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EDITOR
Jessica Impallaria ’08

PHOTOGRAPHER
Casey Jade Photography

CONTRIBUTORS
Amy Bouchard, APR
Jessica Impallaria ’08
Brian Sodoma ’06

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At UNLV, we don’t settle. We always reach for more. We’re Rebels – Different. Daring. Diverse. And we’re on the rise.

For more than 40 years, the UNLV Alumni Association has recognized exceptional individuals who represent the ideals of higher learning and Rebel pride. Through the awards program, the Alumni Association recognizes alumni and community leaders for their outstanding achievements and leadership at the university as well as throughout our community. These recipients truly serve as inspiration for the generations of alumni who will follow.

ABOUT THE UNLV ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

The UNLV Alumni Association was established in 1964 as a not-for-profit organization to promote and enhance alumni engagement on campus.

To date, the association has contributed more than $7 million to the university in student scholarships, endowments, and major capital improvements such as the Alumni Amphitheater, Alumni Grove, Alumni Park, and the $2.7 million Richard Tam Alumni Center.

The UNLV Alumni Association is the driving force behind a strong relationship between UNLV and its alumni and friends through outreach, engagement, and philanthropy for the benefit of UNLV.
As a principal analyst for Applied Analysis, a leading economic, fiscal and policy research firm based in Las Vegas, Jeremy Aguero is often sought out for his insights on local, state and regional economic issues.

Aguero’s 20-year work history demonstrates a wide range of abilities. He has performed countless economic and fiscal impact assessments for projects of local, regional, and national significance. Some of his major projects include The Hospitality Industry’s Impact on the State of Nevada, delivered to the Federal Gaming Impact Study Commission in 1998. In 2003, he chaired the Governor’s Task Force on Tax Policy’s technical working group, co-authoring its 1,400-page report and ultimately receiving a Good Government Award from the Nevada Taxpayers Association.

In 2014 and 2015, Aguero worked with Governor Brian Sandoval and legislative leadership to reform Nevada’s tax structure in support of the Governor’s education reform program. And, since 2016, he worked as the lead staff to the Southern Nevada Tourism Infrastructure Task Force, and then, the Las Vegas Stadium Authority. In doing so, Aguero was credited as playing a key role in both the $1.8-billion Raiders Stadium Project and the $1.4-billion Las Vegas Convention Center Renovation and Expansion Project.

Aguero has taught hotel law as an adjunct professor at UNLV and, as a distinguished professor of practice, has also taught classes about using data in research for UNLV’s College of Urban Affairs. He currently serves on the board of advisors for Nevada State Bank, is a member of the R&F Foundation Board, the former president and current treasurer of Nevada Child Seekers, and immediate past chairman of Opportunity Village’s ARC Board.
Tell us about a moment in your career or during your time as a student when someone showed you unexpected kindness. How do you pay it forward today?

There have been several instances during my life where I have benefited from unexpected kindness. Most often, this has come in the form of mentorship. As I have gained experience, I have come to understand that countless acts of kindness – large and small, overt and obscured – have made all the difference in my life.

One that stands above the rest is the kindness shown to me by Professor Shannon Bybee. Like many young college students, my undergraduate career was marked by uncertainty. After taking a class or two with Bybee, he invited me to his office. He asked me about what I wanted to get out of college and what I wanted to do after it. We talked for hours. He shared his successes and his failures, unabridged. He helped me find a path and then paved it with encouragement and expectation. He never let me forget that ability is a gift and opportunity is borne more from hard work than circumstance. His infectious laugh, which I can still hear today, reminded me that happiness is a choice. Shortly after I graduated, Bybee made me promise him that I would go to law school. I fulfilled that promise. He was right. It has made all the difference in my career.

Paying it forward is simple. The lessons Professor Bybee shared with me I now share with my children, interns, and colleagues. This may very well be the greatest gift he gave me. I’m guessing he knew that too.
Mark L. Fine is one of Southern Nevada's preeminent real estate developers. In 1968 he started his career with Chemical Bank in New York City as a construction lender and later helped manage real estate assets for Loeb/Rhoades & Company, a major Wall Street investment banking company. He moved to Las Vegas in 1973. At the time, Las Vegas real estate development and growth beyond the Strip was truly in its infancy.

As the president of American Nevada, he guided the development and growth of Green Valley for 17 years, Las Vegas's first large-scale master-planned community. During his tenure, Green Valley was rated one of the nation's fastest-growing communities. Fine also spent approximately five years as the president of the Summerlin division of Howard Hughes Corp., helping to launch the 22,000-acre master-planned community in 1991. It became the nation's fastest growing master-planned community during his tenure. In addition, he has been involved with the development of approximately two million square feet of commercial and retail projects and has served as a development advisor to the communities of Queensridge North and South, Mountain’s Edge, Providence, and Inspirada.

In 2005, along with his son Jeffrey, Fine started Fine Properties, focusing on unique, high-end retail and office projects. Some Fine Properties projects include: Hills Center North Business Park, Canyon Pointe Shops, Gardens Plaza Retail and Business Park and most recently the 400,000 square-foot Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Headquarters.

Fine has also played critical roles in higher education in the state of Nevada. He served as the UNLV Foundation Board of Trustees real estate chair for two years. He is a member and former chairman of the UNLV Research
Foundation Board of Directors and during the most recent legislative session, he traveled to Carson City to meet with legislators to support UNLV’s call for decreasing planned budget cuts. Fine has been a Trustee of the UNLV Foundation for over 30 years. He was inducted into the UNLV Palladium Society.

He has also been active for 40 years in the economic development of Las Vegas as well as active on many levels with the Clark County School District.

**Tell us about a moment in your career or during your time as a student when someone showed you unexpected kindness. How do you pay it forward today?**

My involvement with UNLV started in the mid-seventies. I became aware that for this city to grow in a positive way UNLV needed to lead the way. I became active in prioritizing academics and committed in lending my support in that direction.

Thanks to a young enthusiastic new president named Bob Maxson, who pulled in a new generation of community supporters who shared his academic vision, I was recruited to be a trustee over 30 years ago. Those years not only allowed me to help UNLV but they were also important in my personal development and allowed me to grow in so many ways.

I have personally worked with every president since then, each one helping to take UNLV to the next level. I continue to be astounded by how our university has grown over the last 30 years, and thrilled that our community has embraced the vision through donations and activism. UNLV has helped me find my voice, which I hope helped UNLV and the many other community organizations that I have been lucky enough to be associated with. I continue to be active as a trustee, where I have served in many capacities, including chairman. I believe our future has never been better. I can’t imagine where we will be in another 30 years, but it is going to be great.
Michael Gordon came to Las Vegas from Cape Town, South Africa in September 2006 on a Rotary International Ambassadorial scholarship. As a student, he served three terms as President of the Graduate and Professional Student Association (GPSA) as well as one term as Chair of the Nevada Student Alliance. Gordon is a double alumnus of the Graduate College at UNLV. He holds a Master’s in Public Administration and a Ph.D. in Public Affairs.

Gordon continues to give back to the Las Vegas community through his work at The Public Education Foundation, a group dedicated to transformational change in teaching, learning and education leadership. He is a 2012 graduate of Leadership Las Vegas and serves on the boards of The Salvation Army of Southern Nevada, the Boy Scouts Las Vegas Area Council, Beacon Academy of Nevada and the Rotary Club of Las Vegas.

During his time at UNLV, Gordon founded four different student organizations while maintaining his various extracurricular activities and jobs. Among the most notable contributions, Gordon was an Assistant Resident Life Coordinator from 2007 to 2010, President of the Student Ambassadors (2009-13), Vice President of Administration in the Student Alumni Association (2009-10), Greenspun College of Urban Affairs Chapter Board (2011-13), and a UNLV Alumni Association Board Member which included serving as the Chapters and Clubs Committee Chair (2013-16). As a member of the Heritage Society at the UNLV Foundation, Gordon exemplifies all the traits of Rebels; different, daring, and diverse. His resume highlights not
only his engagement, but his advocacy through his positions in more than 20 committees across campus, all while working on his advanced degrees.

What motivates you to give back to UNLV?

It will sound trite, but without the academic and community engagement education I received at UNLV, I would not be where I am today. During my student days, I was lucky enough to be part of several Foundation and Alumni events where I quickly learned that the civic leadership, persistence and a rebellious spirit is what built this university and town. The continued support and advocacy of these donors and community leaders is what allows UNLV to continue to produce the workforce for our growing economy and expanding city. Without their dedication to Las Vegas, none of us would be here.

I was lucky enough to benefit from other people’s generosity and vision to make this university – and city – an excellent place to live and work. I want to help build on their vision and that’s why I’m proud to be a Rebel. For these reasons I support the institution that will continue its proud tradition of opening doors for a different, daring and diverse student population.
Malamud left his job at Nabisco in New York City in 1968 to accept a position of assistant professor at Nevada Southern University, the same year the school established its school of business and economics. He was a charter member of the first Management Department created in 1970 at UNLV and has taught more than 35 different classes at the university during his 50-year tenure.

The appeal of completing his Ph.D was what primarily drew Malamud to the fledgling desert college at first, and when he arrived here he found plenty of faculty and staff to help him complete his needed thesis. Malamud became a distinguished professor at UNLV and taught courses on a variety of subjects ranging from economic basics to advanced theories on the evaluation of urban real estate. His work has also been published numerous times.

Some notable alumni of Malamud’s include: Councilman Bob Coffin, insurance executive, and long-time UNLV Alumni Association President Bob Anderson, Assistant Dean of the Hospitality College Pat Moreo, LVCVA President Rossi Rollenkotter, and many others. He served as department chair in 1976-1980 and 1996-1999.

Malamud has always believed in the dream of what UNLV could be. He has been part of the evolution of the business school from humble beginnings as the College of Business and Economics to the Lee Business School in its present form.
Tell us about a moment in your career or during your time as a student when someone showed you unexpected kindness. How do you pay it forward today?

I experienced kindness, cooperation, and helpfulness from faculty, staff, and students as the rule over my 50 years at UNLV. Most memorable and appreciated was the help I received on my Ph.D. dissertation, The Economics of Office Location—I was ABD (All But Dissertation) when I arrived at Nevada Southern in 1968. Librarian Alice Brown guided me through interlibrary lending and helped me ferret out data from government documents. Barbara Schick, an economics graduate student, got me access to detailed New York and Phoenix office rental data through her friendships with Harry Helmsley and Del Webb. Raedeen Jacobs of the Computer Center key-punched my programs and data.

Discussions with colleagues, particularly business college Dean William T. White and mathematics professor Michael Golberg, challenged and stimulated my research. And when the university’s 32K computer couldn’t handle a Fortran simulation program I wrote, a brilliant math graduate student compiled it on a rusty but fast machine that had just been donated to UNLV by a Test Site contractor; it had previously served for weapons tests in the Pacific. These acts are far from the total sum of kindness I received from UNLV faculty and staff, but they are memories that always reminded me to extend a helping hand whenever I could to other students driven to achieve their goals.
Brendan O’Toole received a Bachelor of Science degree in mechanical and aerospace engineering, and M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in mechanical engineering from the University of Delaware. He has been an assistant and associate professor at UNLV and now is a professor who serves as Chair of the Mechanical Engineering Department.

O’Toole is one of the three co-directors of the Center for Math, Science, and Engineering Education and serves as Director of the Center for Materials and Structures. He previously served as Director of the Mendenhall Innovation Program. He also took two leaves from UNLV to serve as a research associate for the Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education (ORISE) and a senior research associate for the National Academies National Research Council. Both of these research positions were located at the Army Research Laboratory at Aberdeen Proving Grounds in Maryland.

He has been a principal investigator or co-PI on 75 projects. O’Toole and his students have received more than 125 individual and team awards for design, education, research, and professional activities. A few highlights include: the State of Nevada Professor of the Year honor, the Tau Beta Pi McDonald Mentor Award, 18 outstanding professor awards, the FIRST Robotics Inspire Award, the world record (at the time) for fuel efficiency (3470 mpg) at the annual “SAE Supermileage” competition in California, and a first place honor in the collegiate class of the World Human Powered Vehicle Competition where his team’s vehicle reached a speed of 62 miles per hour.
Tell us about a moment in your career or during your time as a student when someone showed you unexpected kindness. How do you pay it forward today?

As a student, my parents had the greatest influence on me, as they provided the emotional and financial support to complete my engineering education. It was in their nature to help anyone around them who was in need, including extended family and local community members. This unwavering support was critical for me, especially during the difficult times in school when stress levels were high and I thought about quitting.

When I started my career as an assistant professor, my department chairs and many other faculty members helped me through the challenging process of attaining tenure. Some unexpected and very valuable kindness came from Professor Malcolm Nichol who was a senior faculty member in the College of Sciences. He supported my research activities early in my career even though my work was not directly related to the primary goals of his research center. He simply valued interdisciplinary work and wanted to help newer faculty develop their careers.

The kindness and mentorship of others who looked beyond their own goals and needs greatly influenced my approach to work and career. Every day I come across new, innovative ideas from students and colleagues and I try to help as many people as possible further their research and discovery, regardless of whether it falls directly under my research interests or not.
Trabia earned his B.S. and M.S. in mechanical engineering from Alexandria University, in Egypt, in 1980 and 1983, respectively. He was awarded a Ph.D. in mechanical engineering from Arizona State University in 1987. After that, he joined the UNLV faculty as an assistant professor.

Trabia is a Fellow of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME). Trabia has received multiple awards recognizing his teaching, research, and service efforts including the ASME Dedicated Service Award, the Tau Beta Pi Outstanding Teacher of the Year Award (multiple times) and has also earned the distinction of being listed in the “Who’s Who in Science and Engineering,” 5th Edition. Trabia credits a past professor, Taher Awad, for demonstrating teaching techniques and styles he finds to be effective with his own university engineering students.

Trabia was part of the team at the College of Engineering who created Hailey’s Hand – a 3D printed robotic hand which has enabled a young girl to live a fuller life. He has authored close to 200 technical journal and conference papers and has been involved with multiple funded research grants with a total budget of approximately $8 million.
Tell us about a moment in your career or during your time as a student when someone showed you unexpected kindness. How do you pay it forward today?

I was lucky to have many great teachers over the years. The one who stands out was professor Taher Awad, who taught me Automatic Control during the senior year of my B.A. studies in Alexandria University, Egypt. I inherited many elements of his teaching style including his willingness to pace the material based on his interaction with the students and his emphasis on ensuring that students are comfortable with fundamentals before proceeding to more complex topics.

He also emphasized the practical aspects of the subject he taught. My interaction with Awad continued during my M.S. studies. While he was not my main advisor, he spent many hours teaching me computer programming. I still use his tricks to debug computer codes. I came to know him better as a person during these years. His interest in learning about many topics outside engineering influenced me and encouraged me to try to understand other cultures and civilizations.
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To learn more, visit unlvalumni.org
Dr. John Pierce is the medical director of Ageless Forever, a Las Vegas integrative health and wellness center. He is board certified in emergency medicine and is a diplomate of the American Board of Anti Aging and Regenerative Medicine and received his medical training from Western University of Health Sciences, College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific, located in Pomona, Calif. He also has a Bachelor of Science Degree in Kinesiology from UNLV.

Dr. Pierce is an exercise enthusiast and has a lifetime of involvement as a competitive athlete, with special focus in weight training and nutrition. He also serves as a Tactical Physician with the Las Vegas SWAT team. At his clinic, Pierce focuses on developing unique and personalized approaches to helping clients achieve optimal health.

In his line of work, effective communication with patients is key to achieving successful health outcomes. On that note, Pierce appreciates UNLV professor Dr. Mark Guadagnoli for teaching him about primacy and recency effects, a principle that explains how people tend to only remember the first and last items on a list, forgetting most of the middle information. On the other hand, by adding humor or emotion to the information in the middle, a person is better able to recall that area of the list.

Tell us about a moment in your career or during your time as a student when someone showed you unexpected kindness. How do you pay it forward today?

During my time at UNLV, I took a course from Dr. Mark Guadagnoli about the science behind how the brain learns and retains information. One particular lecture was about the primacy and recency effect, which basically explains how a person retains information from the beginning and end of a list, whereas the middle information tends to get blurred or forgotten. If there is emotion or special meaning, however, placed on the middle items, they can be recalled better.

I'll never forget one of Dr. Guadagnoli’s examples. He drew a timeline and explained the primacy and recency effects, then in the middle of the line he made a mark and placed the word ‘platypus’ there. As the creature and the word are unique (and funny), it stood out in my mind and I still recall the lesson today. The emotion of humor in the word ‘platypus’ helped the recall.

I used this information to keep my study time effective in medical school and I still use it today when I teach my patients how to improve their health. I try to add emotion to the topic with silly analogies to make sometimes complex biological processes easier to understand. I know Dr. Guadagnoli was probably just doing his job when he taught the primacy and recency effect, but I see it as an act of kindness I’ve been able to pass along to thousands of patients to help them improve their lives.
Caroline Ciocca moved to Las Vegas from Massachusetts in 1994 and worked for some of the state’s most highly regarded enterprises, including The Rogich Communications Group. There, Ciocca gained valuable experience in a supportive role handling PR and marketing for political candidates, businesses and nonprofits. In 2002, she successfully led the Nature Conservancy’s fundraising campaign for Question 1: The Nevada Clean Water, Parks and Wildlife Bond, and helped generate $200 million in support of natural and cultural resources across the state.

Ciocca is currently the CEO of Make-A-Wish Southern Nevada. Prior to that role, she was the director of corporate citizenship for Cash America, Inc., where her efforts contributed to the company’s ability to expand its nonprofit reach to more than 25 organizations. She also has five years of experience as the Executive Director of Aid for AIDS of Nevada, the state’s largest HIV/AIDS service organization.

She is a 2004 graduate of Leadership Las Vegas and earned her MBA from UNLV in 2007. Ciocca is also an active, engaged alumna of Lee Business School.

Tell us about a moment in your career or during your time as a student when someone showed you unexpected kindness. How do you pay it forward today?

Las Vegas has always been kind to me. I immediately felt a sense of belonging, so it didn’t take long for Las Vegas to become my home. At the time I thought it was luck, but now I know it was a little more than luck landing a job with The Rogich Communications Group. It was a job that changed my life forever. My experience wasn’t extensive, but Sig Rogich saw potential in me and gave me a chance. That chance was an act of kindness that put me on an incredible career track. To this day, I still reflect on that experience; it played a huge role in shaping who I am today.

Dedicating my career to the social sector is my way of blending business with impact. People innately want to help others, so the most important thing we can do is ask for help and search for ways to serve others. I love to inspire people to get involved, help people find a path to make a difference, and celebrate acts of kindness — big and small — each day. I pay it forward by dedicating my career to making a difference in the social sector. It’s rewarding, challenging, and meaningful work that makes people’s lives better.
Charles Bernick, MD, MPH, is the associate medical director for the Cleveland Clinic Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health. Dr. Bernick has been involved in the field of Alzheimer’s disease research and treatment for nearly 20 years, beginning as the attending neurologist for the University of California, Davis Alzheimer’s Disease Diagnostic and Treatment Center.

Dr. Bernick moved to Las Vegas in 1994 to join the University of Nevada School of Medicine. Since that time, he has directed the development of a statewide network of Alzheimer’s disease care. In 2009, he joined the Cleveland Clinic Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health and guided the Professional Fighters Brain Health study, which is aimed at understanding the effects of cumulative head trauma on brain structure and function.

Dr. Bernick thanks Dr. Leon Thal, a leading Alzheimer’s researcher and physician for playing a big role in initiating Southern Nevada’s involvement in Alzheimer’s research. The assistance put Nevada on the Alzheimer’s research map, so to speak.

He graduated summa cum laude from Rice University with a bachelor of arts in history. He received his MD from University of Texas Southwestern, being elected to the medical honor society, Alpha Omega Alpha. Dr. Bernick completed a neurology residency at the University of Miami, followed by a fellowship in neurology at the University of Arizona, and a Masters of Public Health at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Tell us about a moment in your career or during your time as a student when someone showed you unexpected kindness. How do you pay it forward today?

During my career, many individuals helped me without expecting a favor in return. Dr. Leon Thal was one of those people, and he also proved to be one of the most influential professionals in my life.

I moved to Las Vegas in 1994 with the goal to develop a statewide system of Alzheimer’s disease care and research. Offering patients the opportunity to participate in clinical trials testing the newest medications is critical to creating a top Alzheimer’s center. But how does a fledgling program in Las Vegas get into the game?

While at a regional medical meeting, I attended a presentation by Dr. Thal, known for his Alzheimer’s therapeutics work and the principal investigator of the Alzheimer’s disease Cooperative Study (ADCS), a group of the 40 top Alzheimer’s centers. I approached him after his talk, introducing myself and our center, and made a pitch for including Las Vegas in a new research trial. Encouraged by his graciousness, I was even more surprised when a call came from his staff the following week welcoming us to the trial!

From there, we gradually built our research program. Dr. Thal didn’t need to give a nascent program this opportunity, but he did. It also impressed me how the Las Vegas community embraced medical research. The greatest limitation in determining if an Alzheimer’s medication works is the time it takes to find study participants. Our program’s success is closely tied to the willingness of Las Vegans to join these important projects – and of course, in my humble view, it’s also tied to a selfless world-class physician who didn’t think twice about giving Las Vegas a seat at the Alzheimer’s research table.
Dr. Ashley Hoban opened her own practice, Summerlin Pediatric Dentistry, shortly after graduation from residency in 2011, at a time when the local and national economy battled the headwinds of the Great Recession. It took the young professional little time to grow her business and establish herself as a leader in her field. Dr. Hoban prides herself in working with other specialties and disciplines to provide the best care for her patients.

She also returned to UNLV School of Dental Medicine in 2011 as an associate professor on a part-time faculty appointment. She provides lectures to pre- and post-doctoral dental students and leads shadowing opportunities that enable students to observe the real inner workings of a growing, successful dental practice. She helps pediatric dental residents prepare for their written board exams and has volunteered during the Give Kids a Smile event, which is hosted at the school.

Dr. Hoban also serves on the board of directors for Families for Effective Autism Treatment of Southern Nevada and has dedicated her practice to improving dental care for all children, especially those with special health care needs. She earned Incisal Edge magazine’s 40 under 40 accolade in 2016, serves as the Nevada Trustee for the Western Society of Pediatric Dentistry, and was past president of the Nevada Academy of Pediatric Dentistry. Board certified by the American Board of Pediatric Dentistry, Dr. Hoban is a fellow of the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry.

**Tell us about a moment in your career or during your time as a student when someone showed you unexpected kindness. How do you pay it forward today?**

I have a great family friend, Dr. Ben Maze, who is also a dentist. He took me under his wing as soon as I decided I wanted to go to dental school. He would use his connections to allow me to shadow private practitioners early on while I was still applying to dental school. He has been supportive and encouraging every step of the way. His guidance helped to cultivate my passion for dentistry and instilled a drive in me to help others. I strive to make him proud every day.

I try to pay this mentorship forward by encouraging anyone I know who is interested in health care to consider pediatric dentistry. Knowing first-hand what it’s like to be a student applying to dental school and looking for valuable experiences, I also allow students and residents to shadow in my office. This gives me the opportunity to hear from them one-on-one and learn about their hopes and dreams. And then I try to assure them that following their dreams and passions is the right thing to do.
Wayne Nunnely spent 36 years coaching football, 17 of which were at NFL level. He retired from coaching in 2012 after three separate stints as defensive line coach for the New Orleans Saints (two seasons), San Diego Chargers (12 seasons), and Denver Broncos (three seasons).

His defensive lines have contributed to seven seasons ranked among the league’s top seven clubs for the fewest rushing yards per game allowed—including earning the distinction of being number one in the league for fewest rushing yards allowed in 1998 and 2005 while with the Chargers. In 1998 the Chargers tied the then NFL single season record for fewest yards per carry at 2.7 yards.

Nunnely began his coaching career as a graduate assistant for UNLV in 1976 and returned to coach at the university from 1982 to 1989, serving as head coach from 1986 to 1989. He also coached at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona; CSU, Fullerton; University of the Pacific; USC and UCLA. At UNLV he was the first African-American head coach on the West Coast and only the fifth in NCAA Division 1-A history. He holds the distinction as the only UNLV head coach to have been a player, graduate assistant, and assistant coach for the program.

Nunnely credits former UNLV football coach, Bill Ireland, for giving him the opportunity to earn a degree from UNLV and for guiding him through early coaching experiences.

**Tell us about a moment in your career or during your time as a student when someone showed you unexpected kindness. How do you pay it forward today?**

The genesis of any storied career almost always coincides with one’s first big break. For me that happened to be the day I met Bill Ireland. UNLV’s first head football coach and eventual athletic director recruited me out of Citrus Junior College in 1971. This was just the beginning of a long and loving relationship that would span well beyond my playing career at UNLV.

Ireland gave me a football scholarship that would not only take me away from the familiar surroundings of Southern California but would later propel me to a prolific coaching career within the college and professional football ranks. Bill Ireland was more than just my coach. He was a friend, a mentor, and most importantly someone who believed in me. Even after I was done playing football, Ireland showed his continued support and belief in me by getting me an academic scholarship so I could complete my degree.

After receiving my degree I continued my involvement with the Rebels football program as a graduate assistant, running backs coach, and head coach. Ireland was a major contributing factor to my development as both a coach and a man. I will always be thankful for the opportunity he gave me and have done my best to pay it forward. It has been an honor to contribute to both my college and high school alma maters in hopes of providing the same academic opportunity that was given to me by Ireland. Ireland inspired me to mentor dozens of young coaches hoping to move up the football ranks just as I did so long ago. I hope that they too will take the lessons I learned from Ireland and pay it forward to future generations of coaches and athletes.
Mike Maier is an IT executive/consultant with more than three decades of domestic and international professional experiences. He thrives on solving and architecting the “Fusion & Transformation of People + Process + Technology”. His experiences have ranged from traditional systems integration and delivery, research and development, to leading-edge solutions spanning various business and government sectors.

While working with Bechtel at the Nevada Test Site in the late 90s and at the Hanford Waste Treatment Plant project in Washington state from 2001 to 2006, Maier was an early innovator building technology solutions to improve business operations, as well as defining an “information-enabled/connected construction site” vision. Later, with the company VMware, Inc., he drove a virtual research and development team evaluating hardware platform configurations for VMware’s early cloud computing efforts.

More recently, he held the position of assistant vice president/director with Tech Mahindra (Americas), a part of the Mahindra Group, (an Indian multinational conglomerate). Maier was a technical thought leader driving innovative infrastructure solutions, including Mahindra’s SMART Cities and IoT solutions and services. He continues to collaborate on a wide range of high-tech initiatives, with an emphasis on those that affect Nevada’s economic diversification.

Maier is heavily engaged within the local technology and education communities. He was a founding committee member for the UNLV Technology Assessment Committee, co-founder for the Southern Nevada Chapter of the National Defense Industry Association, and the first honorary board director for the Technology Business Alliance of Nevada. He is a UNLV College of Engineering Dean’s Advisory Board member and past president of the UNLV College of Engineering Alumni chapter.

As a non-traditional student who struggled academically, Maier thanks several UNLV professors who helped him shape his career vision.

Tell us about a moment in your career or during your time as a student when someone showed you unexpected kindness. How do you pay it forward today?

As an “o’Missour’a farm boy”, I never dreamt that I would be fortunate enough to be where I am today – I have many to thank. As a non-traditional student, a USAF Vietnam-era veteran, I struggled with some of my studies and wouldn’t have finished my degree if not for the extra encouragement and frank advice from three of my UNLV computer science professors, Professors John Werth, Steve Sherman, and Evangelos Yfantis, who saw and believed in my potential.

As my professional journey grew, I was blessed with several mentors and coaches, Chuck Aquilina, Bill Donahoe, Bob Phillips, and Lt. Col. C. Lee Carpenter (USAF Retired), along the way. They too saw and believed in my potential to do more. In turn, I was privileged and honored to mentor and coach several high-potential young and upcoming employees that went on to see their own successes. I pay it forward by sharing my philosophy for success - I called it “Fusion & Transformation of People + Process + Technology”. 
Michael Del Gatto earned a Bachelor’s degree in Architecture from UNLV in 1996 and a Master’s degree in the same discipline in 1999. During his graduate work, he studied abroad in Italy and Greece. After establishing himself professionally, Del Gatto received the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Nevada Young Architect Citation in 2006 and the AIA Western Mountain Region Young Architect Award in 2008.

He has been a principal of Carpenter Sellers Del Gatto Architects since 2005. Some of his recognizable projects include: UNLV Hospitality Hall, the Zappos headquarters, Andre Agassi College Preparatory Academy, Parkdale Community Center, Nevada State College Liberal Arts and Sciences Building, along with nearly 400 projects for the University of Phoenix across the U.S.

As a leader of a reputable architectural firm, Del Gatto looks to his past experiences with fellow principal, Rick Sellers, to guide how he nurture the firm’s young talent.

Since graduation, Del Gatto has remained involved with the UNLV School of Architecture in an advisory capacity for curriculum, initiatives, accreditation and a director search. He currently serves on the Architecture School Committee for the AIA Nevada Chapter.

Tell us about a moment in your career or during your time as a student when someone showed you unexpected kindness. How do you pay it forward today?

While I was a student at UNLV, Rick Sellers agreed to be my mentor. We fostered a relationship and he provided me with valuable guidance throughout my formative years in the profession. A couple of years later, I accepted a position with his company and in 2005 he gave me the opportunity to become a partner. I take seriously my responsibility to pay his mentorship forward with all of the students and young professionals I meet.
Michael Gordon came to Las Vegas from Cape Town, South Africa in September 2006 on a Rotary International Ambassadorial scholarship. He received both his LL.B. (bachelor’s degree) and LL.M. (master’s degree) in Private Law from the University of South Africa, then earned his Master of Public Administration in 2008, then his Ph.D. in Public Affairs.

During his time as a student, Gordon served three terms as president of the Graduate and Professional Student Association (GPSA) as well as one term as chair of the Nevada Student Alliance, the overarching student government association for all NSHE student government organizations representing the more than 105,000+ higher education students in Nevada.

As a policy analyst at UNLV he researched and analyzed the academic infrastructure needs of the university while serving on the Faculty Senate, University Policy Committee and the Top Tier Community Engagement subcommittee.

Gordon recalls the warm welcome he received from both the local Rotary Club as well as UNLV officials when he arrived from South Africa in 2006.

He is also a graduate of the Leadership Las Vegas Class of 2012 and serves on the boards of The Salvation Army of Southern Nevada, the Boy Scouts Las Vegas Area Council, Beacon Academy of Nevada as well as the Rotary Club of Las Vegas.

Why I’m a proud graduate of UNLV

Almost everyone at UNLV showed me kindness in some form or fashion. It started even before I arrived with the Rotary Club of Las Vegas providing a scholarship to study in the United States. I had trouble getting my acceptance letter for my visa and former UNLV President (and Rotary member) Pat Goodall helped that process along – and I was greeted at the airport by Pat Carlton, who would later serve on my dissertation committee. How many students can say that their academic advisor welcomed them to the country?

I arrived in September and had already missed several weeks of classes, but during that first week Janine Barrett at the Graduate College was extremely patient and answered numerous questions from a scared international student. Lee Bernick, then chair of the Department of Public Administration, made sure that I hit the ground running and had the support to succeed academically. My concerns about living on campus were mollified after speaking to Chrisy Grubb and moving into Tonopah residence hall, where I was greeted by “cool beans” Stan Dura. Finally, my first week was complete when Risha Gaitor offered me a job at the SU front desk. That job forced me to learn anything and everything about UNLV in double time!

Nowadays, our Rotary Club continues this proud tradition of working closely with the university. Every year, we provide the Tiberti scholarship to an engineering student; in partnership with UNLV Athletics, we entertain 350+ children on Santa Clothes day and help identify Honors College students for graduate international scholarships.
Paul Moradkhan serves as the Vice President of Government Affairs for the Las Vegas Metro Chamber of Commerce, the largest and most diverse business organization in Nevada, representing thousands of employers and employees. Moradkhan oversees the chamber’s legislative advocacy and public policy efforts at the local, state and federal levels of government and is responsible for driving initiatives to protect and strengthen Southern Nevada’s economy, create jobs and build a strong and competitive workforce for the future.

He previously served as Director of Government Affairs for the chamber, where he was the primary liaison at the local government level and worked closely to develop and implement strategies to advance the policy priorities for Southern Nevada’s business community. Prior to joining the chamber in 2010, Moradkhan was the Senior Corps Project Director for Catholic Charities of Southern Nevada. He began his career in public policy by working for a member of Congress from Southern Nevada.

After graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in English in 2003 from UNLV, Moradkhan received his Master’s in Public Policy from Pepperdine University in 2005. He also serves on several boards for various community organizations such as the College of Southern Nevada Institutional Advisory Council, UNLV Alumni Association Board of Directors, Clark County School District School-Community Partnership Program and JAG Nevada Board of Directors.

Moradkhan credits several professors who took special interest in his academic pursuits and career for igniting in him a drive to remain involved with UNLV and mentor others who are new to his field.

**Tell us about a moment in your career or during your time as a student when someone showed you unexpected kindness. How do you pay it forward today?**

I think it’s a collection of moments that have helped shaped who I am. It was always because of someone either taking an interest in either my education at UNLV, or my career. None of those people had to do that, but they did, and I have always remembered those kind gestures.

Dr. Len Zane gave me a great opportunity by admitting me into the Honors College. Dean Martha Watson was the person who encouraged me to look at public policy schools for my graduate studies and it was Dr. Rebecca Mills who supported my development as a student leader at UNLV.

These people and the experiences I had with them are the reason I support the UNLV Foundation, work with student leaders and try to help young professionals starting off their careers in government affairs. It is important to support others and show kindness whenever you can. A simple act of kindness can change a person’s day and then it can change their life.
David D. Ross brings more than 30 years of executive-level leadership in the gaming industry, an industry in which several other family members have enjoyed prosperous careers. His father, Thomas, is a casino executive and Ross followed in his footsteps. His wife, Patricia, oversees the Michael J. Gaughan Airports Slots Concession. Recently, Ross’ daughter, Rebecca, graduated from the UNLV hospitality program and is currently working at South Point as she embarks on her own career in the industry.

Prior to his current position as Chief Executive Officer of Gaming Asset Management Advisors LLC, a management and gaming asset consultancy, Mr. Ross served as Chief Executive Officer and Director of Affinity Gaming from 2011 to 2014. He previously served as the Chief Operating Officer – Gaming and as a member of the Office of the Chief Executive Officer for Herbst Gaming Inc., a predecessor of Affinity Gaming.

Before joining Herbst Gaming Inc. in May 2009, Ross spent 25 years with Coast Casinos, now a division of Boyd Gaming Corp., serving in a variety of management positions. Most recently he served as Coast Casinos’ Chief Operating Officer from 2004-2008.

Ross earned a Bachelor of Arts in Business Management and a Master of Arts in Hotel Administration from UNLV. He joined the Foundation Board of Trustees in 2013 and currently serves as second vice chairman and is also on the finance committee. He continues to give back to UNLV in numerous ways, Ross thanks casino mogul Michael Gaughan, his first boss in the industry, for setting a great example when it comes to community involvement and giving back to others.

Tell us about a moment in your career or during your time as a student when someone showed you unexpected kindness. How do you pay it forward today?

I was not the typical student. Before I earned my bachelor’s, I entered the workforce and began a career in the gaming industry with Coast Casinos under Michael Gaughan and Frank Toti, my two mentors. Gaughan, who was Coast’s chairman and Chief Executive Officer, had previously taught casino management at UNLV and was a founding member of the UNLV Foundation Board of Trustees. I learned so much from him, and not just about how to be successful in the gaming industry, but also how giving back is very much a part of success in this sophisticated, dynamic industry.

After receiving my bachelor’s degree from UNLV, I pursued my graduate degree, but also felt driven to give back to my alma mater. I co-taught casino management with Leo Lewis while attending graduate school. Along the way I also served on the UNLV Gaming Advisory Board, under the late Shannon Bybee.

Upon receiving my Master’s in Hotel Administration, I again wanted to give back to UNLV. I was honored to be nominated to the UNLV Foundation Board of Trustees. I continue to serve in this role and proudly donate my time and make financial contributions to support UNLV and our students. In more than three decades in the casino industry, I have had the privilege of being the COO of Coast Casinos and later CEO of Affinity Gaming. Those companies have extended many intern opportunities to UNLV students and more importantly actively recruited and hired UNLV graduates.

From my perspective, since there are more than 100,000 UNLV alumni; if each of us can give back in some form, we ensure that UNLV continues to be a successful institution for this great community.
For the past 15 years, Brenda Weksler has been a Las Vegas Assistant Federal Public Defender in the trial unit, representing indigent clients. She formerly clerked for the Honorable Kathy Hardcastle at the Eighth Judicial District Court. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in English from UNLV, with a Minor in Philosophy.

Born in Buenos Aires, she moved to Las Vegas when she was 14 years old. Her years at Boyd School of Law, along with her years as an undergraduate at UNLV, instilled in her the need to help those who are less fortunate, she says.

She also mentors students through programs such as Huellas, designed for Boyd Law School’s La Voz program. In 2017, she was named Nevada’s Federal Public Defender of the Year. Weksler also received the Boyd School of Law Alumni Leadership Award and the National Association Criminal Justice Karen Winkler Dedicated Service Award in 2016.

**Tell us about a moment in your career or during your time as a student when someone showed you unexpected kindness. How do you pay it forward today?**

I was very fortunate to have been raised in a household full of love and encouragement. While my parents always told me I could accomplish anything I set my mind to, I never truly believed them because...well, loving parents lack objectivity. And, frankly, I have always had a tendency to doubt my abilities.

My undergraduate work at UNLV and my days at Boyd Law School would be the time when my parents’ deep-seated beliefs about me would be tested. I particularly remember Professor Gajowski and Professor Rosenberg, William Shakespeare and Virginia Woolf scholars respectively, who pushed me to test my abilities and rewarded the results. Frank Durand, Professor Aldana, Professor Pollman, and many others, picked up the baton at Boyd and continued encouraging my growth and development. They instilled in me the importance of giving back to my community and helping those who will come after me.

Much of the confidence I needed came from professors who, along the way, were willing to engage in conversations that left me with a renewed sense of what I could accomplish. I know there are many individuals who have not been as fortunate as I have been either because they lacked the guidance or the emotional support. It is up to those of us who have benefited from this mentorship to provide it to those who come after us. It is our responsibility to mentor others and instill confidence in them by pointing out the way in which they shine.
As president of JBH LINK in Las Vegas, Jeanne Hamrick works with organizations of various sizes to assess, advise and assist in the implementation of long-term development planning, capital campaigns as well as philanthropic and major gift counsel and coaching.

A life-long Nevadan who was born and raised in Las Vegas, she graduated from Bishop Gorman High School prior to attending UNLV, where she earned a Bachelor’s in Psychology and a Master’s in Counseling and Educational Psychology. For several years, she utilized her skills working for the State of Nevada, counseling adolescents and adults through an in-patient and special needs independent living project.

With her background in counseling, Hamrick developed a strong understanding for how to bring people together to work towards a common cause. She has achieved tremendous and measurable results for organizations both large and small. Hamrick maintains a diverse client base and has worked with organizations like Nevada Public Radio, Make-a-Wish Southern Nevada, the Animal Foundation, UNLV Football Foundation, Las Vegas Academy and Opportunity Village.

Following graduation from UNLV, Hamrick remained active with the university in various volunteer roles, including working on the inaugural TEDxUNLV event, and for the past 15 years as part of the College of Liberal Arts Advisory Board, of which she now serves as chair.

In addition to her love and support of education, Hamrick and her dog Ace visit numerous facilities as a nationally certified Pet Partners therapy team.

Deeply committed to her community she has been involved with campaigns that have raised over $100 million for various organizations and their projects over the course of her career. One of her more notable campaigns was the successful completion of a $52 million capital campaign for the relocation and development of a new campus for Bishop Gorman High School in Las Vegas. Throughout her life she has been supported by her husband of 35 years, Don, and their three wonderful children.

Tell us about a moment in your career or during your time as a student when someone showed you unexpected kindness. How do you pay it forward today?

When I was a student in high school, I had a speech and debate teacher and coach named Bob Forbuss who encouraged me to join the debate club. Bob went to great lengths not only to encourage me to have big goals but he also helped me develop my skills. And he always went out of his way to make sure those of us who could not afford to travel to debate activities had the scholarship monies we needed so that we could participate. This was one of many acts of kindness he extended to everyone he touched.

Bob not only made a lasting impression on me but left a lasting legacy on so many young people in our community. His enthusiasm and dedication to all of his students is part of the reason I was inspired to enter counseling. Whether it’s through my professional or community work, I like to think I pay his kindness forward whenever I spend time mentoring young people.
Maileen G. Ulep
BS Nursing ’09,
MS Family Nurse Practitioner ’15,
MS Nursing Education ’16
SCHOOL OF NURSING
ALUMNA OF THE YEAR

Maileen Ulep is a nationally board-certified family nurse practitioner whose experience encompasses both inpatient and outpatient settings; health policy at the local, state, and national levels; health care missions; and nursing education. She is committed to delivering patient-centered and evidence-based care.

She was appointed to the Cognitive Disorders Clinic at the Cleveland Clinic Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health in 2016 and specializes in memory loss, early-onset dementia, frontotemporal degeneration, Lewy body disease, Parkinson’s dementia, and Alzheimer’s disease.

Ulep co-founded the Western Regional Advanced Practice Nurses Network (WRAPNN) in 2017, an organization that focuses on education, leadership, and collegiality. She was also the lead author of Alzheimer Disease, which was selected as a continuing education article in the 2018 dementia issue of The Journal for Nurse Practitioners, an official publication of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners (AANP). Former UNLV professor Patricia Alpert helped to guide and cultivate Ulep’s research interests once she had completed her master’s degree.

Ulep was also named a New Face of Healthcare in Southern Nevada by the Las Vegas Medical District in 2018 and was the recipient of the prestigious AANP 2018 Nurse Practitioner State Award for Excellence for Nevada. She graduated Cum Laude with her Bachelor of Science in Nursing with a Minor in Anthropology in 2009, Master of Science in Nursing – Family Nurse Practitioner in 2015, and post-master’s certificate in Nursing Education in 2016, all from UNLV, where she is currently pursuing a Ph.D.

Tell us about a moment in your career or during your time as a student when someone showed you unexpected kindness. How do you pay it forward today?

I will never forget one of my former professors at UNLV, Dr. Patricia Alpert. I was nearing my senior year during my master’s program and knew that I wanted to further my education but didn’t know how to make it happen as I was interested in integrating nursing, biomedicine, and anthropology. I felt that integrating these would help us better understand both the proximate and ultimate causes of disorders, which could help to better design preventative interventions.

Dr. Alpert spent a lot of time listening to my hopes, dreams, and research interests. She became a mentor to me. She provided guidance in making my academic and career goals a reality. That’s a big reason why I am here now, in a Ph.D. program, working to further this integrative approach.

Another passion of mine is advancing healthcare and our profession through health policy efforts. UNLV professors Dr. Susan VanBeuge and Sheryl Giordano, MSN, have been highly influential with this. I am truly thankful for their continued support and mentorship. One of the goals of the Western Regional Advanced Practice Nurses Network (WRAPNN), the nonprofit organization I co-founded with four other colleagues (all UNLV alumni), is to offer mentorship. I hope to offer the same mentorship as my former professors did, one student at a time. WRAPNN’s mission is to bring together a collaboration of advanced practice nurses (e.g., certified nurse specialists, midwives, and nurse practitioners) to share health related medical information, education, collegiality, mentorship, and advance goodwill in all disciplines among the Western Regions of the United States and the Pacific Islands.
Appointed Chief Scientist for Geography at the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) in 2006, Dr. Kenneth Bruce Jones’ career in the sciences is marked by numerous successes.

Dr. Jones is known for leadership in the fields of remote sensing, landscape ecology, biogeography and geographic information systems. One of his greatest successes involved showing New York officials that a $500 million investment in a filtration system to protect an upstate watershed would save New York City $7 billion. The work is one of the first instances where economic value was placed on services freely provided by ecosystems. He is currently involved in a NATO project assessing watershed conditions across Europe and Australia.

Dr. Jones credits Dr. Ted Allen, a professor and long-time friend, for his guidance during a difficult time during Jones’ undergraduate years. Allen’s insights and enthusiasm towards the sciences profoundly influenced the biologist.

Dr. Jones’ achievements have brought him recognition from the EPA, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Wildlife Society, and the International Statistical Institute.

Tell us about a moment in your career or during your time as a student when someone showed you unexpected kindness. How do you pay it forward today?

As an undergraduate student at Jacksonville University (JU), I had difficulty adjusting to college life and the demands one faces when leaving home for the first time. During the summer session in my sophomore year, I decided to play 3-on-3 basketball on a biology team. One of the professors on the team was Dr. Ted Allen, an ornithologist and former player on the Murray State University basketball team.

Ted took a liking to me almost immediately. He and I had several discussions about my struggles with some of the courses at JU. His tremendous enthusiasm for biology and natural history, and regular guidance and encouragement throughout my time at JU, had a huge impact on my life and career in biology. I have remained compassionate and enthusiastic about biology, natural history, and environmental conservation to this day. Ted, who turned 86 this year, remains a very close friend and father figure. I have used Ted as a role model throughout my career and life and have tried to show compassion and enthusiasm to those young people considering a career in biology. I continue to pay it forward by being involved in applied science and conservation societies.
Judy Tudor is a child welfare training specialist under the Nevada Partnership for Training grant, a partnership between UNLV, UNR, and the Division of Child and Family Services as well as local child welfare agencies across the state. Under the grant, Tudor and others provide education for new and existing child welfare workers in addition to conducting free trainings for community partners working with children and families.

An alumna of the Nevada foster care system herself, Tudor worked in child welfare in Las Vegas for five years providing direct services for foster care and adoptions, and another five years providing supervision over foster care and child protection units. She also managed various child welfare programs for 10 years and serves as a CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) volunteer for children navigating the foster care system. Tudor is also a member of the Foster Care Alumni of America.

Tudor recalls a specific act of kindness from a colleague named Ann who comforted her at a time shortly after a family member passed away. This generosity, Tudor says, influenced her work and how she navigates her work relationships.

She has taught UNLV undergraduate practicum classes and served as a field liaison for practicum students, and currently teaches a supervision in social work class for graduate students.

Tell us about a moment in your career or during your time as a student when someone showed you unexpected kindness. How do you pay it forward today?

I truly believe that I have been blessed by random acts of kindness on a daily basis, so coming up with one was very difficult. However, one that truly stands out to me was during a difficult time when I was caring for my stepfather who had recently been placed in hospice care.

I got the call that he passed away one morning when I was at work. I saw a colleague, named Ann, who could tell I was distraught and immediately dropped everything and offered to drive me to the care center. She stayed with me just holding my hand and comforting me throughout the whole day as I grieved the loss of my stepfather.

Her sacrifice to support me through this difficult moment was something I have never forgotten. As a result of Ann’s kindness, I try to focus on people and not tasks. I am sure she had other plans that day, but she dropped everything to be there for me in my time of need. I have tried to emulate this kindness with others by being aware of their needs and willing to provide whatever they need in that moment.
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