Summer 2017 Newsletter

Gaming leader adds to strong support of think tanks at UNLV

MGM Resorts International added to its ongoing support of key UNLV programs this year by establishing a think tank that will seek bipartisan solutions to a range of economic, social, and political issues.

The MGM Resorts Public Policy Institute will be housed in UNLV’s School of Public Policy and Leadership in the Greenspun College of Urban Affairs, and is already drawing national attention. Co-chaired by former Sen. Harry Reid, D-NV, and former Rep. John Boehner, R-OH, the public policy institute will focus on wide-ranging, substantive, and relevant national and international policy issues that impact the travel, tourism, hospitality, and gaming industries, and the global communities in which they operate.

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License to learn
UNLV plates drive scholarships for Rebels

The UNLV license plates you see around town do more than shout out allegiance to the scarlet and gray. They also support students: $25 of each new license fee, and $20 per renewal, gets routed to UNLV scholarships.

The program is now in overdrive, thanks to alumnus Jon Cobain ’64. Through the end of 2017, Jon has pledged up to $100,000 to match all new license plate-generated scholarship contributions dollar-for-dollar.

The license plate program is fueling the aspirations of students like Mecca Walker, a May ’17 graduate and a recipient of the Child of Alumni Scholarship. With dual degrees — one in economics and a second in Spanish for the professions — Mecca is off to graduate school in pursuit of her MBA in international business.

“My UNLV experience helped me understand people better,” she reflects. “And this makes me a better student, a better citizen, and a better human.”

Her dad is UNLV alumnus and professor Kirk A. Talib-Deen, who received both his bachelor of arts and master of arts degrees from UNLV. He is working towards a Ph.D. from the College of Education.

The idea to create specialty plates that benefit students came from Fred C. Albrecht, ’71 M.Ed. Albrecht worked closely with UNLV athletics staff member Sheila Strike and the Nevada Highway Patrol to push the bill through the legislature, and it passed in 1993.

The Nevada DMV began printing plates later that year.

Book an appointment to get your plates: dmnv.com/dashpass

MGM Resorts and UNLV launch new policy institute

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“I’m excited about the possibilities the Institute offers to proactively explore issues and develop bipartisan policy solutions – especially on topics that matter to our workforce, our communities, and the industries in which we play a leading role,” says Jim Murren, chairman and CEO of MGM Resorts International.

“I’m pleased to have a partnership with UNLV, a leading academic and research institution, and am deeply honored to have the guidance and involvement of Senator Reid and Speaker Boehner.”

Work at the institute is expected to begin later this year.

The new project comes on top of MGM’s ongoing support of the UNLV partnership with Brookings Mountain West, which joined UNLV in 2009.

MGM pledged $1 million to support Brookings Mountain West, which has focused world-renowned scholars on the university, Las Vegas, and the mountain west region.

“MGM’s support is crucial to our efforts to bring accurate, independent data to public policy issues affecting our city, state, and region,” says Brookings Mountain West Director Rob Lang.

“Our work in diversifying the Nevada economy including health care policy concurrent with the launch of the new UNLV Medical School, our research on Interstate 11 and the multimodal modern transportation systems for the Las Vegas metro region, and studies on federal-state government relations are only a few examples of ongoing research made possible thanks to support from MGM,” Lang says.

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VISTA liberal arts award turns 30

For 30 years, the annual VISTA Group Outstanding Senior Award has been a celebration of exceptional achievement, leadership, and service. It is a testament to Michael and Sonja Saltman’s enduring support of the liberal arts.

The award shines a spotlight on the top undergraduate student in the College of Liberal Arts. This year’s recipient is history major Marie Reff, who was recognized at the college’s annual Honors Convocation on April 3. The award carries a $1,000 prize.

“Knowing that this is the VISTA award’s 30th anniversary makes it that much more special,” says Reff, an anthropology minor who graduated in May.

“To me the VISTA award is an affirmation of academic accomplishment and shows that good things come from hard work.”

Reff will use the funds to help defray the cost of graduate studies in writing for dramatic media at UNLV. After receiving an MFA, she plans to pursue a career as a screenwriter.

The award is funded by the Saltmans, longtime UNLV benefactors, and named for The VISTA Group, a real estate development company of which Michael Saltman is managing general partner and president.

The Saltmans’ generosity is evident across the UNLV campus. They are co-founders of the Saltman Center for Conflict Resolution in the William S. Boyd School of Law and contributors to the Angel Fund in the Law School and Department of Art in the College of Fine Arts. Their commitment to liberal arts is unwavering.

“Thirty years ago, we considered a strong liberal arts education as the lever to success, and we still do — even more so now with the tech world in full bloom,” says Michael Saltman, a long-standing member of the UNLV Foundation Board of Trustees and Law School Dean’s Council.

“Being able to read, write, and think are essential as we move into singularity and as UNLV works toward Top Tier status and beyond,” says Saltman.

Candidates for the VISTA award must have at least a 3.5 GPA, must have earned 50 percent of their academic credits at UNLV, and be nominated by a liberal arts faculty member.

Exceptional VISTA scholars from three decades

1988-89 / Lee Barnes / English
Lee Barnes teaches English and creative writing at the College of Southern Nevada. He earned an MFA in creative writing from Arizona State University. He has published nine books and more than 40 short stories. In 2009 Barnes was inducted into the Nevada Writers Hall of Fame, and in 2013 he received the Excellence in the Arts Award from the Vietnam Veterans of America.

1996-97 / Ioana Mondestucu / Philosophy
Ioana Mondestucu is an attorney with Leone & Alberts in Walnut Creek, Calif. Prior to coming to UNLV, she completed coursework in mechanical engineering at the Institute of Politehnica Bucharest. She earned a law degree at the University of San Francisco School of Law.

2004-05 / Zsolt Nagy / History
Zsolt Nagy is an assistant professor at the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota. He completed his doctorate at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. His research areas include modern European history, transnational studies, and cultural diplomacy.

History major Marie Reff is the 30th VISTA award recipient

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- Michael Saltman
Rebels and Las Vegas alike are abuzz about the planned Fertitta Football Complex, which will elevate Rebel football to a new level in recruiting, training, and performance. The two-level, 73,000-square-foot complex will cost approximately $26 million – and will be entirely funded through private donations.

Brothers Frank and Lorenzo Fertitta committed a record-setting $10 million for the project. Major gifts were also given by Findlay Toyota, Michael Gaughan, Rebel football letterman George Maloof, Jr., George Balaban, Bill and Bonnie Paulos, Bill and Bonnie Wortman, Kirk and Andrea Hendrick, Lawrence and Michelle Epstein, the Marretti family, and the Micatrotto family, among other generous donors – including an anonymous donor who made a $2 million gift. Another $1 million+ gift was given from the family trust of the late Geraldine K. Howard in honor of her late son, Dennis Lee Howard.

The state-of-the-art facility, which will be built centrally on campus, will feature an academic center, nutrition center, player locker room, player meeting rooms, coaches’ offices, team auditorium, and player lounge. The interior branding will feature elements of Las Vegas history.

Once construction starts, the complex is expected to be completed in 10-12 months.
What do you do after spending four years as an infantryman in the U.S. Marine Corps? When Kristian Que was discharged, he signed up for four years in the Army National Guard armored cavalry. So much for hard-earned rest. But Que is always up for a challenge, taking the rigorous path when he can because, he says, it’s the rewarding path.

A single father of two, Que moved to the United States from the Philippines at the age of seven. He graduated from the Lee Business School in December with dual degrees in economics and marketing. He earned his degrees with help from the Lee Scholars Program.

“With my savings dwindling and my GI Bill nearly exhausted, the Lee Scholars Program gave me the means to achieve my goals without having to choose between graduating or dropping out to provide for my family,” he says. But he had to face a lot of challenges head on to get to where he is today.

After his military service, Que entered the IT sector. But as he quickly rose up the ranks, he realized that he would need an academic degree to make headway. So it was time to go back to school.

“That first semester, I was at the math department every day for tutoring,” he says. It paid off: He got a 99 percent for his final grade. “But I don’t get good grades because I’m smart. I get them because I’m persistent. If I’m not a natural at something, I’ll work harder. So right then, I decided to dual major, adding marketing, which is on the more qualitative end of the business spectrum.”

These challenges have driven Que to great accomplishments. He received the Lee Scholarship two years in a row, an experience he says you can’t put a price on. Last year, Que, along with colleague Katelyn O’Hara, presented at UNLV’s Undergraduate Research Forum. With data generated from multiple disciplines – political science and history, among others – they used an economics model to determine the probability of a presidential assassination attempt.

“It was tough, because for instance, one variable was: Is there a war going on? Well, how do you define ‘war’?” he says. “But I wanted to show the versatility of economic formulas outside of economics.”

And he succeeded. The unique topic and unorthodox application of economic models won a cash prize – which Que unflinchingly donated back to the Lee Business School.

“UNLV has given me so many opportunities, I decided that I could give back as a way to show my gratitude,” he explains. “If it weren’t for the help and all of the opportunities I’d received, I wouldn’t have been in the position where I could compete at all.”

“When there’s no struggle, when there’s no obstacle, you’re not really growing or improving as a person. I like that process, so I apply it to every facet of my life.”