

“I would love to see [UNLV get] a veterans lounge. To have a big space where veterans can hang out, where you’re guaranteed to be surrounded by veterans so it makes it more comfortable? I would love to see that.”



PHOTO: BECCA SCHWARTZ

Nathan Rosas, center, enrolled as a mechanical engineering student after serving in the Army and Army National Guard.

ENGINEERING THE SUPPORTS

NATHAN ROSAS ENLISTED in the Army right after high school since he wasn’t sure what he wanted to study in college. The Army offered clarity, structure, and the GI Bill that would eventually make higher education possible.

Rosas spent six years as an Apache helicopter mechanic, deploying once to Afghanistan, and then served an additional three years in the Army National Guard in Illinois.

Eventually, he joined his parents in Las Vegas and enrolled in UNLV’s mechanical engineering program, a field where his years of maintaining aircraft systems became an advantage.

“I always loved to tinker,” he says. “I loved taking apart broken things and putting them back together. I knew I wanted to challenge myself. Engineering relies on creativity to solve problems. I love understanding problems and then solving them.”

Rosas quickly found a like-minded community at UNLV’s Military & Veteran Services Center and joined the Rebel Vets student organization.

“The social media position [in Rebel Vets] was open at the time,” he recalls. “I was struggling to get information, and I didn’t want others to have the same struggle I did.”

Now as vice president, he organizes monthly meetings, connects members with local and national resources, and builds partnerships with veteran organizations in Las Vegas.

“It’s dangerous for veterans to be alone,” Rosas says. “Often when you realize you need a support group, it’s very close to too late to find one. Getting involved, having a support group of peers, and having resources available is crucial to success — not just on campus but in life.”

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UNLV @ NELLIS

ENROLLING FAMILIES ON THE DOUBLE



The UNLV @ Nellis AFB space is staffed full time by Academic Affairs Coordinator Chardon Cooks, who is here to welcome and answer military-affiliated students' questions about enrollment. General education courses are offered on base as well.

PHOTO: BECCA SCHWARTZ

For many active-duty service members, the biggest barrier to pursuing higher education isn't motivation, it's logistics.

Long shifts and unpredictable schedules can make it difficult to attend in-person classes or connect with advisors. That's why the UNLV @ Nellis AFB Office was created.

Located inside the Nellis Education Center on base, the office serves as a direct extension of UNLV's Military & Veteran Services Center, offering academic advising, admissions support, and degree exploration services.

"We act as that first line of support," says Chardon Cooks, who has been the Academic Affairs coordinator for the office for the past eight years.

Cooks meets with anyone who has access to the base, including active-duty personnel, veterans, reservists, spouses, and dependents. She helps prospective students complete applications, order transcripts, understand funding, and map out academic plans from admission through graduation. "You tell me the destination and I'll create the map," she says.

Some days she speaks with a dozen airmen all interested in nursing. Other days might bring in veterans returning to school after more than a decade away. She helps support graduate students, parents seeking guidance for their children, and military spouses.

"I'm a military spouse, and I remember the base having a lot of resources for my active-duty husband, but I felt like there weren't a lot of things for me," she says. "I like creating that safe space, letting them know, 'This center is for you, too.' And I always tell the spouses: 'Educate yourself. No matter where you go, you can take that education with you.'"

One of the first questions she asks any potential student is whether they want to continue in the field they've been working in during their military service. "After doing it for six or eight years, maybe you don't want to do that anymore," she says.

Together, they review military credits, prior coursework, and career interests to determine the best academic path.

"Some military jobs translate well and others don't. We just look at what they have and the experience they bring to the table to see how that fits into the academic side," she says.

Cooks' office sits just steps away from the military education office that processes tuition assistance, allowing her to troubleshoot funding issues in real time. "If there is an issue, we'll take them through all the hoops," she explains.

One young airman was discouraged by a low GPA and scattered credits from multiple schools. Together, she and Cooks built a plan: Start at CSN, raise her GPA, then transfer to UNLV. She followed every step.

"Eventually she applied to UNLV and got in and is a business student," Cooks says. "I was reviewing her grades one semester, and I was so proud to realize she'd done it."

Cooks emailed a note of encouragement. Several months later, after returning from a deployment, the student stopped by to report the good news: She is now set to graduate in May with a bachelor's degree in finance.

"It may seem like a long road, but I have never looked more forward to a graduation," Cooks says.

For active-duty students, the sense of belonging begins before they ever step onto UNLV's main campus. It starts at Nellis, in a small office where someone understands their challenges and believes they can succeed.

"One of my favorite things is seeing the lightbulb moment," Cooks says. "They walked into my office thinking they couldn't get into UNLV because of this or that. But you can have that degree. And I love seeing that moment of realization."



"Over the years, it has been important that I do my part to elevate the university. Because when UNLV flourishes, so too does everyone and everything around it."

PHOTO: COURTESY OF DAN TUNTLAND

2026 OUTSTANDING ALUMNUS

THE GRATEFUL REBEL

Dan Tuntland shows his profound appreciation for UNLV through personal and professional deeds that resonate today, tomorrow, and far beyond.

CONSIDERING THAT DAN TUNTLAND, '94 BSBA Marketing, didn't start his college career as a Rebel, the fact that the UNLV Alumni Association chose him for its top honor seems pretty crazy. The lifelong Nevadan initially chose That School Up North.

"It's true, I first attended UNR," says Tuntland, who was born in Reno but raised in Las Vegas. "And I enjoyed my experience there … but Las Vegas was where the action was."

Keep in mind that the semester he transferred was fall 1989. A lot of that action was inside the Thomas & Mack Center. "That 1989-90 year on campus — and really, throughout the entire community — was magic, with everything centered around and everyone focused on the Runnin' Rebels basketball team," Tuntland says. "That team was the glue and talk of the whole community."

While that excitement brought him back to Las Vegas, it's the enriching experiences that followed that made him a Rebel forever. Take, for example, business professor Larry Barton's class. That's where Tuntland learned that, next to honesty, good communication was critical for his development.

"I still remember his instruction pertaining to communication: Be clear, concise, and honest in both the spoken and written word. And remember, not everything has to be said — good or bad," Tuntland says.

After graduating, he embarked on a long career with Tiberti-Blood, a local real estate and development firm. In 2007, Tuntland struck out on his own, founding DJT Real Estate Co., specializing in land acquisition and investment, brokerage, and development.

The company has flourished, and for that Tuntland thanks UNLV. The university instilled in him a sense of community.

"For all of its growth, Las Vegas is still a small town and a place where your reputation is paramount. That reputation is the reason real estate deals big and small get done here," he says "It's the reason charities want your help, whether through time or treasure. It's how you become a part of the Las Vegas community rather than exist as an outsider."

Over the years, Tuntland has shown his appreciation for his alma mater in numerous ways. Consider the high-level highlights, and the Alum of the Year honor seems inevitable now:

- Tuntland is vice-chair of the UNLV Foundation Board of Trustees, a volunteer board that oversees the university's fundraising operations.
- He is the chairman of the UNLV Research Park, a 122-acre master-planned economic development space for research, collaboration, and tech innovation, as well as the future home to the Intermountain Children's Hospital.
- He serves on the UNLV Lied Center for Real Estate's Board of Governors, through which he has helped strengthen connections between the classroom and the local commercial real estate industry.
- And through his longtime financial support of both the UNLV Foundation and UNLV Alumni Association, he backs up his belief in the transformative power of higher education and the work UNLV does to create life-changing opportunities for students and graduates.

Asked to pinpoint what inspired his involvement, Tuntland unsurprisingly rewinds to his days as a student.

"Even back in 1990, I recognized that UNLV was the hub of the entire Las Vegas community," he said. "That left a lasting impression as something I wanted to contribute to long after I left campus.

"So over the years, it has been important that I do my part to elevate the university. Because when UNLV flourishes, so too does everyone and everything around it."

2026 Alumni of the Year

This year's honorees are true difference-makers who embody what it means to be a Rebel. Here they provide a glimpse into why the UNLV Alumni Association deemed them worthy of being celebrated.



JESSICA STOPS

'00 BA Communication Studies

The **Patrick T. Smith Achievement in Service Award** winner is vice president of tribal brand marketing and strategic initiatives for the Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation, where she leads philanthropic and charitable giving efforts.

ON CREATING MOMENTUM

"Giving back does not have to begin with a title, a large donation, or a formal program. It can begin by mentoring someone, volunteering your time, opening a door, sharing what you have learned, or simply showing up when your community needs you. The impact compounds — one relationship, one opportunity, and one act of service at a time."



THADDEUS "TOBY" J. YUREK

'08 J.D.

The **William S. Boyd School of Law Alumnus of the Year** has built a career spanning policing, law, and public service, including time in the Nevada Legislature. He serves as managing partner of GGRM Law Firm, which recently established a scholarship to help first responders go to law school.

ON IMPROVING THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

"At the end of the day, I just want to make the road a little easier for the next person sitting in that patrol car dreaming of law school. What I hope for in the long term is simple: a generation of Nevada lawyers who have run toward the emergency and who are leaving this state better served than before."



THOMAS M. WARE

'86 BA Political Science

The **College of Liberal Arts Alumnus of the Year** is a Los Angeles-based attorney who specializes in common interest development law, representing homeowners associations, volunteer boards, and property managers. He is also a national speaker and legislative advocate on behalf of common interest developments.

ON HANDLING COMPLEXITY

"A liberal arts degree gives you something far beyond a specific set of rules or facts — it teaches you how to think, how to listen, and how to adapt. Through my undergraduate classes, that mix of rigorous classwork and student leadership taught me very early on that real-world issues are rarely straightforward."



LAURA "ALI" CALIENDO

'19 Ph.D. Public Affairs

The **Greenspun College of Urban Affairs Alumna of the Year** founded Foster Kinship in 2010 to provide relative caregivers with support services that traditional foster parents already received. She is an assistant professor of practice in UNLV's School of Public Policy and Leadership.

ON MAKING A DIFFERENCE

"What I have always been really, really passionate about is improving outcomes for our children and the community and families here. I feel like being here at UNLV, this is the opportunity to continue the mission and the work."



YUTAKA SAHO

'96 BS Athletic Training

The **School of Integrated Health Sciences Alumnus of the Year** built an international sports medicine career after coming to UNLV from Japan to study athletic training. He has worked with Japan's Olympic teams, served as an athletic trainer for the men's national ice hockey team at the 1998 Nagano Winter Olympics, and founded Sports Safety Japan in 2007.

ON PERSEVERANCE

"When I look back on my time at UNLV, what I remember most is the anxiety — wondering whether I could even finish the program, whether my English would ever be good enough, or whether I truly belonged. But completing my degree and becoming a certified athletic trainer gave me a kind of courage I hadn't had before. Receiving this award gives me a chance to look back and, for the first time, tell that younger version of myself: You did well."



DR. ERIC MCCLINTOCK

'21 MD

The **Kirk Kerkorian School of Medicine Alumnus of the Year** is a member of the school's charter class. The opportunity to attend UNLV's new med school drew him back to his home state after five years working in biotechnology in California. He completed his internal medicine residency at UNLV, later joined the university's faculty, and practices hospital medicine at Corewell Health Troy and Corewell Health Royal Oak in Michigan.

ON BEING IN THE MOMENT

"What I cherish is the human connections made at the bedside. Patients will often tell you exactly what is wrong with them if you just slow down, ask the right questions, and truly listen to what they have to say."



NATHANIA PARK

'09 BS Nursing and '14 MSN-Family Nurse Practitioner

RUSS PARK

'09 BS Nursing

The **School of Nursing Alumni of the Year** met as students and have built their careers alongside each other in Las Vegas. Russ leads Silver State Adolescent Treatment Center. Nathania is a family nurse practitioner at Intermountain Health focused on primary and senior care.

ON PARTNERSHIP

"No one builds something meaningful alone. UNLV has the incredible responsibility of developing that local talent and preparing the next generation of nurses and leaders ... so we feel a responsibility to help strengthen the next generation of nurses." ***(Nathania)***

"Las Vegas is where we met, built our family, and found our purpose. Because this community has given us so much, we feel a duty to leave a stronger foundation for the next generation of healthcare professionals coming behind us." ***(Russ)***



MATTHEW COVA

'09 Master of Health Care Administration

The **School of Public Health Alumnus of the Year** has built a career in hospital operations and healthcare leadership and serves as CEO of Ascension Seton Medical Center. His work has included expanding emergency services, advancing robotic surgery, launching a pharmacy residency program, and developing the first accredited hospital-based paramedic program in the HCA Healthcare system.

ON A PROFESSOR'S IMPACT

"My time at UNLV set a high standard for how I approach leadership. Professor and department chair Dr. Chris Cochran truly invested in his students, providing the guidance, strategic mindset, and encouragement that helped lay the groundwork for my transition into executive leadership."



TAMMI TIGER

'15 Master of Public Administration

The **Graduate College Alumna of the Year** is the founding director of UNLV's Tribal Education Initiative and a commissioner on the governing board of the Nevada Department of Native American Affairs. Her work focuses on creating educational opportunities for Indigenous students and increasing understanding of Tribal communities.

ON LIGHTING THE PATH

"My people call it Hina Hanta — the Bright Path. It is the way of life for our people to continue, meaning my story includes all the events along that path from thousands of years ago to today. ... Public service is how I carry our story forward and pave a clearer way for future generations."

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DR. JOHN FERRIN

'07 BS Biological Sciences and '11 DMD

The **School of Dental Medicine Alumnus of the Year** is a periodontist at Ferrin Periodontics in Medford, Oregon, and founder of the Sgt. Clint Ferrin Veterans Dental Program at UNLV, which he established in honor of his late brother, Clint. The program provides free oral healthcare to Southern Nevada veterans while giving dental students supervised clinical experience.

ON VETERAN CARE

"Many veterans put their own needs and health aside while serving, and they often need our help afterward. I am grateful that Clint's name and selflessness continue to be remembered. His example has also shaped how I practice dentistry, including finding ways to care for veterans and make their treatment more financially accessible."



DANIEL JOSEPH CHENIN

'02 BS Architecture and '05 Master of Architecture

The **College of Fine Arts Alumnus of the Year** received the Fielden Medal for Academic Excellence, one of UNLV's highest honors for graduating architecture students. He leads his Las Vegas-based international architecture firm, Daniel Joseph Chenin Ltd., and mentors UNLV architecture students.

ON BUILDING STRENGTH

"My advice to students: Remain endlessly curious and avoid rushing to define who you are. You are going to make mistakes, explore ideas that don't pan out, and encounter unexpected turns along your path. Embrace those moments — they are an essential part of your growth and will ultimately make your work much stronger."



LAURIE HARTIG

'88 Master of Education

LISA K. HABIGHORST

'96 Master of Education

The **College of Education Alumni of the Year** co-founded Spread the Word Nevada in 2001 to expand access to books for children in low-income communities. The organization has since become Nevada's largest children's literacy nonprofit, placing millions of books in homes across the state.

ON GETTING BIG RESULTS

"My advice to current students is to follow your dreams, embrace mentors, and remain open to where your passion leads. You never know when a small effort might grow into a movement that changes thousands of lives." ***(Laurie)***

"We started with simple hopes of just securing enough books and cardboard boxes for a handful of schools. Guiding our staff, board of directors, donors, and dedicated volunteers to turn that humble beginning into a statewide movement that has placed millions of books into young hands is the proudest achievement of my career." ***(Lisa)***



SEAN KAU

'11 BS Computer Science

The Honors College Alumnus of the Year has worked as a software engineer at Google since 2013, following an early career at Shuffle Master. His work at Google has included leading the launch of native printing infrastructure for Chromebooks, serving millions of users.

ON PROBLEM SOLVING

"What I'm most proud of isn't just that we wrote code that worked, but how we solved the problem for the user. Watching our work go live and knowing we transformed a daily friction point into a seamless, built-in feature for millions of students, teachers, and professionals using Chromebooks every day was incredibly rewarding."



VALERIE TU

'11 BS in Geology and '13 MS Geoscience

The **College of Sciences Alumna of the Year** is a planetary geologist who contributed to NASA's Curiosity rover mission and studies Mars and other planetary bodies at NASA's Johnson Space Center. She created research internships and faculty partnerships that connect UNLV students with aerospace opportunities.

ON SUPPORTING ACCESS

"Because so many individuals opened doors for me when I was a student balancing multiple jobs and raising a family, paying that forward feels like a natural obligation. UNLV consistently produces exceptional, world-class talent, and I want to ensure our students have direct access to the experiences that set them up for extraordinary careers."



CHRISTINA SCHLAZER

'12 MS in Health Physics and '16 MBA

The **Lee Business School Alumna of the Year** works in healthcare technology and is co-owner of The NOW Massage franchise in Las Vegas. She stays involved with UNLV through mentoring, guest lecturing, and advisory work.

ON MENTORING TODAY'S STUDENTS

"Serving as a mentor has given me the chance to help students think through career decisions and navigate uncertainty. Sometimes, the most important thing I can do is simply listen. I want students to feel supported as they figure out what comes next."



BRIAN PAULSON

'97 BS Hotel Administration

The **William F. Harrah College of Hospitality Alumnus of the Year** has spent more than 30 years in hospitality and serves as chief operating officer of Nigro Management Inc. in Las Vegas. He also serves as co-chair of UNLV's Global Advisory Board and coaches high school football, bringing his focus on mentorship and developing people to both roles.

ON SMALL DETAILS

"Moving the needle in your career isn't about grand gestures or asserting authority; it's about showing up early, taking pride in the small details, and approaching every task with humility and a strong work ethic. ... When you consistently do the right thing — even when you think no one is watching — people notice."



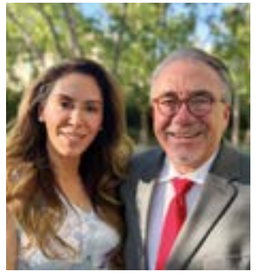
SHIPRA DE

'11 BA Computer Science, BA Economics, and BS Mathematical Sciences

The **Howard R. Hughes College of Engineering Alumna of the Year** added a master's in computer science from the Georgia Institute of Technology and an MBA from Arizona State University to her UNLV degrees. She leads and mentors data analysts at Nevada National Security Sites and remains involved with UNLV through industry partnerships, the Computer Science Advisory Board, and student mentoring.

ON KEEPING PACE

"There is one skill everyone needs to develop — whether they're an engineering student or not — and that's resilience. We're entering an era where technology is evolving at an incredible pace, and artificial intelligence is changing the way we all work."



ELAINE SANCHEZ

'95 BS Political Science and Criminal Justice

TONY SANCHEZ

'88 BS Political Science

The **University Libraries Alumni of the Year** are first-generation UNLV graduates who have built careers in public service and community leadership. Elaine has served on the Las Vegas-Clark County Library District board for 16 years. Tony recently completed a term as chair of the UNLV Foundation Board of Trustees and is an executive vice president at NV Energy.

ON A THRIVING COMMUNITY

"I got to experience the full breadth of the UNLV community, which really helped get me where I needed to go. My education not only made me smarter, it made me more compassionate and more aware of the systems that make a community thrive." ***(Elaine)***

"UNLV is uniquely positioned in that it's a critical economic engine for Southern Nevada. ... Because UNLV has given me so much, I absolutely feel an obligation to give back, and I hope other alumni think about this in the context of the significant cuts in federal funding for higher education." ***(Tony)***



KEVIN KRAFT

The CEO of the Southern California-based event production company By Dzign is the **Silver State Award recipient**, the Alumni Association's top award for a non-alumnus. He has supported UNLV for more than 15 years by donating services to make Homecoming and other signature events special and by providing mentorship and employment opportunities for students and graduates.

ON THE WINDING ROAD

"Your career doesn't always arrive in the form you expect. Sometimes the opportunities that change your life are the ones you never planned for, and you have to recognize them when they appear."



J. DANIEL CHI

Finance Professor

The **Outstanding Faculty Award** recipient has spent his career expanding financial education and experiential learning opportunities for students. He serves as finance department chair and helped launch courses and extracurricular programs aimed at ensuring Rebels graduate with with foundational knowledge to support future financial health.

ON THE GOAL OF EDUCATION

"Teaching is to kindle a fire rather than to fill a pail. ... To develop the capacity for independent learning as well as a passion for lifelong learning — that I believe is the ultimate goal of education and something every teacher should strive to achieve."

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1970s

Gary L. Goodson, '78 BA Hotel Administration, and his wife, Beverly, live in Coos Bay, Oregon. In 1981, the couple opened The Pancake Mill, which they operated for 42 years. Goodson has plans for a new drive-through food service business. He enjoys AutoCAD drafting and 3D design and is designing an addition to his home. His son, Jason, is a teacher with a BA from Willamette University and a master's from the University of Pennsylvania.

Marty Gross, '79 BS Hospitality Management, works in national sales and marketing for Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Atlantic City. He previously worked in executive-level positions at Cannery Casinos, Station Casinos, M Resort, The Mirage, Riviera, and tribal gaming operations. He and his wife, Bonnie, have been married 46 years and have three children.

Leon Levitt, '79 BA Communication Studies, enjoyed a 35-year media career that included stops in Washington, Phoenix, and Atlanta. Now retired in Wilmington, North Carolina, he enjoys traveling, good wine, Scotch, and golf. While at UNLV, Levitt served as editor of the *Yell*, an experience that helped shape his career in media.

1980s

Charles E. Lewis, '84 BS Hotel Administration, joined the Brook Casino in Seabrook, New Hampshire, as chef for banquets and special events. At the casino he opened The Secret Garden, an event space accommodating 50 to 2,500 guests. The employee-owned casino has a sister property in Eureka, Nevada.

Herb Santos Jr., '85 BA Sociology, was inducted into the American Board of Trial Advocates (ABOTA), an organization of experienced trial attorneys and judges. Santos has spent three decades representing injured Nevadans and advancing the civil justice system through his work as a trial attorney, educator, and community leader.

Perry K. Todd, '85 BS Hotel Administration, is a table games supervisor at Palms Casino Resort and a 28-year member of SAG-AFTRA. He worked in film and television, and authored *Sports Betting for Profit*. Todd enjoys traveling, fine dining, and collecting movie posters, scripts, autographs, and signed photos.



Kari Kawa-Harding, '89 BS Hotel Management, and **Sally Kawa**, '90 BS Hotel Management, are co-owners of Johnny's Cafe in Omaha, Nebraska, which recently received the James Beard Award for America's Classics. The award recognizes independently owned restaurants with timeless appeal.

Tami Belt, '88 BA Communication Studies, is the founder of Blue Cube Marketing Solutions. She launched an online course, Branding Your Story. A second-generation Las Vegas native, Belt grew up watching the Runnin' Rebels play at the Las Vegas Convention Center and considers attending UNLV during the championship era a treasured memory.

Kurt Hildebrand, '88 BA Communication Studies, is editor of the *Record-Courier* in Douglas County, which earned 2026 Nevada Press Association awards for print general excellence among rural newspapers for the second consecutive year, as well as online general excellence. Hildebrand also received first place in editorial writing, while the newspaper won for best opinion pages.

Charles Pellegrini, '88 BS Hotel Administration, began a career in real estate after owning a restaurant. His projects include StarLofts Pittsburgh, a boutique collection of luxury loft residences. Pellegrini develops and manages properties, and pursues private real estate lending with his wife and business partner, Janet. Married since 1989, they have two children. He enjoys golf and playing piano.

Nick Podar, '88 BS Hospitality Management, opened a new branch of Hoskins Equipment in Henderson, where he is a sales executive. A 30-year veteran of the Las Vegas construction industry, Podar works with a company that provides construction rental equipment for major projects throughout Las Vegas, Phoenix, Southern California, and Salt Lake City.

Douglas Guild, '89 BS Business Administration and '10 MPA, is the director of parks and recreation for The City of North Las Vegas. Guild spent his career serving Southern Nevada through public service and community leadership. He and his wife, Nanette, recently celebrated 33 years of marriage. They have three children and five grandchildren.

1990s

Rob Nickels, '90 BS Management, retired from Cox Communications in July 2025 after 29 years with the company. He began a new position with Positron Access Solutions in February 2026. Nickels and his family moved to Ammon, Idaho, in May 2024.

Alex Marquez, '92 BS Electrical Engineering, is celebrating 10 years as founder and global managing director of Experian Ventures.

Michele Voelkening, '94 Communication Studies, and **Gaby Rodriguez,** '14 Communication Studies, co-founded Las Vegas-based public relations and digital marketing firm The PMA Agency. Voelkening serves as president and managing partner. Rodriguez is vice president of public relations and community outreach. The agency's clients include Connections Academy, Junior Achievement of Southern Nevada, and The Children's Cabinet/First 5 Nevada.

John Santana, '95 BA Communication Studies, is the supervisor of medical libraries for St. Peter's Health Partners in Albany. He is also the rhythm guitarist in Kick Out the Rouge, a Kingston, New York-based rock band that performs throughout the Hudson Valley and New England. The band released its third album, *Late for the Future*, on all streaming platforms.

April (Powell) Stewart, '95 BA Communication Studies and '05 M.Ed., was reappointed by Gov. Joe Lombardo to a second term as a commissioner for Nevada Volunteers. She enjoys reading and traveling.


Levitt, '79


Gross, '79


Belt, '88


Guild, '89


Nickels, '90


Voelkening, '94


Ackerman, '97


Johnston, '97

Bryce Ackerman, '97 Communication Studies, is a workforce management leader at Roche and was recognized by CX Network as one of its "Top 30 contact center leaders to follow in 2026."

Stacey Dallas Johnston, '97 BA English, has spent 25 years with the Clark County School District, including 21 years as a teacher, two as a learning strategist, and two as a school administrator. She published her first book of poetry, *Broken Record*, in 2025 and launched LOCAL POET, a small business selling handmade crafts, jewelry, and copies of her book at local markets and festivals.

Betsy (Porter) Buchheit, '99 BA English, serves as acting deputy area director for the Social Security Administration's Southern Illinois and Indiana area.

2000s

Stephanie (Prisco) Liggio, '00 BA Communication Studies, worked in the title insurance industry for 21 years. She published a book that serves as a guide for those interested in building a political campaign or becoming more civically engaged.

Mikhail Gaushkin, '01 BS Hotel Administration, is co-founder and chief commercial and revenue officer at Hey Seven. He has held leadership roles at MGM Resorts International, Caesars Entertainment, Seminole Gaming, Hard Rock International, GoDaddy, JetSmarter, and Auction.com.

Scott D. Horn, '01 BS Special Education, is a substitute teacher. He collects baseball cards.

Andrew Hamilton, '02 BA Film, has developed digital learning, web development, and media production businesses in Las Vegas and the United Kingdom. Through Hamilton Productions, Goster Group, and Website190, he has built websites, produced training videos, and developed learning management systems.

Mike Taack, '02 BA English and '11 M.Ed., is founder, CEO, and head of school for WYLEES, the Western Youth Leadership, Engagement, and Empowerment Middle School, a tuition-free public charter school near UNLV. Taack enjoys photography, painting, traveling, writing, playing video games with his children, and attending live music performances.



Cari Byers, '02 MA Communication Studies, took over Premier Showgirls, an agency that books talent for events and specializes in Las Vegas showgirls, in 2014. Under her leadership, the agency has expanded to produce live performances for events and a cabaret show that ran for three years. Byers said Premier Showgirls is proud of its Las Vegas roots and connection to UNLV, as well as its role as a locally based small business that gives back to the community.

Cheryl Baker, '04 MM, is an elementary general music teacher for PreK-6th grade students and a presenter, author, and Toastmasters trainer. She is the author of *Lessons from the Music Room* and *A Survival Guide for New Music Teachers* and has presented for organizations including Music ConstructEd, the Elementary Music Summit, DCMEA, VEMEA, FCPS, and FGMEA. Baker produces the Fairfax Public Access television show *Spiritual Conversations*.

Jessica J. Henning, '04 BSBA Marketing, earned a master's from Harvard University in 2019 and completed her Ph.D. at Pepperdine University in 2026. She is the founder of STATUS International Real Estate and is launching a new venture that combines AI and real estate. Henning is an avid international traveler and dedicated yoga practitioner, and is the founder of The Well Living Foundation.

Fernando Avila, '05 Physical Education, works in real estate while coaching girls soccer at Western High School. He enjoys staying active, working out, playing soccer, and helping others pursue their fitness goals. He is a second-degree Taekwondo black belt.

Adrienne Davis, '05 BS Workforce Education and '08 M.Ed. Educational Leadership, is celebrating 30 years with Vitalant, where she is a national quality manager. She began her career there as a hospital services representative. Davis is the parent of three children, including UNLV graduates Scott Davis and Staci (Davis) Devinson, who both graduated from the College of Education. She is a grandmother of five.

Seth Grabel, '05 BS Hospitality Management, is an investor, broker, and magician who buys motels and gives them themed makeovers. His wife, Tammy Grabel, is also a UNLV alumna and worked as a publisher for *Las Vegas Woman* magazine.

Patricia Galas, '06 BA Communication Studies, works in the hospitality industry.

Matt Suiter, '06 BS Finance, a Las Vegas realtor and owner of The Suiter Group at Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices, was named the 2026 Spearfishing U.S. National Champion. Suiter has competed in spearfishing tournaments since 2016 and travels with his sons, Merrick and Reef, to compete internationally.

Camille (Calimlim) Touton, '06 BS Engineering and '06 BA Communication Studies, returned to Las Vegas after 20 years in Washington, D.C., where she was a commissioner for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. She is an adjunct scholar in residence in UNLV's College of Engineering, where she teaches Leadership in Water Systems: Sustainability and Resilience Across the American West. Touton is founder and principal of Rotunda, River & Range LLC. Her husband, **Matthew Touton**, '07 BS Chemistry, is also an alum.

Jessica Zuch, '06 MM, is founder and director of Jessica Zuch Studios Ltd., a Hong Kong-based music school. She created Harmonyland Adventures, a children's music curriculum, and Harmonyland: Notation Quest, an educational app designed to make early music learning engaging and accessible. Zuch enjoys traveling, culinary exploration, baking and edible art, yoga and wellness, crochet, walking, and discovering new cultural and creative experiences.

Sheri Beyer, '07 M.Ed., is a business immigration supervisor at Fragomen Del Rey Bernsen & Loewy LLP.

Larissa J. Fekete, '07 BS International Business and '07 BS Business Administration, is the assistant dean of academic support at Oberlin College.

Nate Botsis, '08 MA and '14 Ph.D. English, recently published *The Literary DJ Presents: 31 Aesop's Fables*. He runs a book-selling business and maintains a website featuring his blog, published books, and a newsletter. Botsis spends much of his time parenting and is a waiter.

Brittany Walker Hausle, '09 BA Political Science, joined the law firm of Lex Politica, where she focuses on election law, campaign compliance, and corporate governance. She also serves on the UNLV Alumni Association Board of Directors. Hausle enjoys spending weekends poolside with her husband, Michael, and their daughter, Reagan.

Chelsea (Milko) McAllister, '09 BA Political Science and BS Kinesiology, joined federal government contractor LMI as a senior strategic communications specialist supporting U.S. Customs and Border Protection. She previously worked at the U.S. Agency for International Development until 2025. McAllister and her husband, Derek, are active parishioners at Saints Philip & James Catholic Church in Baltimore, where they serve on the parish council and lead the families and couples ministry. Derek is an assistant teaching professor at Towson University's Honors College.

Vontoba Terry, '09 MA Economics, is CEO of Urban Hydration. He won $20,700 as a contestant on *Wheel of Fortune* during the show's America 250 theme. Terry and his wife, **Psychelia Terry**, '09 MBA, were married before beginning graduate school and mentored undergraduate students during their time at UNLV.

2010s

Chris Jones, '10 BA Psychology, is completing a doctorate in health sciences. He is the clinical supervisor at Child Haven, an emergency children's shelter operated by the Clark County Department of Family Services, and operates a private practice, Anchor & Sail Psychotherapy. He also teaches graduate-level courses at University of Massachusetts Global. Jones married his longtime partner, Tara, in October 2026.

Keri Hales Patterson, '10 MHA, became the narrator of the audio soap opera *Haven Falls*. She is preparing to release new recordings of two songs her mother originally recorded in 1978. Nearly 50 years later, the two are recording them together as a mother-daughter project.

Panagiote "Pete" Tsolis, '10 BSBA Marketing and '14 EMBA, earned his Ph.D. in global leadership and change from Pepperdine University in 2024. He is director of business programs and assistant professor of entrepreneurship at Hellenic American University in Athens, where he oversees MBA, MS, and BSBA programs. Tsolis chaired the Global Business and Technology Association's 26th annual International Conference.



Taack, '02



Hamilton, '02



Baker, '04



Henning, '04



Avila, '05



Grabel, '05



Touton, '06



Zuch, '06

J.W. Bond, '13 JD, was selected to the 2026 Super Lawyers Rising Stars list, following selections in 2024 and 2025. He is founding attorney and partner at Attorneys of Idaho in Boise, representing clients in personal injury, criminal defense, and DUI matters. Before becoming a lawyer, he worked as a Las Vegas police officer.

Renee Brna, '13 BA Psychology, is pursuing her master's in marriage and family therapy at UNLV. Brna is a co-author of the new book *A Happy, Healthy Mom: Your Guide to Less Stress, Better Teamwork*, and *More Joy on the Journey*. A former Broadway performer, Brna transitioned to the mental health field to focus on maternal wellness and psychological recovery for mothers.

George Pierce, '13 MBA, began his financial services career at Merrill Lynch. In 2016, he joined LPL Financial, and in 2018, he and his father, Bill, founded Pierce Wealth Management at LPL Financial. The firm specializes in retirement plans, including 401(k)s, 529 college plans, and asset allocation. Pierce has been married to his wife, Alexis, since 2015. They have two daughters, Maddison and Emma.

Joseph Sorge, '14 BA Criminal Justice, is a deputy U.S. Marshal in the Western District of Pennsylvania. Sorge completed an extended assignment in Washington, D.C., supporting high-level federal protective missions and serving in several protective roles throughout the United States. His career included service in the U.S. Air Force Security Forces and work as a police officer, flight attendant, and Geek Squad Agent before joining the U.S. Marshals Service. Sorge enjoys traveling, scuba diving, riding his Harley-Davidson motorcycle, and spending time with family. His other interests include repairing computers, setting up home networks, playing first-person shooter video games, and designing and collecting challenge coins and patches.

Angela Garcia, '17 Geology, is an exploration geoscientist at NASA's Johnson Space Center and an Artemis II science officer. Garcia supports lunar science operations for NASA's Artemis missions and has helped train astronauts in geology and lunar observations.

James Lovett, '17 JD, joined the business litigation team at Howard & Howard, where he focuses on commercial litigation, professional liability, healthcare, labor and employment, and


Botsis, ’08


Sorge, ’14


Hausle, ’09


Garcia, ’17


Terry, ’09


Posocco, ’18


Jones, ’10


Geyrozaga, ’18


Tsolis, ’10


Thomas, ’20


Bond, ’13


Shenouda, ’21


Brna, ’13


Towery, ’22


Rodriguez, ’14


Lively, ’23

intellectual property matters. A registered patent attorney, Lovett has experience with patent and trademark prosecution, intellectual property disputes, and complex litigation.

Andrea Corral Rodríguez, ’17 BA Psychology and Journalism and ’23 MSW, is a registered social worker in Québec, Canada.

Patricia Violi, ’17 M.Ed., is inaugural director of Lancer Accessibility Resource Services at Pasadena City College.

Kristina Carmona, ’18 BA Special Education, teaches high school students with autism at Basic Academy and leads the school’s Best Buddies Leadership program. She recently won a new car.

Kurt Geyrozaga, ’18 BA Criminal Justice, is an imagery analyst in the Army National Guard supporting special operations forces missions and a federal civilian imagery analyst focused on peace-building efforts in the Indo-Pacific. He is founder and president of Veterans in Emerging Technology and AI Governance, a nonprofit focused on AI governance in national security. He also serves on the Clark County Law Library Board of Trustees. Geyrozaga was admitted to Harvard Kennedy School’s MC/MPA program. He also assists fellow veterans and their families in navigating VA benefits and disability claims.

Evan Posocco, ’18 BA Journalism & Media Studies, was promoted to assistant director of live event production at Monster Jam with Feld Entertainment. He oversees live event production, including in-venue content, fan engagement initiatives, creative development, and supporting technology. Posocco has worked with Monster Jam since 2017, progressing through roles including graphics operator, director, show caller, and producer.

2020s

Lucas Joel Thomas, ’20 MA English, is an adult ESL teacher at UCEDA School in Las Vegas. He previously taught high school English at Basic Academy of International Studies in Henderson. Since 2019, he has self-published 10 books. Thomas enjoys reading, writing, learning new languages, and spending time with friends and family. His wife, **Ana Thomas,** ’24 MSW, completed training to become a licensed clinical social worker.

Camrynne (Cruz) Flowers, ’21 BS Kinesiology, is associate head coach of UNLV Cheer. She graduated with a nursing degree from Joyce University in August.

Melikabella Shenouda, ’21 BA Psychology and ’24 M.Ed. Higher Education, performed spoken word at TEDx Las Vegas during the event’s second annual conference. Her piece, “Eclipse,” explores themes of love, lust, and loss through wordplay and comic relief, with the goal of fostering connection and healing.

Ronnie Terry Robinson, ’22 BSBA Management, ’24 MS Information Systems and MS Cybersecurity, and ’26 MBA, retired as a U.S. Army master sergeant after 28 years of service. Robinson works part time at UNLV IT Information Security Operations while pursuing his cybersecurity career. He enjoys gaming, traveling, and learning about languages and cultures.

Dr. Hosia M. Towery III, ‘22 OTD, is a PRN occupational therapist at Dignity Health Outpatient Rehabilitation. He completed an Indigenous Healing Perspectives Certification Course through Washington State University.

Amberlee Lively, ‘23 BA Criminal Justice, has been a communications operator for the Henderson Police Department for three years. She became a communications training officer and trains new dispatchers. She was awarded the 2025 Dispatcher of the Year from the Henderson Fire Department. Lively likes to attend country concerts and rodeos. She also likes watching the Vegas Golden Knights and Henderson Silver Knights. She enjoys crafting and baking, scrapbooking, quilting, and baking her famous chocolate chip cookies.

Emma Bela, ’24 BS International Business, began her career with MGM Resorts International in VIP Services at Bellagio before moving to Dubai to join Atlantis The Royal. She later founded New Luxury Standard, an advisory firm that helps luxury hospitality and experience-focused brands strengthen service standards, client retention, and revenue performance.

Kaylyn Calove-Marella, ’24 BA English, is a marketing communications manager. She freelances, working with small businesses to build their brands and digital presence. Calove-Marella enjoys hiking and traveling throughout the Southwest. She earned a skydiving license, and continues developing new creative and marketing skills.

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Joyce Woodhouse, a UNLV alumna and longtime Nevada educator and public servant, died May 8, 2026. Woodhouse moved to Southern Nevada in 1966 to begin her career as a teacher. Over more than four decades with the Clark County School District, she served as a teacher, principal, and administrator. She later represented Henderson in the Nevada State Senate, serving from 2006 to 2010 and again from 2012 to 2020. A tireless advocate for public education, she worked to support Nevada's schools, educators, and students. Woodhouse earned two master's degrees from UNLV and founded the Nevada Institute for Teacher Education Preparation. In 2024, she was inducted into the inaugural Hall of Fame class of the UNLV College of Education.

Mary Dale Deacon, who served as director of UNLV Libraries from 1982 to 1992, died August 2026. Deacon played a key role in the growth of the Libraries, securing funding for expanded collections, implementing an integrated automated system, and creating new staff positions. She also championed construction of a new library facility as a priority for the Maryland Parkway campus. A graduate of the University of New Mexico, Deacon earned a master's in library science from the University of Denver and later worked at the University of British Columbia. She was preceded in death by her husband, James E. Deacon, a distinguished professor emeritus at UNLV, in 2015.



Deacon

William "Bill" R. Jankowiak, a distinguished professor of anthropology at UNLV and internationally recognized scholar of Chinese society, human relationships, and cross-cultural anthropology, died July 2026. During his three decades at UNLV, Jankowiak became a leading scholar of love, family, sexuality, and human relationships, authoring a dozen books and more than 130 scholarly articles. His greatest legacy was the generations of students he mentored.



Jankowiak

Randall "Randy" Shelden, a longtime UNLV professor of criminal justice, died June 19, 2026. Shelden joined UNLV in 1977 and retired in 2024. With a focus on criminal justice, he helped develop the program, including the creation of its master's degree in the late 1980s. Shelden authored more than 20 books and 50 articles, and received national recognition in 1992 for his contributions to criminology. A dedicated teacher, he received UNLV's Outstanding Teacher Award six times. He was also a U.S. Navy veteran and an avid Boston Red Sox fan.



Shelden

Zhanlei Yao, a longtime UNLV financial planning and budget analyst, died June 3, 2026. Yao spent more than 15 years at UNLV, serving as a senior financial accountant and, most recently, a senior budget analyst. She worked with departments across the university, providing financial expertise and support to campus colleagues. Known for her kindness, positive spirit, and dedication to her work, Yao was a valued colleague and friend to many at UNLV.



Yao

Marco Benvenuti, an alumnus of the William F. Harrah College of Hospitality, died Aug. 28, 2026, following a three-year battle with cancer. Originally from Tuscany, Italy, Benvenuti came to UNLV in 1999 and earned a bachelor's in hotel administration in 2002, graduating summa cum laude from both the Hospitality and Honors colleges. He earned a master's degree from Cornell University and worked for several major hospitality companies before turning to entrepreneurship. In 2010, Benvenuti co-founded Duetto, a hospitality technology company focused on revenue strategy. He grew from a small consulting operation into a global technology business serving hotels and casinos. Benvenuti remained connected to the Hospitality College throughout his career and was a strong supporter of education. The Marco Benvenuti Strip View Lobby in Hospitality Hall was named in his honor.



Michela Carattini-Mays, '24 PhD Special Education, developed a Registered Behavior Technician minor connecting prospective technicians with rural Minnesota ABA clinics and is creating a graduate certificate for master's students. She developed a curriculum and instruction course integrating high-leverage practices into lesson planning and mock IEP meetings. She also leads a project launching a website offering research-based podcasts, resources, and virtual mentorship for special educators

Aidan Neshite, '24 Marketing, is building and operating his own health insurance agency. Licensed in multiple states, he was one of Nevada's top producers this year. Neshite enjoys trail running and working toward competing in 100-plus-mile races.

Ebenezer Belete, '25 Ph.D. Learning Sciences, has taught at UNLV for four and a half years. He was selected as a speaker for UNLV's spring 2026 commencement. His daughter, Tracy, graduated from high school at the same time. Tracy accompanied her father to evening classes at UNLV while she was in middle school. Belete enjoys photography and has visited 22 national parks with his family.

Denise Dennis, '25 BA Criminal Justice, joined UNLV in October 2025 as a business coordinator at the International Center for Gaming Regulation. She started a Master of Business Administration degree at the University of Illinois Chicago in October 2025 and was selected to serve as MBA Student Outreach Vice President of GMARK for the 2026-27 academic year.

Kaleigh Doerfler, '25 BS Hospitality Management, is a guest experience manager for food and beverage operations at Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom Park. She lives in Orlando and credits her hospitality education with helping her pursue her dream career.

Maizie Dyess, '25 Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction, is an assistant professor at the University of Rhode Island, where she teaches science methods in the College of Education.

Kelsey Henderson, '25 JD, joined Fox Rothschild in Las Vegas as an associate in the Labor & Employment Department. She advises clients on labor and employment matters, including regulatory compliance, workplace policies and procedures, and workplace litigation.

Mateo Tomas Portelli, '25 BA History, is pursuing a master's in cybersecurity at Old Dominion University. He earned the GIAC Response and Industrial Defense certification and published *Democracy on Sale: The 7 Rules of Door-to-Door Political Canvassing*. Portelli is an Army National Guard cyber warfare officer, information technology operations analyst, and founder of Martello & Pieto Consulting LLC.

Pauline 'Ofa Tamale, '25 DMA Music Performance, is an opera singer, choir director, and voice teacher. She enjoys long drives, road trips, watching sunsets, and trying new foods.

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Every Nov. 11, the oil painting that hangs just inside the front doors of UNLV's Military and Veterans Services Center is taken off the wall and set on an easel in front of the Veterans Memorial statue near the Rose Garden. At the annual Veterans Day ceremony, the university takes a moment to honor alumna Karen J. Wagner, who died in the 9/11 attack at the Pentagon.

At UNLV, Wagner was in ROTC and graduated in 1984 with a bachelor's in business administration. She then spent nearly two decades working her way up the Army's ranks as a hospital administrator to become a lieutenant colonel and the medical branch representative to the deputy chief of staff for Army personnel.

Retired Col. Mac Hayes was just building the ROTC program when Wagner was a student. He remembers Wagner's athleticism, good humor, and the maturity she brought as a nontraditional student, earning the respect of fellow cadets.

Today, 25 years after her death, Hayes is glad the campus still honors her. "All Rebels should be proud of the way she soldiered — that's the way I describe someone who does their job, and does it well, while being easy to work with. To become a lieutenant colonel and to be selected to work at the Pentagon means you've really achieved something special."

— Cate Weeks

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