UNLV Magazine

Fall 2016

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FALL 2016

UNLV
Spirited Debate

Dajonai McLin, a freshman majoring in nursing, holds up some swag after a rally to raise campus awareness about the many presidential debate events on campus this fall. [Photo by Josh Hawkins/UNLV Photo Services]
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+ Two more tech leaders to watch
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At my annual State of the University address this fall, I shared some of the exciting changes taking place at the university. I also emphasized the unique attributes of UNLV: We’re different, daring, and diverse!

Of the 4,000 higher education institutions in the United States, only 200 are considered research universities and even fewer are at the level in stature and community impact to which we aspire. While we might be considered young by higher education standards, we are an emerging institution that is making a great impact on our community and in the lives of our students, faculty, and staff.

In these pages, you’ll find ample evidence of that — from the way our students are immersed in the process for electing our country’s next leader (page 28) to how our new medical school will be addressing social issues in our community (page 8). And certainly, the alumni featured beginning on page 40 are different, daring, and diverse. These are the types of UNLV stories that keep me passionate about my work. As a community, we have never followed the traditional path and have never been timid. Now more than ever is the time for UNLV to be bold and to act.

As a university, we will continue our transformation. We will:

- Become a school of choice in the region with a 40,000-student enrollment in the next decade.
- Reach a six-year graduation rate of 50 percent or more in alignment with the national average.
- Have more students recognized nationally through scholarship programs, awards, and learning opportunities.
- Enhance economic development activities that have been steadily growing over the last four years and form partnerships — like the one with the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority to host a 2016 Presidential Debate — that bring unparalleled opportunities to our campus.
- Expand faculty research opportunities and increase research expenditures to more than $120 million in the next decade.
- Grow total economic output to more than $4.5 billion per year, which is two and a half times more than our current activity.
- Expand the Academic Health Center, which includes the schools of Nursing, Dental Medicine, Medicine, and Allied and Community Health Sciences. This will lead to a pathway for more doctors and healthcare providers, increased economic impact, and enhanced healthcare for the community.

Over the past two years, my commitment and passion for this university has grown even stronger. We are at a pivotal time in our history and have created an environment where the possibilities are endless. I appreciate your continued support in helping us achieve our vision. Go Rebels!

Len Jessup
UNLV President
WELCOME TO COMMON GROUND.

Wherever you’re from, whatever you’re here for, no place brings a nation together like Las Vegas.

We welcome you to the 2016 Final Presidential Debate.

LET FREEDOM RING

October 19, 2016
“I worked with Virko on many occasions in the early to mid-80s, while he was rapidly bringing the university and the city up to speed on several fronts, sometimes almost singlehandedly. From the mind to the page, to the keyboard and the baton, it was a memorable experience.”

— George Skipworth of Eugene, Oregon, commenting on the UNLV News Center story “School of Music Says Goodbye to Longtime Professor with Special Concert.” Distinguished Professor Virko Baley retired from UNLV after 46 years.

“We moved our daughter in on Wednesday and from start to finish we were amazed at how wonderful the experience was. Even when we hit a couple snags, UNLV peeps stepped up and helped us manage it in a welcoming, efficient, and pleasant manner. Thank you, UNLV. You’ve confirmed that THIS is the place my daughter should be!”

— Karen Reyher of Elizabeth, Colorado, on the UNLV Facebook photo album from residence hall move-in day.

‘You’ve given me hope’

This letter was handed to members of UNLV’s Sanford I. Berman Debate Team — Tom Gliniecki, Matt Jallits, Jeff Horn, and Matt Gomez — as they ate at an Atlanta airport restaurant after a competition at Georgia State University. The writer paid for their meal. Their proud debate coach, Jacob Thompson, posted it on Facebook along with the message, “Some days you need a win, then your debate students show you a note that they got handed in an airport restaurant by a complete stranger (who also paid for their dinner) ... I’m so grateful for the way our debaters represent UNLV! Also, I may have gotten some dust in my eye.”

Poster Child

A Howard R. Hughes College of Engineering project to 3D print a hand for Hailey Dawson has turned the little girl into a star. Her mother posted this of her on Instagram (@haileys_hand) in front of UNLV’s advertising display at McCarran Airport. Since her story appeared in our fall 2014 issue, the Little League star has been invited to throw out the first pitch at games for the Rebels, the Las Vegas 51s, and the Baltimore Orioles. As Hailey has grown, the college has been tweaking its design. She sported the patriotic-themed hand for her trip to the White House Nation of Makers conference.

If you believe in a strong UNLV, you can help. Join us by making your Annual Fund gift today.

unlv.edu/foundation/give-online
Flashlight

Basin and Range Identity

National Park Service turns student photography into poster for Nevada’s newest national monument.

BY JASON SCAVONE

With 700,000 acres of practically untouched Nevada wilderness, you don’t so much visit Basin and Range National Monument as you supplicate to it. You have to approach with caution and planning. You have to respect the fact that it’s difficult to access. And once there, the land commands your full attention. Cell phone service? Visitor centers? It’s not that kind of park. But for your reward: unspoiled land stretching out to the horizon.

Where art instructor Checko Salgado saw virgin territory, he also saw opportunity. The terrain was so wild, so raw, it was begging to be photographed. He contacted the U.S. Bureau of Land Management to arrange a trip for his Photography for Graphic Designers class. The first venture in fall 2015 didn’t go smoothly despite planning — their van got stuck on the trip out — but for the 16 students who went, it left its mark.

Salgado invited students again in the spring 2016 semester, and tagging along was Matt Segundo. He had made the trip the previous semester before graduating in December 2015 with a bachelor’s degree in art. He was so struck by the area that he knew he had to return with the group of eight that made the second trip.

“I couldn’t wait to get back and produce more shots because the area was just beautiful, unforgiving, open, barren,” Segundo said. “This time it seemed more so. Once you get it the first time, it sparks your interest to go again.”

The photos Segundo and his classmates shot were exhibited at Archie C. Grant Hall. Representatives from the BLM drove down from Caliente to see it. The National Conservation Lands program, part of the BLM, wanted to use the shots to make posters to promote the monument.

“I took my cues from the [Works Progress Administration] posters in the mid-’30s. They were doing the Conservation Corps, and they’d go out and paint,” Salgado said. “We’re photographers. We’re going to do that same style but we’re going to bring in some modern technology, bring in some modern fonts.”

The experience has already paid off for Segundo. The posters became a key piece of his portfolio and helped him land a job with Salesforce in San Francisco.

Meanwhile, professor Salgado showed off the posters in September at an exhibit in the Russell Senate Building in Washington, D.C., to promote Nevada and the 100th anniversary of the National Parks Service. And he’s taking students out in mid-October for their next project. They will shoot from Alamo to Ash Springs to Lund and Ely to gather photos for a map made by the Outside Las Vegas Foundation to promote the area.

“A lot of people don’t know about the Basin and Range — it’s like a huge major piece of artwork.”
Biggest Threat to National Parks

BY KEYONNA SUMMERS

This year, America celebrates the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service (NPS), a federal program that protects the history and beauty locked within hundreds of nature trail and forest areas, and dozens of monuments, battlefields, and memorials. We asked UNLV resident expert on the subject — Scott Abella, an ecologist and life sciences professor — a few questions about what makes our parks so special.

Why is the anniversary of the NPS significant?

U.S. national parks were visited by more than 307 million people in 2015 and contribute $30 billion annually to the U.S. economy through visitor spending and job creation. They often form core areas around which conservation programs are built for natural resources critical to society — including freshwater supplies, clean air, and ocean coastlines. And we are increasingly recognizing how unique some of the natural features are in the “cultural” parks.

For example, we at UNLV are currently working on a project in Pecos National Historical Park near Santa Fe, New Mexico. This park conserves over 1,000 years of human history, including one of the most significant American Civil War battlefields in the West. The park also contains ponderosa pine forest grasslands rich in biodiversity, which we are working on maintaining and restoring. UNLV also is working on projects at Lake Mead National Recreation Area, Tuzigoot National Monument (Arizona), Glen Canyon National Recreation Area (Arizona-Utah), and Guadalupe Mountains National Park (Texas).

What has been the biggest conservation success?

There are numerous iconic examples, such as the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone and the largest dam removal project in the world to restore flow to the Elwha River in Olympic National Park, Washington. Many times parks receive little recognition for the substantial work they do in conserving natural features.

Locally, for example, many people are aware of Lake Mead in Lake Mead National Recreation Area and concerned over dropping water levels. However, at 1.2 million acres, most of the park is land, making it one of the largest, most intact landscapes in the entire Mojave Desert. The NPS has done extensive vegetation restoration projects and removed non-native plants to keep these habitats in good shape.

What is the biggest threat that has faced national parks over the years?

Increasingly we have realized that what goes on outside of national parks is just as much of a concern as what goes on inside. One example is that fish in lakes of Voyageurs National Park in Minnesota contain some of the highest concentrations of toxic mercury ever reported in the state. Factors like air pollution, the transport of non-native species into parks, alteration of rivers outside of parks, and climate change are all external threats facing parks.

What do you foresee as the biggest threat facing national parks in the next 100 years?

As an ecologist, I am concerned about climate change like many other people. However, I do not think it is actually the primary threat facing national parks. I am much more concerned about how invasion by non-native species and changes in fires will affect parks in the coming decades, perhaps in combination with effects from climate change. Unnaturally severe fires can instantaneously alter a park ecosystem for perhaps centuries. They are a different challenge than climate change, which at least allows some capacity for organisms to adapt.

Scott Abella is the author of Conserving America’s National Parks, a 200-page book of conservation stories, photos, and maps outlining the challenges facing NPS sites.
The Epidemic

The medical school is making sure its students address the social issues that affect health.

BY PAM UDALL

A July 27 National Public Radio story highlighted an issue the UNLV School of Medicine is determined to avoid: The lack of education on opioid addiction. The story pointed out how little time medical schools spend teaching addiction medicine — sometimes just a single lecture during a student’s first two years in school.

Meanwhile the use of prescription drugs has reached epidemic proportions in the U.S., where 80 percent of the world’s opioids are consumed. Per capita, Nevada has one of the highest rates of both prescription pain-killer sales and drug overdose deaths, according to a report from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “I think most people are surprised when they find out that the majority of those deaths are due to prescription drug abuse,” said Dr. Barbara Atkinson, founding dean of the medical school.

Addiction is one of five social issues the school is addressing through its teaching, research, and community outreach programs. The others are nutrition and obesity, mental and behavioral health, homelessness, and human trafficking — all of which can lead to significant medical conditions. The school mapped out its curriculum to ensure its future doctors “understand the intricate balance between using medicine to keep patients comfortable during severe pain episodes and the risk of long-term misuse and addiction,” Atkinson said.

It can be a tricky balance — something Atkinson knows from her own experience after knee replacement surgery and its painful recovery process. Wary of the dangers of pain medication, she tapered off her prescription quickly, a little too quickly. “My surgeon helped me understand the importance of taking enough medicine to restore full range of movement,” she said. But he also guided her on the early signs of dependency on the medication. “I was able to complete physical therapy, but still I didn’t quit taking my pain medication for about six weeks.”

Managing pain medication is even harder for individuals whose pain isn’t associated with short-term healing, she noted. Chronic pain due to back injury, cancer, and other diseases is the hardest to control. When prescription drugs are used outside of recommended usages or over long periods, serious side effects can include physical dependency, the need for increasing dosages to achieve the same effect, and increased sensitivity to pain.

“Unlike the medical student highlighted in that NPR story, our students will get much more than a few hours of lectures on pain management and addiction,” she said. “We designed our comprehensive four-year curriculum to ensure our students recognize addiction, prescribe the right amount of pain medication for their patients, and manage their patients’ pain treatment.”
From cutting-edge research in soft robotics and water reuse, to inventions that will make staying healthier, easier, UNLV engineering faculty and students are making a difference.
In August, Connor Fields, a Lee Business School student, made history at the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro by winning the United States’ first gold medal in BMX. A few things we learned about him:

He’s independent: Fields grew up in Henderson and started competing locally as a teen after his mother found a flier at a bike shop advertising one of the local tracks. “I like that BMX is an individual sport. I was always really competitive as a kid and I would get mad at the kids on my teams because they wouldn’t be playing as hard as me.”

He’s had setbacks: He competed in the 2012 Games in London as the top seed. “I was expected to medal or win, but I had a bad event and placed seventh. It took a long time to get over that.”

In March, a broken wrist nearly quashed his Olympic dreams again. “It was a crazy four months of not knowing if I was going to be chosen or healthy enough to compete, form-wise. Ultimately, I qualified to make the team by discretionary nomination. I ended up at the Olympics with only two months of training camp.”

He’s not retiring: Fields plans to compete again in the Tokyo Games in 2020, when he’ll be 27. “Late 20s is when it starts to go downhill — not so much because of the physical side of BMX, but typically near that time there are other priorities to consider.”

Studying is a break: Training entails three to six hours a day, five days a week. Plus, he said, he has to schedule in stretching, appointments with chiropractors and massage therapists, and even time to rest. “My life is approximately 90 percent about BMX and so when I go to class, I’m doing something else with my brain. It gives me a chance to think about something different, learn something, and meet new people. I don’t love studying — I don’t think anybody’s going to be excited about that — but I think it’s important to have balance in your life.”

He’s building a brand: “As an athlete, you have to create a brand and image, and market and manage yourself. I’ve incorporated myself, so I have to deal with contracts and negotiations, pay taxes, etc. It’s interesting to learn things in accounting, finance, and my other business classes and see the crossover into real-world experiences.”

Read the full interview: unlv.edu/news.
On display

Reducing the epic images of Edward Burtynsky down for this magazine seems a huge injustice. His works on the modern oil industry are massive and meant to engulf the viewer. More than 50 of his large-scale works now are on display at UNLV’s Barrick Museum in an exhibit organized by the Nevada Museum of Art in Reno. His works take us from the oil fields of Azerbaijan and the massive refineries of Canada to the gatherings of car aficionados at the Bonneville Salt Flats and the suburban housing developments of North Las Vegas. There his images provoke questions about the types of communities people choose to build, and human dependence on natural resources to meet the demands of our suburban infrastructure.

Go see it: The exhibit runs through Jan. 14. Burtynsky will deliver a University Forum lecture Nov. 2.

Morning talk, football return to KUNV

UNLV’s public radio station, KUNV 91.5 FM The Source, kicked off the new school year with new programming along with local news breaks from emerging UNLV journalists. “The Morning Lounge” with Steve and Kim brings you the best of jazz, funk, and soul along with insightful conversations with UNLV researchers, community leaders, and your favorite artists. Radio veteran Greg Magnusson now hosts middays, and John Nasshan takes you home weekday afternoons.

More local artists are coming to KUNV’s “Nightshift,” a nightly show of student programming. Hip-hop/jazz group The Lique is the first in a planned series of artists performing live in-studio for both over-the-air audio broadcast and, with the help of UNLV-TV, online video streaming.

UNLV football also returns to KUNV’s airwaves for the first time in more than a decade with student announcers calling every home game thanks to the guidance of local sports media personalities Jon Castagnino and Ron Futrell.

KUNV quadrupled the number of paid student internships this year with support from CSUN student government.

Listen: 915thesource.org

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THE THOMAS & MACK CENTER

UNLV'S PREMIER EVENT VENUE completed a $72.5 million expansion project this fall — just in time to host its first-ever presidential debate for the general election on Oct. 19. The facility is named after two prominent bankers, E. Parry Thomas (above right) and Jerome D. Mack (above left), who donated the original funds for the feasibility and land studies. Thomas passed away in August, see page 55.

- 31,419: The NBA scoring record broken by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar on April 5, 1984, against the Utah Jazz.
- 18,000: seats, which were upgraded along with rest-rooms, concession stands, and elevators.
- 850,000: guests attend events annually during the 100+ event days a year at the facility.
- #1 ranked university facility according to the trade journal Venues Today.
- 36,000: square feet and stunning views of the city in the addition called the Strip View Pavilion.
- 08.16.93: It took country legend Garth Brooks just under an hour to pack the arena for the first of three shows.
- 12.29.86: The largest crowd ever at the T&M saw UNLV beat Navy and its All-America center David Robinson, 104-79.
The T&M’s first event featured JERRY TARKANIAN’s Runnin’ Rebels defeating the University of Victoria, Canada. The T&M often is called the Shark Tank after the legendary coach.

FRANK SINATRA joined Rat Pack sidekick DEAN MARTIN and singer DIANA ROSS for the center’s grand opening ceremony.

Operatic tenor LUCIANO PAVAROTTI delivered the first classical music concert.

Inaugural game of the International Hockey League team LAS VEGAS THUNDER. The T&M also has been the home to the city’s Arena Football League teams.

The NBA ALL-STAR GAME takes place at the T&M, marking the first time the game was held in a city without an NBA franchise.

The inaugural NATIONAL CLEAN ENERGY SUMMIT brought political leaders together to the Cox Pavilion attached to the T&M.

The arena will play host to the final PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE for the 2016 presidential election.

$18,124,200 Highest grossing boxing event: Evander Holyfield vs. Lennox Lewis

17,771 Tickets sold by U2, the most for a concert in the arena’s history.
The Evil Hours is a gripping personal account of PTSD and its treatments, worthy of conversation for all of us.

BY JORGE LABRADOR

You don’t often see the word “biography” applied to an account of an illness. But no other word could get the scope of David J. Morris’ The Evil Hours: A Biography of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder quite right.

The 2015 book is an extensive chronicle of Morris’ own PTSD diagnosis and his experience navigating the state of modern trauma treatment. The work will resonate with those entrenched in dealing with the disorder, either directly themselves or as a caregiver, as well as those learning about it in depth for the first time.

Morris, the inaugural Eleanor Kagi Foundation Fellow in Literature and Medicine at UNLV’s Black Mountain Institute, was a Marine infantry officer in the 1990s. He later
author David Morris took this 2007 “war selfie” in Ramadi on what turned out to be his last assignment in Iraq as a war correspondent embedded with 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment. “I had been in an IED hit a few days before and was feeling a bit like I was living on borrowed time or like stolen time.”

worked in Iraq from 2004 to 2007 as an embedded war correspondent for Salon and the Virginia Quarterly Review. He returned to the United States after his third reporting trip to Iraq, following an improvised explosive device (IED) attack on his Humvee.

Morris writes that trauma “destroys the fabric of time. In normal time, you move from one moment to the next, sunrise to sunset, birth to death. After trauma, you may move in circles, find yourself being sucked backwards into an eddy, or bouncing about like a rubber ball from now to then and back again. August is June, June is December. What time is it? Guess again. In the traumatic universe, the basic laws of matter are suspended: ceiling fans can be helicopters, car exhaust can be mustard gas.”

Morris’ horrifying description of the moments following the detonation are matched only by the newly dreadful, haunting context of the day leading up to it. Traumatic time, he writes, “doesn’t just destroy the flow of the present into the future, it corrodes everything that came before, eating at moments and people from your previous life, until you can’t remember why any of them mattered.”

He recounts his initial PTSD experiences, which manifested about two years after returning to San Diego: sleeplessness, nightmares, and even panic induced by an unexpected portrayal of an IED attack in the film Iron Man.

Morris’ eventual PTSD diagnosis and experiences with health professionals who often did not understand PTSD — or the war — moved him toward writing what would become The Evil Hours. Along with his own story, Morris weaves in the condition’s surprisingly long-spanning history, piecing together the “biography” promised by the book’s title. “There are deep, intriguing connections between literature and medicine,” said Morris in an interview shortly ahead of his residency. “There are signifiers of what we would now call PTSD in the Iliad and Odyssey — that’s going back to the start of Western literature.”

Despite such references through time, PTSD didn’t enter the public awareness until the Vietnam War. Even as recently as World War I, “shell shocked” veterans were, at best, disregarded; at worst, subjected to electric shock therapy. But following Vietnam, returning soldiers campaigned to have the Veterans Administration (VA) recognize the condition. With recognition, came research. And then, treatments.

However, Morris said, the research — and the state of VA-preferred treatments — leaves much to be desired. Catch-all treatments often disregard the specific experiences of survivors. He also criticizes some research methods used to come up with the VA’s preferred treatments. For instance, a patient who doesn’t react well can be ejected from a study, and thus not counted in research samples, skewing results.

Prolonged exposure is one of the most widely used forms of therapy. This treatment asks the patient to recount the worst moments of the traumatic incident over and over again. For some, the treatment works by desensitizing individuals to the trauma experienced and reducing their fear and stress. For others, including Morris, the therapy exacerbates a patient’s symptoms.

Morris doesn’t back any generalized forms of treatment — in fact, he rejects the notion that any one thing could work for everyone — but he does cite some promising new research and studies individuals can explore. A few things that work for him: travel, yoga, and, uniquely, the haka dance, a traditional Maori dance originally performed by warriors.

The dance “allows people to honor the dead in a dramatic and emotionally resonant manner that provides a kind of closure and marks the passage from the realm of war to the realm of peace,” Morris writes. “In North America, we have no rituals governing the return of warriors from battle, nor do we have any traditions to guide survivors of trauma back into society.”

Morris’ journey is fascinating. And although some of his ultimate thoughts on the core nature of trauma are more philosophical than scientific, they set the tone for a conversation that society needs to have.

David J. Morris is the Black Mountain Institute’s Eleanor Kagi Foundation Fellow in Literature and Medicine. The foundation also supports UNLV programs for military and veterans at the Partnership for Research, Assessment, Counseling, Therapy, and Innovative Clinical Education (the PRACTICE), and the Women’s Research Institute of Nevada.
Program First

Runnin’ Rebel coach Marvin Menzies on the fast-break start to his UNLV career.

By Ched Whitney

When Marvin Menzies arrived in Las Vegas in April he was way behind, and he knew it. The search for the next Runnin’ Rebels coach had been tumultuous. The team had just three scholarship players and Menzies had to quickly assemble his new coaching staff.

Menzies, who had worked under household-name head coaches such as Rick Pitino and Lon Kruger, had himself built a winning program at New Mexico State. In his nine years in Las Cruces, he took the Aggies to five NCAA Tournaments.

So, why leave a successful program — his Aggies had won 26 of their past 28 conference games — for the uncertainty and the pressure of a fanbase yearning for a return to the prominence of the UNLV glory days? The answer is simple, he said: the potential.

At 54, Menzies is energetic and upbeat, qualities he knows Rebels fans want to see in their team’s style of play. “This is one of the few towns where if we win, people will come,” he said. “This is a basketball town. It’s a flagship program.

“The fan base is all part of the Rebels family.”

Menzies and his family — he and his wife, Tammy, have a son, a daughter, and a niece “who’s been with us forever” — had been keeping tabs on UNLV for quite a while. When Kruger took the job as the Rebels’ head coach in 2004, Menzies was one of his first hires. He and his wife loved Las Vegas their first time around.

When UNLV’s best post-Jerry Tarkanian team — Kruger’s 2007 squad — advanced to the Sweet 16 of the NCAA Tournament, it was with players Menzies had recruited. By that time, Menzies had moved on to Louisville, where he was an assistant to Pitino for three years, prior to taking the head job at New Mexico State.

This past spring, Kruger, Pitino, and San Diego State’s Steve Fisher, who gave Menzies his first Division I coaching position, were all vocal supporters during his UNLV courtship.

“I wanted to become a full-time head coach when I was hired by Steve Fisher at San Diego State,” Menzies said. “I like to think I’m a good listener, a good observer. I’ve tried to learn from some of the professionals I’ve worked for in my time.”

Early in his career, Menzies hadn’t really decided coaching was what he wanted in life. He has an economics degree from UCLA and a master’s degree from Sacramento State. He thought about starting a business — or maybe even going into politics.

Does he talk politics with his players? “I’m staying away from politics,” Menzies said, laughing. “I learned my lesson a long time ago. As a young head coach, I supported a specific candidate in town. That public venue wasn’t the right way to go about things.”

But he does preach political engagement and participation. “What I say is what my mom said to me: I’m not going to tell you who to vote for, but I’m going to tell you to vote.”

Menzies’ mantra, “program first,” informs how he and his coaching staff engage with the student-athletes in their charge and how they recruit potential UNLV stars.

In recent years, UNLV has signed a number of so-called one-and-done players, who leave after a year, seeking NBA stardom. “We’ll go after high-level talent,” Menzies said, “but only if (that player) wants to be a Rebel first, a student first. I’ve stayed away from certain high-level players who’ve predetermined, ‘Well, I’m going to go there for a year and then leave.”

“Program first” led Menzies to take his team to the Bahamas in August to

Photo: Josh Hawkins/UNLV Photo Services

Photo: Josh Hawkins/UNLV Photo Services
Big Gift

Construction will begin next on a 73,000-square-foot football training facility, the athletic department announced last month.

Dubbed the Fertitta Football Complex, after the family pledged $10 million — the largest single gift in the athletic department’s history — toward the state-of-the-art facility to be built on the UNLV campus at the north end of team’s practice area.

“We believe in the future of Rebels football under (head coach) Tony Sanchez’s leadership,” the Fertitta family said in a statement. The Fertittas are longtime supporters of UNLV and previously donated $1 million for the men’s and women’s tennis programs.

With the announcement, more than $16 million has been pledged for the project, which is expected to cost in excess of $24 million and take 10 months to complete.

“I thank the Fertittas for their program-changing gift,” athletic director Tina Kunzer-Murphy said. “We thought outside the box when we hired Tony Sanchez, and everyone is already seeing the outstanding results both on and off the field.”

The men’s basketball program was the recipient of what was previously largest athletics department gift, $7.2 million from the Mendenhall family for construction of the team’s training facility.

About That Stadium ...

Will UNLV football play in a new stadium soon? In September, we edged one step closer to knowing. The Southern Nevada Tourism Infrastructure Committee (SNTIC) approved a proposal for a new stadium for the home games of the Rebels and the National Football League’s Raiders franchise, and other events. It would be located at Russell Road and Las Vegas Boulevard.

What does the seal of approval mean? Given the committee makeup, the proposal’s unanimous approval carries a lot of weight. Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval had created the committee to study the feasibility and financing alternatives for a stadium. He put his top economic development official in charge and ensured the committee included elected city and county officials, business and regional planning leaders, and UNLV President Len Jessup. But there are still two more big steps to go.

The next hurdle? The Nevada Legislature must consider the proposal in a special session (scheduled for mid-October). Because the proposal involves an increase in hotel room taxes in Clark County, it will require a two-thirds vote to pass. The Legislature could approve SNTIC’s recommendation, deny it, or amend it.

And then? The next step would be getting NFL approval for the Raiders’ relocation from Oakland to Las Vegas. The team must officially put its application together in the next few months for consideration at the league’s winter meetings and a vote in March. Missing this window would push everything back a year. With both legislative and NFL approval, construction could move forward with groundbreaking in late 2017 or early 2018 and a stadium opening in time for the 2020 football season.

More: Get details in the meeting reports at sntic.org.

The coaching staff filed scouting reports on each facet of the trip. “I felt really good about it,” Menzies said. “The blemishes I saw are all very coachable. I think we have some talent.”

He said the bonding that came with the experience will be invaluable when the season starts in earnest on Nov. 11 at the Thomas & Mack Center against South Alabama. But Menzies knows the date many Rebels fans have circled is Dec. 10: UNLV’s first meeting with Duke since the Blue Devils upset UNLV in their 1991 NCAA Final Four match up.

practice and play three exhibition games. For Menzies, who credited the Rebel Athletic Fund’s Runnin’ Rebels Club for paying for the trip, the excursion was part of his catch-up plan for a team that hadn’t played as a unit: Getting the athletes used to travel protocol; preparing for games; warming up for games; and playing in actual games.

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THE REGENERATION CONNECTION

A fascination with tissue restoration inspires a UNLV professor and an undergraduate student to team up to understand how frogs might impact the fate of humankind.

BY RAEGEN PIETRUCHA

When it comes to someday harnessing regenerative superpowers that even Wolverine and Deadpool might envy, UNLV life sciences professor Ai-Sun “Kelly” Tseng has put her faith in an unlikely hero: Xenopus laevis, the South African clawed frog. Tseng’s little hero has the ability to regrow a number of body parts seemingly at will.

Diana Peña once watched a video on tissue regeneration in a high school biology class. It sparked a scientific curiosity in the first-generation student that led her to the UNLV Honors College and a double major in biology and psychology. She eventually heard about the work happening in the Tseng Lab from a fellow student and emailed Tseng to ask if she could help.

This story is about their two-year journey that would help both professor and student better understand this mighty amphibian. And it’s a perfect illustration of how UNLV’s research endeavors are a part of the undergraduate student experience.

Tseng: It all began when Diana emailed me to say she was interested in working in my lab. As part of my application process for undergraduates, besides asking for grades, I ask to know why the student is interested in research because they’ll spend between 15-20 hours a week — sometimes more — doing research.

Peña: I thought it was awesome that Dr. Tseng’s research could go on to help people overcome their medical issues someday. Her work was more and more interesting to me as I learned more and more about the possibilities in the field, what we can do for humans.

Tseng: I get quite a number of applicants; when I interviewed Diana, I knew she would be a great fit for the lab. She seemed to inherently understand what it actually entailed and that it would be well beyond her normal course load — a course load that, especially as a double major, is not insignificant.

WHEN PEÑA WAS ACCEPTED to join Tseng’s lab, her training actually began outside of it. After more than a month of biweekly training sessions, Peña was tested to ensure she could translate observations into the appropriate action steps that would enable her to begin participating in the lab’s experiments — and could do this independently.

Once Peña passed this test, Tseng granted her access to the lab. There, Peña began learning firsthand how to conduct experiments. She paced herself at one experiment per week. It took more than a year of trial and error, a process that would frustrate even the most patient undergraduate researcher, before Peña celebrated her first big success in the lab. She was able to perform her experiments consistently and successfully over a two-week period.
“Some students get frustrated when experiments don’t work the first time and they have to repeat them. We have to make sure that our results are consistent and reproducible, though. We can’t just perform experiments once and move on.”

— Ai-Sun “Kelly” Tseng, life sciences professor

Calorie Counting at the Snap of a Photo

Smartwatches that help you track daily steps and heart rate? That’s old hat. Faculty in engineering and nursing are upping the ante with a fitness tracker that makes calorie counting as easy as taking a picture.

The UNLV office of economic development recently licensed this invention to startup company MealCheck Technologies. It merges current fitness-assessment functions with camera and scanning technology so users can photograph their food to find out its nutritional content.

The invention represents the next step in making health management effortlessly quick and nonintrusive. “The missing piece within the fitness tracking space is nutrition monitoring,” said Jason Pottinger, director of business strategy at MealCheck, which will commercially develop, manufacture, and sell the device under a licensing agreement with UNLV. “What can’t be accomplished through self-reporting and apps will be possible through this technology we’re producing.”

MealCheck is an offshoot of Academic Technology Ventures, which specializes in commercializing academic research.

The device is the brainchild of Jillian Inouye, associate dean in the Schools of Nursing and Allied Health Sciences; Mohamed B. Trabia, associate dean in the Howard R. Hughes College of Engineering; and Venkatesan Muthukumar, an electrical and computer engineering professor.
**Peña:** You learn throughout the entire process of doing research. You’re always learning new techniques, and though we’re not doing particularly difficult tasks, it can take a while to get your first win.

**Tseng:** Many students struggle to overcome experimental failure. Some students get frustrated when experiments don’t work the first time and they have to repeat them. We have to make sure that our results are consistent and reproducible, though. We can’t just perform experiments once and move on. These days, experimental failure is normal to Diana — so normal that she doesn’t even see it as a challenge. She just pushes on. Diana quickly picked up on the realities of what we do.

**Peña:** I realized after many experiments that failure is just part of research.

Researchers have studied the fascinating process of regeneration since the 1700s. It’s the subject of science and superhero mythology alike, and with any luck, the work being done in Tseng’s lab will someday lead to a confluence of the two.

Xenopus laevis is able to regenerate a number of tissues, including muscle and nervous tissue. Humans possess only a limited ability to do this — an ability that is believed to be gradually lost as humans age. The idea behind Tseng’s and Peña’s research is that, through studying model organisms like Xenopus and gaining a deeper understanding of the role insulin plays in its regenerative processes, scientists will someday be able to use the knowledge they obtain from the frogs and apply it to humans.

Research of this nature has the potential to dramatically improve the lives of people with degenerative diseases. Someday, it may even lead to the regeneration of human tissues, organs, and limbs. Although this type of research has many aims, without the fundamental biology knowledge Tseng and Peña gain in the lab, we can’t even begin to hope for these life-changing therapies to come to fruition.

**Peña:** You hear the term “critical thinking” getting thrown around a lot — how universities want to make students good critical thinkers. Coming into the lab, I definitely was not. Now that I’ve worked in the lab, had the opportunity to experiment, read research articles, and discuss research with Dr. Tseng and other faculty members, I think I am a much better critical thinker.

**Tseng:** This is part of the value of research for undergraduates — for everyone, really. But we especially need to expose undergraduates to research because it teaches them critical thinking skills that they don’t necessarily have the opportunity to gain or practice in a lecture. In a lab, students learn how to structure experiments, ask scientific questions, and analyze data and results. It also helps bring all the things we discuss in biology class to life.

**Peña:** Dr. Tseng always asked me to think about what I might be doing wrong, what might be causing my failed experiments, what I could change. She got me asking questions. I don’t just take everything that I hear or read or assume as truth anymore. I scrutinize it. I think about ways things could be done differently and improved upon.

**Tseng:** Besides being a good learning experience, student research actually contributes to scientific knowledge. Basic biology research has applications to real life, and it helps better society. Being able to do this research together allows faculty to show students what it’s like — how difficult it actually is, but also how rewarding.

**Peña** was recognized as one of this spring’s outstanding graduates and garnered UNLV’s Undergraduate Scholar Award. She also learned how to write research proposals, which resulted in a fellowship and funding from the National Science Foundation.

Research funding, most of which comes from federal agencies, enables undergraduates to focus on academic endeavors. Peña hopes to see more of this funding awarded to undergraduate researchers.

Outside of the fellowship funding, Peña has volunteered her time to the lab. Not surprisingly, when Peña received a campaign call during the primaries, the first thing she asked was the candidate’s position on science funding.

Exposure to the financial side of research has given Peña a deeper understanding that, without proper support for biologists like her faculty research mentor Tseng, there never would’ve been a research opportunity for her to begin with. Fortunately, because UNLV understands that ensuring student success is as important as increasing research funding — and that the two are in fact inextricably linked — both are part of the university’s Top Tier strategic plan.

Tseng’s and Peña’s work together will continue for a bit longer while Peña waits to hear back on her medical school applications, then separately as Peña heads toward a bright future in medicine.

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UNLValumni.org
Like many a Las Vegas transplant, David Damore figured his time in the desert would be brief when he arrived here from Sacramento, California, on a blistering summer day in 2000. Sixteen years later, Damore is entrenched in Las Vegas and has become a go-to source for context on Nevada’s hot-button political issues. Whether it’s a local television reporter wanting someone to analyze policy discussions in Carson City or a scribe from The New York Times looking to gauge which way the Silver State is leaning, Damore has become a Nevada political expert of record. With each interview, Damore and other professors like him help UNLV raise its stature both nationally and abroad. He recently took some time to share his thoughts on the media, our political process, and the one question he would ask this year’s candidates if given the opportunity.

THE VOICE OF NEVADA POLITICS

David Damore, political science professor and Brookings Mountain West fellow

The media inquiries ebb and flow depending on what’s going on. There are some days — like a campaign visit or a debate or the caucuses — when it seems like talking to the media is what I do all day. And then sometimes I’ll go a week or two when I don’t hear from any reporters.

I’ve always spoken with the local media. But then as Nevada got more important nationally, I received a lot of national and international inquiries, and it just kind of snowballed from there. One of the things I quickly learned is, once you give reporters your cellphone number, they keep it forever. And they share it with their friends.

I’ve had a few reporters and producers tell me that they come to me because I can condense a lot of information into succinct sound bites. Conciseness — that’s really what they’re looking for.

There’s obviously variation across the different mediums. Television interviews take lots of time; you have to get dressed up and they typically cut you down to like a five-second sound bite.

What I enjoy the most is radio, because it’s unedited. I can say what I want to say. It’s usually live, and I get the time to develop my thoughts.

I didn’t have any formal training in media relations. It was really learn-as-you-go. And I learned some hard lessons.

There have been times when I’ve given an interview where you give a writer essentially the whole story and all the research, but they don’t credit you with the information. I’ve had times when I’ve been paraphrased or my words are presented without the context and nuance around it so the bottom-line meaning is lost. I used to let those things bother me, not anymore.

It’s exciting to see the journalists who have moved on, like [former Las Vegas Review-Journal and Las Vegas Sun reporter] Molly Ball going to The Atlantic and some other folks going to national papers. But it’s also meant having to develop new relationships with their replacements — and their replacements’ replacements. These days it seems the reporters are even younger. They get thrown into it and often need help navigating the terrain.

Some of my most memorable interactions with the media were during the Sharron Angle-Harry Reid U.S. Senate race in 2010. It was pretty clear early on that Reid was going to win, but a lot of reporters wouldn’t believe me. Even up to the final day, I had people telling me, “No, you’re wrong!” I was like, “You’re calling me as an expert.”

According to the polling, the race was close or Angle was ahead, but I suspected otherwise. So I got criticized for being a homer for the Democrats. I’m registered as non-partisan. I’m just telling you what I think.

People assume polls are accurate. But Nevada is a really difficult place to poll, mostly because of the changing demographics. The electorate here always churns. And the parts of the electorate that are growing the fastest are the most difficult to poll: those with just cell phones, non-English speakers, and lower socio-economic status. Then you have the fact that people work crazy hours, so if you’re not calling around the clock, then you’re missing a significant segment of the population here.

But the media loves polling. Because a poll, any poll, is a story.

It’s cliché, but Nevada really does have an incestuous political environment. There are very few people who have a lot of influence, not just in local and state politics, but nationally.

That’s one thing I took from that Reid-Angle race. It was amazing to see how the establishment from both sides coalesced behind Reid. We saw something similar during the last legislative session, when you had a Republican governor in Brian Sandoval and establishment Republican and Democratic legislators working together to move policy.

The question I always get is, “Well, isn’t Nevada a libertarian, anti-government state?” Eh, sort of. But it’s also a state...
“People outside the state wonder why Nevada has become so important in presidential elections — after all, we only have six Electoral College votes — but it’s a state that encapsulates a lot of what’s happening across the country.”
where party and ideology are often trumped by personal relationships and shared interests. One anecdote that captures this point is that in the same week Harry Reid received the endorsements of the Nevada Mining Association and the Sierra Club.

**All the issues** play here: immigration, health care, wage equality, background checks, renewable energy. All these national issues are salient in Nevada. We’re in a new America. A changing America. An urban, diverse America that has a lot of policy challenges that Nevadans confront every day.

**The voter disillusionment** you hear a lot about during this election cycle is nothing new, sadly. Compared with other democracies, the U.S. has always had a less knowledgeable and less engaged electorate and a distrust of politics and politicians.

**The rules of the game** are such that, in a country of nearly 320 million people, we end up with so few choices.

**Also not helping** is the rise of the 24-hour partisan news outlets. We used to be able to agree on the facts; now we don’t even agree on the facts. It’s really difficult to have a debate about policy when pushing the narrative matters more than evidence.

**If you don’t care** for the presidential candidates, well, we do have a “none-of-the-above” option in Nevada! In fact, between “none of the above” and the minor party candidates who will be on the ballot, the chance of anyone getting 50 percent here is unlikely.

**My grandfather got me into politics.** He was always interested in it and he was involved locally. We always talked about it and, living in Sacramento, he was able to watch some shrewd politicians operate close-up — Pat and Jerry Brown, Ronald Reagan, and of course, Willie Brown. I remember as a kid seeing his autographed picture of JFK, which is now in my office. In high school, I read all the Watergate books and that kind of stuff. The study of politics and university life is a good fit for me. I definitely didn’t want to be a lawyer.

**We’re one of only four states** with a part-time Legislature. We’re the only state where the governor picks road projects. We’re one of three or four states with an integrated higher education system for both community colleges and universities. And we’re still using a funding formula for K-12 that originated in the 1960s. The core of how our state runs is antiquated, and it has consequences in terms of policy. It has consequences for the people those policies serve.

**It’s long past time** for our Legislature to meet annually. This is the thing, though: This stuff is in the state constitution. And it’s tough to change the state’s constitution.

**My opinion on the Electoral College and its usefulness in the 21st century has vacillated.** I used to think it was horrible. Then I moved to a small, swing state.

**The Electoral College undermines** the basic notion of the equality of the vote. It also dictates that presidential candidates only compete in a handful of states. But if we didn’t have it, running for president would be even more expensive and the fights over ballot access would only intensify.

**Nevada is a very accessible** place to get involved in the political process, particularly at the local and state level. I’m amazed at the number of former students I encounter who are working in the Legislature and other areas of local and state government. This is a place where you can go meet your elected official and have relationships with them.

**The other thing** about Nevada is the influx of people from other states. A lot of people haven’t been here long enough to have learned the politics, and they’re generally more susceptible to short-term campaign effects.

**I think Nevada is too small** and too peculiar to ever put up a serious candidate for president. But if you look at the greats of Nevada politics, it is no surprise that they all served in the U.S. Senate. Across parties and over time, the Nevadans who have flourished on the national stage did so in a body where power accrues through longevity and political skill, where state size matters much less. As a consequence, Nevadans have put their stamp on some major pieces of federal legislation, from the mining act to the Affordable Care Act.

**The fact Las Vegas and UNLV** were chosen as sites for the final presidential debate validates Nevada’s arrival on the national political stage. It’s a great opportunity to have the international media here for a week looking for our stories.

If I had the chance to address the candidates at the debate, I would ask them what they see as the limitations of the office. We’re supposed to be operating in a separated system, but because of our broken politics, the presidency has become more autonomous. So I would ask: How will you remain accountable and restrain yourself from carving out even more executive authority while still meeting the demands of the office?
Nevadans provided with free legal education by the law school and its partners, the Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada and Nevada Legal Services.

Families helped through the new Pro Se Boot Camp at The Shade Tree shelter.

Children assisted through the Kids’ Court School.

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The Adventures Begin Here

For the first nine years of its existence, UNLV was strictly a commuter operation. In a town given over to wide expanses and a firm dedication to a Los Angeles-style love affair with the automobile, it all made a certain amount of sense.

Then, in 1966, President Donald Moyer got the ball rolling on a slew of new campus buildings, including the original dining commons and Tonopah Hall. Fifty years later, the residence halls are at their 1,800-bed full capacity while construction continues at the UDistrict student apartments, which will bring about 2,500-3,000 new beds at full build-out.

The original building still exists as the north wing of Tonopah Residence Complex, where business major Jaimie Phillips kicks back in her room. The freshman and her roommate, hotel administration major Eve Lee, themed their space around the idea of “Adventure Awaits.” — Jason Scavone

[Photo Josh Hawkins/UNLV Photo Services]
THE DEBATE,

IN THE MORE THAN 50 YEARS SINCE JOHN F. KENNEDY AND RICHARD NIXON SQUARED OFF ON TELEVISION, presidential debates have provided grand political theater. They are a crucial part of the American electoral process, organized with excruciating care to be nonpartisan and to help voters get a clearer sense of who they want to support and why.

On Oct. 19, for the first time, our campus will host a general election presidential debate — a made-for-television event expected to grab the world’s attention like never before. Hosted in partnership with the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, UNLV’s debate will occupy the most high-profile slot; it is the last of three presidential (and one vice presidential) debates during this unprecedented election season.

It is perhaps the most significant “real world” spotlight ever shone on Southern Nevada. It is a chance to show the nation UNLV’s progress in becoming a Top Tier research institution and the city’s stature as the ultimate location for events and meetings.

In August, UNLV Magazine gathered four of the people who made the debate possible. Here they discuss how UNLV landed the event and what it means for this university and this city.
VEGAS STYLE

INTERVIEWS & STORIES BY T.R. WITCHER & CATE WEEKS
ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHRIS MORRIS
PHOTOS BY JOSH HAWKINS & R. MARSH STARKS
How UNLV landed the debate

FAHRENKOPF: Normally a year before the debates, we issue a request for bid to the universities and colleges across the country ... I have always wanted to have a debate in my home state. So I picked up the phone and called [then-Interim UNLV President] Don Snyder, and said, “Don, I want Nevada to have a debate; could UNLV be in a position to host it?” Don ran with it and here we are.

Snyder: I very quickly came to the conclusion that if we were going to do it, we’d need to have a partner. I felt that the [Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority] could see this as an opportunity to extend the brand of Las Vegas, while also extending the brand of UNLV.

Jessup: I’ve worked at University of Arizona, Washington State University — some of the PAC 12 schools that have looked at hosting debates before. They shied away from it. I knew that it was a daunting endeavor, but my resolve was strengthened knowing we had a partner with the LVCVA.

THE APPLICATION

The 19-page application and selection guidelines issued by the Commission on Presidential Debates is nothing if not specific: indoor humidity not to exceed 50 percent; quiet air conditioning set at a specific temperature range; fully carpeted floors; and “comfortable, fully padded seats with unobstructed views of the stage.” The venue must provide space for forty 53-foot-long mobile TV trucks and a media filing center for 3,000 journalists (Cox Pavilion will fulfill that need). And the hosting city must deliver 3,000 hotel rooms within 30 minutes of the venue — something Las Vegas offers in spades.

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RALENKOTTER: There’s never been a university and a destination marketing company coming together to co-host the debates. From our standpoint, because the business message is such an important part of Las Vegas, we thought putting the two brands together would be great. This enabled us to talk about business really being done in Las Vegas. And the prestige that comes with hosting a presidential debate just solidifies our message.

CAMPUS PREPARATIONS

The LVCVA and UNLV are sharing the costs to produce the debate and are working together to secure sponsorships to offset outlays. The debate happens to coincide nicely with the completion of the Thomas & Mack’s $72.5 million renovation and expansion, which improved everything from the flooring to rafters and made numerous mechanical, electrical, and communications system upgrades. And, after years of deferred maintenance due to Great Recession-era budget cuts, UNLV is sprucing up campus and improving signage.

FAHRENKOPF: Let me just add to what Rossi’s talking about. We estimate — we never know for sure — that there will be 2,500 to 10,000 reporters from all over the world coming to Las Vegas for the week. It’s just a remarkable opportunity to showcase some of the other things in Southern Nevada.

JESSUP: We did some digging. Universities that had hosted before had calculated $50-$60 million dollars worth of earned media — basically free publicity to the university and the city. So we thought, “Well, this is just perfect. This university is working hard to become a Top Tier university, and we’ll get to tell that story to the world.”

MEDIA AND MARKETING BUMPS

Through September, UNLV’s debate had already generated $85 million worth of publicity. Hofstra University in New York just hosted its third straight presidential debate. During its 2012 debate, Hofstra’s website drew 150,000 visits, a 400 percent increase over usual traffic, and according to the Associated Press, the university’s enrollment applications climbed by 5,000 the following year.

The University of Miami, meanwhile, hosted a presidential debate in 2004 and received enough news coverage to fill two binders. Earlier this year it hosted a Republican primary debate, netting more than 2,400 mentions in news articles (a total ad value of just under $11 million), along with 16.8 million impressions on Twitter.

RALENKOTTER: The bonus was being selected for the last debate of the season. It’s like the seventh game of the World Series — winner take all. There are estimates that over 70 million people will be watching the debate that night — four times the number of people who watched the last World Series that went to seven games.

LIVE, FROM UNLV ...

In addition to the thousands of journalists working from the debate’s media center and reporting with UNLV as their backdrop, major networks will be setting up stages in the days leading up to the debate. CNN will broadcast from the Lee Pascal Memorial Rose Garden on the northeast side of campus. MSNBC will stage its broadcast from the Alumni Amphitheater on the southeast side. Bloomberg News is planning segments from inside the Student Union.

UNLV’s student journalists — including a few who will report from inside the debate’s media center — are likewise part of the mix. More than 60 students are producing stories for UNLV-TV, KUNV radio, and other journalism school platforms. The debate also inspired the launch of the university’s first podcast UNLV: Different, Daring, and Diverse this fall with a dozen student hosts and contributors. Learn about UNLV’s transformation through the voices of our students on iTunes, Google Play, or your favorite podcast subscription.

FAHRENKOPF: My prediction is it’ll be closer to 100 million.

RALENKOTTER: That’s even better. That’s a hundred million people seeing a different side of who we are as a community.

Getting the student body involved

JESSUP: The enthusiasm for this has spread like wildfire. In addition to the steering committee with campus and business and community leaders, we created a logistics committee and committees for campus engagement and voter education. These involve hundreds of students, faculty, staff, and community members. We did a launch event that...
went far beyond anything any other location has done. Once we hit the debate, they’ll have been working for a whole year in preparations.

SNYDER: I’ve had a chance to work with the university one way or another for almost 30 years, and I have never seen a broader level of engagement and enthusiasm on campus than there is about this. It’s really extended far off campus. These are the things that we dreamed about when we first started talking about the debates in terms of enthusiasm and partnership.

JESSUP: We have an army of students involved. I’ve always been a proponent of what faculty call experiential learning. So imagine being a student who wants to learn about politics, or about democracy, or about debates, and we give you opportunities to be involved in this. Imagine this being your first chance to vote and taking a freshman seminar on election issues. Imagine being a member of our nationally ranked debate team, which has been bringing top-notch high schoolers to UNLV for related events throughout the year. In one way or another, all of these students are participating in the final debate — some will even be lucky enough to be on the debate floor that night.

Our entire campus has a role in this presidential election of the United States of America; they’re all participating in the selection of what I think many people still feel is choosing the leader of the free world. What an experience!

What’s at stake for the university?

JESSUP: The debate is perfectly in the sweet spot of the university’s strategic plan to reach Top Tier status. That has several pathway goals — they evolve around excelling at research, providing a great student experience, launching a great medical school, and fostering community partnerships. We recognize that, for us to be a great university, we need the support of the community, and in turn, we have a duty to help the community get to the next level as well. That’s the story we get to show to the world.

TOP TIER

UNLV has set its sights on being recognized as a Top Tier public university in research, education, and community impact by 2025. One measure of success will be when the university joins the 115 institutions (out of more than 4,600 in the U.S.) at the top of the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. It is a coveted feather in the cap for higher education, and UNLV would be the first in the state to achieve the designation (UNLV and UNR are both currently in the second tier). But more importantly, Jessup said, our Top Tier

LAUNCH EVENT

It wouldn’t be a Las Vegas event without a grand kickoff, would it? We brought in the marching band; dropped patriotic balloons; fired up the crowd with speeches by organizers and the governor; and officially unveiled the volunteer engagement plans, marketing campaigns, a logo, and official hashtags (#UNLVPresDebate and #UNLVegasDebate2016).

strategic plans will ensure the university enhances economic development efforts, fosters a climate of innovation, improves health care in the region, and enriches the cultural vitality of the community.

SNYDER: As I travel around with my UNLV logo on my briefcase, people come up to me wanting to talk about Rebel basketball and about the 1990 NCAA championship team. Not to draw direct parallels to athletics, but this is at that level — it’s a championship event, a seventh game of the World Series equivalent — and I think people for years will be talking about the fact that we hosted the final debate in 2016.
“So imagine being a student who wants to learn about politics, or about democracy, or about debates, and we give you opportunities to be involved in this.”

**Jessup:** That’s a great example. The effects that [the 1990 NCAA championship] had on the campus enrollments, on applicants starting to apply from around the country — it put UNLV on the map, literally, from an enrollment point of view. UNLV merchandise started to be sold nationally; there were Rebel fans from all around the country and in other countries. This will do the same in terms of UNLV as a serious institution for research and community engagement, as a vibrant leader engaged in the conversations about government and our country’s future.

**Jessup:** [All of our committees] have heavy involvement with members from the community. Then, as an outgrowth, we partnered with the Clark County School District (CCSD) on a number of initiatives, and we kicked it off at the Paradise Elementary School, right on the northern edge of campus. Our students are helping the CCSD students learn about the debate and the role that the debates play in the democratic process — they’re engaging them in debates about the debates as they get ready to watch this debate.

**Snyder:** I’ll tell you, just sitting there, watching what was taking place at Paradise school that day — we saw second-, third-, and fourth-graders incredibly engaged in the conversation, in dialogue. I think that’s just scratching the surface of what we’re going to see in terms of youth paying a different type of attention.

**Outreach to Area Schools**

An essay contest is challenging students in Clark County School District (CCSD) high schools to debate the merits of presidential debates. Among the prizes: a $1,000 scholarship for a UNLV-bound junior or senior who writes the best essay. Essays will be judged by community leaders and UNLV faculty and students. Winners (and their teachers) will be announced at a celebration event shortly before the Nov. 8 election.

UNLV and the school district worked together to offer debate-themed lesson plans to secondary school teachers, including the online “Join the Debates” curriculum through the Commission on Presidential Debates. UNLV’s nationally ranked Sanford I. Berman Debate Team has led mentoring programs for area high schoolers all year long. Especially popular has been the team’s watch events, held during both primary and general election debates. Their event for the first presidential debate on Sept. 26 attracted more than 200 youths and teachers from around the city.

Nevada State College and the College of Southern Nevada have been swept up in debate fever too. UNLV student leaders and debate committee organizers worked with their counterparts at sister institutions to develop activities on their campuses and ensure those students felt welcomed to join our events and serve as volunteers.

**Paradise Elementary School students quiz Ralenkotter, CCSD Superintendent Pat Skorkowsky, and Jessup on debate activities in their school.**

**Getting the community involved**

**Jessup:** [All of our committees] have heavy involvement with members from the community. Then, as an outgrowth, we partnered with the Clark County School District (CCSD) on a number of initiatives, and we kicked it off at the Paradise Elementary School,
to this campaign than they ever have before — just because of these types of partnerships.

**Ralenkotter:** It is also an opportunity for us at the LVCVA to explain how the room tax benefits everyone who lives in Las Vegas. Over the last 20 years, approximately $2 billion has been generated through the room tax for teachers’ salaries, for construction of schools. We’ve been able to get that message out to students and to their parents about how this community pulls together. All three of us (Ralenkotter, Jessup, and Snyder) are doing speaking engagements for different organizations like the Chamber of Commerce and so forth. We have a host committee of 1,600 residents who help us welcome people to Las Vegas; they’ll do an outreach throughout Southern Nevada.

And we’re reaching out to all of our corporate customers throughout the world. We have an ad campaign going in in-flight magazines. We’re working very closely with the airport for welcoming messages as the participants come in for the debates. The hotels are going to do the same type of a thing. We want to make everyone welcome, really hype the debate itself coming into town.

**Difference between general election and primary season**

**Jessup:** When I think back over the years and I compare (the general election) presidential debates like this to primary debates, it seems like the audience is quieter. In some of the primary debates, it seems like they just allow the audience to do whatever they want. There’s a lot of cheering and jeering and heckling and that kind of thing.

**Fahrenkopf:** The primary debates are run by the parties and the networks. These debates are much different. The moderator will come out, and he or she will talk to the audience about applauding and expectations about heckling. I must tell you, in 19 of them, there’s only been one time, really, that someone broke that rule. That doesn’t mean that if one of the candidates says something funny, the people can’t laugh. But there’s not to be any booing, clapping, cheering, or any of that kind of activity that would interfere with someone else’s ability to hear what the candidates have to say.

Before the debate begins, we usually have the university president and then the student body president come up and say a few words. Then we spend some time talking to the audience. Fundamentally, my message is, “You are very, very fortunate because you’re part of history here tonight.”

**Tickets, please?**

**Snyder:** People hear 18,000 seats and think there’s going to be a lot of people there. They don’t realize this is a television event with a small live audience — not a live event that happens to be televised.

**Jessup:** We had season ticket holders for Rebel basketball ask if they could sit in their seats, or if they could rent one of the suites for hosting a party to watch the debate. Even if the Secret Service would let them in, they wouldn’t see anything because everything
While the university and city bask in the glow of hosting their presidential debate, a bigger prize seems to hang on the horizon: a national political convention. The host committees for this year’s conventions estimated that Cleveland saw between $200 and $250 million in economic benefit while Philadelphia reaped between $250 million and $300 million.

Las Vegas, which brought in 42 million visitors and more than 21,000 conventions last year, would seem to be an increasingly obvious choice for convention hosting duties, particularly since it’s been a swing state since 1992.

In the 1980s, the city pursued hosting both parties. For the 1988 convention, Fahrenkopf served as chairman of the Republican National Party and was in charge of site selection, which deemed that “at that time the Thomas & Mack couldn’t handle it,” he said.

Today, the T&M facilities, the newly opened T-Mobile Arena, and even more hotel and meeting spaces put the city in good position, as does its reputation. The gaming industry is now squarely part of the American mainstream — so much so that the challenge now is the city’s popularity as a meeting destination. Calendars book up well in advance, Ralenkotter said.
THE DEBATE, VEGAS STYLE

will be draped down on the floor in the arena to create a studio for television.

**FAHRENKOPF:** We get the same question everywhere else, “What do you mean there’s only going to be a thousand tickets?” The actual number all depends on the facility, the security needs, the construction of the boxes for the networks. It depends on where the Secret Service wants to cut off access and hang drapes and so forth. We had 1,200 or 1,300 (tickets) one time; the smallest was 600.

Assuming for the moment that we only have two candidates...One-third of those tickets, traditionally, will go to the Democratic nominee, one-third of the tickets will go to the Republican nominee, and one-third will be split between the sponsoring school and the Commission on Presidential Debates.

**JESSUP:** Again, since we want this to be a learning experience, our priority is making sure our current students are able to attend. We're distributing them to full-time students through a computerized lottery.

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**ON HOSTING AT COLLEGES**

The Commission on Presidential Debates has held all but three of its debates on college campuses “because our main function of the commission is educational,” Fahrenkopf said. “This allows students to participate in the production process and become involved in election-related projects.”

While major schools have hosted debates, some of the most enthusiastic bids come from smaller or less heralded schools. For instance, Longwood University, host of this year’s vice presidential debate, touted its connection to the landmark Brown v. Board of Education lawsuit (the plaintiffs attended nearby Moton High School). In the run up to debates, hosting colleges become electric environments. “These special programs that the schools put on, classes, and so forth — it’s just a remarkable thing that reinvigorates democracy,” Fahrenkopf said.

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**DEBATE CURRICULUM**

UNLV encouraged faculty to create new classes or enhance the ones they were already teaching with observations about the issues and events unfolding right now. Some examples:

**FIRST YEAR SEMINAR/PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES:** The students in this class (most of whom are first-time voters) will study the electoral process and be required to watch the debates. “I want them to be able to analyze a candidate’s overall performance along with their effectiveness in conveying their message to the general public,” instructor Majid Shirali said.

**RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER IN THE 2016 ELECTION:** Professor A.B. Wilkinson hopes to “teach students how to weed out spin issues and pundit propaganda, so they’re able to focus on facts and evidence. That way they can decide where they stand on certain policies that affect their lives and the lives of others.”

**THE NEWS IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE/2016 ISSUES:** Ten UNLV professors will join this class to share their research on issues specific to this election year. Leading the course is professor Cian T. McMahon, who said his students will “impress (their) friends on debate night with quirky, historical trivia that somehow adds depth to what is being said.”

**GREAT PERSONALITIES:** The biggest misconceptions that professor Michael Green hopes to dispel: “that elections don’t matter; that all politicians are alike; that politics is inherently corrupt.”

**WOMEN/GENDER IN POLITICS:** This course has been taught for more than a dozen years, but “the 2016 campaign has been particularly curious,” professor Joanne Goodwin said. “All the debates, as well as the issues supported by all the candidates, reveal the enormous divide in the country on issues in general, and on gender specifically.”
Reinventing ourselves (again)

RALENKOTTER: If you look at our history, one of the things that really has made Las Vegas successful is we keep reinventing ourselves. Coming out of the recession, all the challenges we had as an industry on all market segments — we really had to reach out to our customers and talk about all the new things that Las Vegas has and has to offer. We also looked at how we could improve our current market base; and this is where the real opportunity is with this. There’s a national movement by all the convention bureaus in the United States to push the message that meetings mean business, that things get done when you meet in person. We’ve been hammering that message time and time again. This is an opportunity to say that, “Guess what? Las Vegas hosted a presidential debate. Serious business gets done in Las Vegas.”

SNYDER: This is a classic example of looking at the opportunity and doing something even more with it. That’s what Las Vegas is, and what UNLV is.

RALENKOTTER: The debate is another thing that adds to our resume. There’ll be future debates in Las Vegas — guarantee it. There’ll be a presidential party convention. This really sets us apart, showing people that Las Vegas can host almost any type of activity or event — including serious business events.

LECTURES, WATCH EVENTS & MORE

While UNLV groups will fill gathering spaces all across campus to watch and, presumably, have their own debates about the debate on the big day, the campus has been swept up in the excitement and has been planning activities for months now.

Dozens of public lectures and forums are hitting on debate-specific topics — from presidential power grabs to how social media influences electorate opinions. In addition to the public talks, the nationally renowned speakers are dropping into UNLV classes.

UNLV Libraries got in the spirit with a special exhibit on student activism (see page 56) as well as producing a guide to its resources for faculty and students studying presidential elections. Among its collections: presidential campaign advertisements dating back to 1952.

The Graduate Student Showcase, one of the signature events for UNLV’s Research Week, is themed around election-year issues.

UNLV’s longstanding voter education programs have gone into overdrive this year. Groups from the Boyd School of Law, Nevada Institute for Children’s Research and Policy, the Lincy Institute, Brookings Mountain West, and others developed voter guides and public forums.

Special public lectures and debate watch events like this one on Sept. 26 have brought students and faculty together for discussions in the classroom throughout the election season.
THE DEBATE, VEGAS STYLE

VOLUNTEERING

More than 1,000 students, staff, and community members applied for official volunteer positions, with hundreds more raising their hands to help in areas that don’t require security clearance. In the leadup to the debate, they’re helping with the dozens of debate-related events. On debate day, you’ll see them ushering, directing traffic, staffing Ask Me! booths, and serving as production assistants and interns for media and Commission on Presidential Debates staff. One of the more high profile positions, particularly for those who speak multiple languages, is as a student host for dignitaries from foreign countries participating in the CPD’s International Study Mission Program. The program provides about 60 international delegates with an insider experience on organizing political debates.

When the cameras turn off ...

JESSUP: Whether they’re watching on television or they happen to be lucky to be there in person — the journalists included — I hope people come away saying, “I didn’t realize how beautiful that UNLV campus is and how great that university is. I knew they had a basketball team and a top hotel program; I had no idea about their creative writing program and that they’re launching a medical school.” It might influence somebody to think, “I might have my son or daughter apply for school there.”

RALENKOTTER: We want them to say that Las Vegas did a great job hosting, as we always do, and that we certainly do have a dynamic community. If they take those two things away, I think we will have exceeded all of our expectations.

SNYDER: I’ll speak as a community member: I want the community to be really proud of itself. We have an opportunity to showcase ourselves around the world, but we also have a chance to showcase the community to ourselves. I want the community to walk away thinking, “Wow, look what we did!”

FAHRENKOPF: Let me do clean-up here. [The commission does this] as an educational function. We are hopeful that, when this is over, those people who watched it in person or on television or on their computers have learned something about the candidates and that what they’ve learned can contribute to their being good citizens and going out and voting. That’s number one.

And there’s more: Wondering when politicians began dressing down on the campaign trail? How gaffes have plagued presidential hopefuls? Or why Nevada is such an oft-visited state? The UNLV News Center has been interviewing our experts, capturing student experiences, and digging into some off-beat election history. Read the stories at unlv.edu/news and learn more about the debate itself at unlv.edu/2016debate.

HISTORY OF THE DEBATES

The first televised debate occurred on Sept. 26, 1960, when Vice President Richard Nixon debated John F. Kennedy in Chicago, a debate viewed by 66.4 million people. While that event was significant in presenting JFK as a young and vigorous president-to-be, the debates didn’t exactly take off from there. In fact no debates were held in 1964, 1968, or 1972, and sitting presidents, save for Gerald Ford in 1976, eschewed them as “not presidential.” The subsequent three debates were, according to the Commission on Presidential Debates, “hastily arranged after negotiations between the candidates that left many uncertain whether there would be any debates at all.”

In 1984, the selection process for debate moderators and panelists left many concerned about sponsorship of future debates. Two independent studies recommended a separate, nonpartisan entity be created to conduct the presidential debates every four years. Thus, the Commission on Presidential Debates (CPD) was founded in 1987.

Under the current format there are three presidential debates and one vice presidential debate. According to CPD, between 1998 and 2012, the general election debates have attracted between 30 million and 70 million viewers, and the debates are rated by 70 percent of voters as “very or somewhat helpful” in the decision on how to cast their ballots.

The debate format has evolved over the years. Fahrenkopf said that debates used to be run by a single moderator and three panelists. But the reporters on the panel were so concerned about getting their own questions asked that they often failed to follow up on their colleagues’ questions or draw out depth from the candidates.

Starting with a debate at Michigan State in 1992, the commission tried a new approach. The first half of the debate was the normal panelists asking questions, but then the second half featured the moderator asking and following up on his own questions. Since that debate, all the debates have been with a single moderator.

Four years ago, the commission divided the 90-minute format into six 15-minute segments to allow the moderator to “drill down (past) that two-minute thing that candidates have done at a press conference somewhere,” Fahrenkopf said.
UNLV’s location just blocks from one of the country’s busiest airports has made it a favorite campaign stop for would-be Leaders of the Free World. But the campus also has had the distinct honor of hosting former and sitting U.S. presidents at official events — often, and not coincidentally, during election years.

**GERALD FORD**

The former president was the featured speaker at a UNLV Barrick Lecture Series event at Artemus W. Ham Concert Hall on Feb. 8, 1988. At a press conference before the lecture, Ford discussed the upcoming Republican presidential primary, declining to endorse a particular candidate. “I am taking a neutral stand prior to the convention,” he explained. “I made George Bush head of the CIA, I sent (Al) Haig to Europe, and ran with Bob Dole as my vice president.” Clearly he did not want to take sides at the time, although he also said, “I think anyone should be allowed to run for president.”

**JIMMY CARTER**

Just months after Ford’s visit, the Barrick Series brought another former president to campus; this time Democrat Jimmy Carter on April 14, 1988 (pictured in the Green Room of Ham Hall with, seated to his left, philanthropist Marjorie Barrick). He revealed that he would make his decision in the Democratic primary based on who he thought could win the election and added a bit of political strategy saying, “It is advisable that a Southerner be on the ticket.” Carter further expressed his view that the office of the presidency was usually only examined in times of war or crisis, or when there is some kind of scandal. He believed that the office “had been shaped by those who had held it.”

**BILL CLINTON**

President George H.W. Bush once used the UNLV track to squeeze in a jog during a brief visit to Las Vegas. However, Bill Clinton became the first sitting president to choose our campus as a venue, in his case for a town hall meeting June 9, 1996. After stepping off Air Force One, Clinton delivered a 20-minute speech on education and environment issues during a rally and addressed nuclear waste storage, saying the decision “should be based on the best science, not the worst politics.” He went on to the Moyer Student Union and touted curfews, drug addiction programs, and other preventative measures to juvenile crime. After leaving office, he delivered the opening address to the 900 attendees at the National Clean Energy Summit, which was co-sponsored by UNLV, on Aug. 18, 2008.

**GEORGE W. BUSH**

Just two weeks before the November election in 2004, George W. Bush took the podium to the strains of the “Washington Post March” at the Republican National Committee rally at the Thomas & Mack Center. Bush outlined what he considered to be his responsibilities as president if re-elected and vowed to keep taxes low, to bring about educational reforms, and to continue to fight the war on terror.

**BARACK OBAMA**

Obama first stepped into the Cox Pavilion when it hosted a Democratic primary debate Nov. 15, 2007, with CNN’s Wolf Blitzer moderating. He returned on July 9, 2010, to deliver a speech on the economy and again on June 7, 2012, to discuss student loan debt. His vice president, Joe Biden, and singer Lady Gaga held a rally on campus for their It’s On Us sexual assault awareness campaign April 7, 2016.
‘I Had Nothing to Lose’

When Vamsee Pamula, ’92 MS Electrical Engineering, sees chances to apply his big brain to business opportunities, he takes the leap. His latest venture is a daring moneymaker — and a potential life saver.

Story by Greg Lacour | Photo by Erik Perel

VAMSEE PAMULA MIGHT AS WELL HAVE FLOWN TO ANOTHER PLANET. It was early fall 1994, his first week as a 20-year-old grad student at UNLV. The world he knew was south India, where his father, an electrical engineer, maintained the power grid for a bustling city of 2 million while trying to bring electricity to impoverished rural areas. Pamula knew nothing of the United States, certainly nothing of Las Vegas, where he’d decided to seek a master’s degree solely because a cousin of his had gone to school there.

But early on, he made a crucial acquaintance whose background mirrored his own. Rama Venkat was in his early 30s, at the time an associate professor of engineering from Chennai (formerly Madras), the city near where Pamula had grown up. Both men were members of the Brahmin caste of priests and scholars, the keepers of knowledge across generations. Pamula naturally gravitated to him.

“I remember one of the first days he was here, I think I was leaving to go pick my daughter up from school, and I asked Vamsee if he wanted to ride with me. He said, ‘Sure,’” recalled Venkat, now dean of UNLV’s Howard R. Hughes College of Engineering. “We were talking about different types of things, what he needed to be successful, and I told him some of the ways he might do that.”

Venkat was taken aback. Most master’s students, especially those from other countries, weren’t so enthusiastic practically from the moment they stepped off the plane. “For some reason, that incident, which showed drive and enthusiasm, sticks with me until today,” he said. “He was curious and willing to take an opportunity and seize on it.”

HE STILL IS.
On a hot late Thursday morning in June, Pamula is meeting in the conference room at Baebies, his latest entrepreneurial venture. The company occupies about 18,000 square feet in a nondescript corner of North Carolina’s renowned Research Triangle Park, the 7,000-acre high-tech research and development campus near the state capital of Raleigh. Pamula co-founded Baebies in 2014, helped secure roughly $13 million in equity financing for the company’s expansion a year later, and expects to begin selling its neonatal health screening products this year — all after he sold his first tech startup, which he founded in 2004, for $96 million.

Little about Pamula’s appearance or demeanor suggests a young tech millionaire at the helm. He’s slight, bespectacled, of medium height, and outfitted in a gingham button-down, cotton slacks, and loafers. He speaks softly and looks more like a grad student than his 42 years of age. He is an ideal reflection of what UNLV increasingly wants to do — spur brilliant students into entrepreneurship and use its research to drive economic development in Southern Nevada. That’s a pillar of the university’s Top Tier strategic plan to rise as an institution.

In the conference room, Pamula gestured to Baebies’ motto, printed on the wall in the same lowercase gray and blue of the company’s logo: “everyone deserves a healthy start.” The company operates on a simple mission Pamula and his co-founder, Rich West, devised. Roughly 1 percent of the 137 million babies born worldwide every year have treatable heritable disorders or genetic diseases, and Baebies wants to use its technology to improve screening procedures and devices for early detection and expand access to all babies of the world.

For instance, Baebies is working on an electroencephalogram-based procedure to test infants for hearing defects. Children can’t communicate that they’re having trouble hearing until they can talk, but by then precious developmental milestones will have passed. So Pamula wants Baebies to develop and sell products to detect and treat the condition early, when treatment has a far better chance of success.

Of course, he could accomplish this in an academic setting, but he decided some years back that he’d rather go the business route. Pamula doesn’t see a conflict between profitability and the medical and social good.

“I’ve never thought of myself as a businessman,” he said. “It’s just that, fundamentally, what was underlying this whole path was making something useful for others — the business follows that.

“It circles back to this interaction I had with this professor from Duke back in ’93, Frank Starmer. He kind of reinforced what my father always taught me: that whatever your education, put it to use to help somebody else. It was always his mantra. And if you do that with some idea of how business transactions work, you can build a business out of that. You do good; you do well; you do both.”

THAT’S WHERE AND WHEN PAMULA’S INTERESTS REALLY STARTED. His father was an engineer for the government electric utility for the state of Andhra Pradesh, on the southeastern Indian coast on the Bay of Bengal. It was and remains a frequent target for cyclones and other storms that cause power outages, so Pamula and his siblings — one brother, one sister — learned early about the importance of engineering to people’s lives.

His older brother became a cardiac surgeon while Pamula enrolled as an electrical engineering student in 1990 at Osmania University, in the city of Hyderabad, some 400 miles northwest. Three years in, he volunteered as an assistant for a biomedical engineering conference that drew researchers and scientists from around the world to Osmania. Starner, a computer science professor at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, was one of them.

At the conference, he spoke about computer science as a matter not of theory or pure academics but problem-solving, on a large and vitally important scale. “He said, ‘I usually seek out problems,’ “ Pamula recalled. “He was a computer science professor, but he hung out mostly in the medical center, looking for problems so he could solve them.” The young engineering student had never thought of his studies as a practical tool.

That was his first great watershed moment.

HIS SECOND CAME WHEN HE BEGAN STUDYING UNDER RAMA VENKAT AT UNLV, riding a borrowed bicycle to and from campus and working on a research assistantship that included a full tuition credit and a small stipend. The assistantship involved studying ways to reduce potentially radioactive dust at the nearby Yucca Mountain Nuclear Waste Repository. After it ended, the two men continued to work together on Pamula’s master’s thesis, which centered on a process called molecular beam epitaxy, the stacking of atomic layers of materials atop each other; the resulting “sandwich” is a crucial component in, among other things, semiconductors.

Pamula would work all day under Venkat’s guidance, the dean recalled. Then Venkat would pick up his young children from school, eat dinner, put them to bed, and call Pamula, who invariably was still at the lab. The two published a paper together when Pamula was still in the master’s program, an unusual feat. “(Dr. Venkat) was just very enthusiastic about any problem,” Pamula explained to me in the conference room. “He’s a very smart guy, and with varied interests. You hear about these scientists from 200 years back, the guy who would work on math, work on physics, like Pascal and …”

“Ben Franklin?” I offered.

“Exactly. He’s like that, in a way,” he said. “Very versatile. He could take any problem and solve it.”

The two still keep in touch, talking by phone every few months and visiting when work takes either near the other. “What he has done in the last 20 years since he
left UNLV is amazing,” Venkat said. For all their similarities, though, the dean said Pamula differs in one important respect: “I wish I was more of a risk-taker like him.”

PAMULA’S THIRD WATERSHED MOMENT CAME AS A DOCTORAL STUDENT. In 1996, with Frank Stamer’s example still in his mind, he enrolled in Duke’s engineering Ph.D. program. Three years in, he and a team of fellow students entered a project in the inaugural Duke Startup Challenge. It’s similar to the student-run Rebel Venture Fund, created by UNLV’s Center for Entrepreneurship to invest in startup companies and provide mentoring and resources to support their growth.

Pamula’s team won first place and $30,000 in prize money. They started a business with their first product being a wireless mouse that can be operated in the air. It had applications for operating cellphones, playing games using it as a baton, and as a wearable to monitor health. After finishing his Ph.D., with a growing interest in biomedicine — and inspired by his older brother—he founded a new company that perfected a method for manipulating droplets of liquid on a flat surface, a useful technique in medical fluid sampling and DNA testing. It was called Advanced Liquid Logic, and he spent nine years as its chief technology officer before selling the company to the San Mateo, California-based global genetic sequencing and genotyping company Illumina for $96 million.

With Advanced Liquid Logic, Pamula explained, the technology had directed the team and its mission. With Baebies, it’s the other way around; mission comes first, and team and its mission. With Baebies, it’s the other way around; mission comes first, and team and its mission. With Baebies, it’s the other way around; mission comes first, and team and its mission.

Sara Mallett Leoni, ’96 BA Communication Studies
Sara Leoni has always known one thing about herself, even dating back to her days as a starting outfielder for the UNLV softball team. “Losing is not an option. No two ways about it,” she said. “That’s what got me into UNLV in the first place.”

These days, at 42, Leoni routes her competitiveness through a different scholastic channel. She’s the CEO of Rafter Inc., a San Mateo, California-based startup that through contracts with campus bookstores around the country allows students to lease rather than buy textbooks and other course materials — often drastically cutting their expenses. “Cost of course materials should never be a barrier to a degree,” she said. “But it is, for many students.”

After graduation, Leoni worked in marketing for a succession of companies, including Yahoo!, E*TRADE Financial, and CafePress. “I wanted to do more than just sell mugs, which is what I was doing at CafePress,” she said. “I wanted to do something that was meaningful and impactful.” She went to work for Rafter’s predecessor in 2009, helping grow its revenues from about $2 million per year to $50 million. In 2014, after the name change, the company’s board of directors asked her to take the CEO job.

In school, she’d never thought about entrepreneurship as a career path. Only with years and experience did Leoni realize how well it fit her strengths. “You have to have an incredibly strong sense of ownership — this is your baby, so you have to be very passionate,” she said. “And you have to be a real risk-taker. No one’s going to figure it out for you.”

Henry Schuck, ’05 BS Hotel Administration and Accounting
When Henry Schuck enrolled as a freshman in 2001, his mother gave him $5,000 and told him: There’s your college fund. For all four years. It turned out to be one of the best things she could have done for him.

He took a job working the front desk at the MGM Grand Hotel and Casino and then at a small startup in Henderson called iProfile. The company hired itself out to IT companies and collected pertinent data — key personnel, workflow, financial outlook — for the clients the companies were trying to cultivate.

Schuck worked through college, getting elected student body president along the way. Two years after graduation, he co-founded his own version of his old firm — DiscoverOrg, which serves the same purpose but on a much larger scale. The company employs 250 and makes about $60 million per year. “The idea is that sales and marketing professionals are expected to grow revenue for companies, but they spend an inordinate amount of time going through outmoded data,” said Schuck, 33. Through services such as his, those people can be freed from time-consuming research and non-selling activities to focus on growing the company.

His entrepreneurial success — he was a national finalist last year for Ernst & Young’s Entrepreneur of the Year award — has put his early experience in a new and uneasy context. He had his first child, a daughter, in May, and he naturally wants her to have some of the advantages he didn’t. But then he wonders if he found his opportunities through necessity. “We’re all sort of the sum of our experiences,” Schuck says. “I think what happens in college for a lot of tech entrepreneurs is that they just know college. Their context for business is so small. The lucky thing for me is that at a young age, I was able to get a lot of business experience and world context that I was able to capitalize on.”

SEE PAMULA PAGE 54

TWO MORE REBEL TECH LEADERS TO KNOW

These UNLV graduates are shaking up stagnant industries with original thinking and different tactics. Here’s how they’re tapping into their Rebel spirit to change the way we do business.
Colombia, the country where journalist Vanessa Hauc grew up, features Andean ice caps, Amazonian rainforests, and Pacific beaches. But Hauc didn't find a career theme until she was sitting in classrooms some 3,000 miles away in the Mojave Desert.

"In South America, the way we were raised, we were in close contact with nature all the time," she said. "Then at UNLV, in my environmental science classes, I realized there was so much to learn about the planet and how important the environment was."

Hauc, ’00 BS Communication Studies, is an Emmy-winning correspondent for Noticiero Telemundo, the flagship nightly national newscast for the Spanish-language TV network Telemundo. In addition to regularly reporting on economics and politics, she’s filed dispatches from New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, Chile during the rescue of trapped miners, and Paris during last year’s terror attacks.

Climate change and sustainability dominate her reporting, which reaches millions of households throughout the U.S. and Mexico. And that fixation has carried over into her volunteer work in the Latino community.

Though her educational journey spanned colleges on three continents, Las Vegas was where she had the “a-ha moment” linking her interests in journalism and the environment to her cultural background.

“I realized that the environment is one of the most important stories of our time,” she said, “and the Hispanic community is especially vulnerable to the changes on our planet. I realized it was important to me to communicate that message to my community.”
BORN IN LIMA, PERU, Hauc moved with her family to Bogota when she was 6. Her striking features led to modeling jobs by 14 and a gig hosting a children’s dance show on Colombian television at 15. But as college rolled around, she traded a mass TV audience for solitary hours at a word processor.

“I enjoyed working on TV, but I wanted to be a writer,” she said. Hauc eventually struck upon journalism, an ideal marriage of her passions.

In her third year of college in Colombia, after a study abroad stint at the University of Aix-en-Provence, she married a Frenchman and followed him to Las Vegas and UNLV’s broadcast journalism courses.

Hauc was able to transfer some credits from Colombia, and immersed herself in studying environmental science and sharpening her journalism skills on both sides of the camera. Six months before graduating, she landed a low-level position at KINC Channel 15, the local Spanish-language Univision affiliate. Las Vegas is a top-25 Hispanic TV market, but the station’s staff was tiny, affording Hauc a bonanza of skill-honing opportunities.

“I was doing teleprompter, producing, writing, whatever,” she said. It wasn’t long before she was reporting on air. “The station was very small, but it taught me to be resourceful and multitask, to own a story and work a story from every angle.”

By the time she left Univision in 2002, she wasanchoring the news.

Her next job, at the city of Las Vegas’s KCLV Channel 2, was short-lived. Her appearances on the city’s monthly community affairs program led to a talent agent spotting Hauc and inviting her to tryout for a new show on Telemundo.

She was cast on Al Rojo Vivo (loose translation: “Red Hot”), a newsmagazine that catapulted Hauc to a national network audience and a reporting post that seemed worlds away from life at a tiny Las Vegas affiliate. “We had so many more resources at the network, and every event you’re covering is very important,” said Hauc, who still works out of Telemundo’s Miami-area national headquarters.

During her 10 years reporting for Al Rojo Vivo, Hauc continued focusing on environmental reporting. She developed a weekly segment called “Alerta Verde” (“Green Alert”), highlighting environmental footprint issues. In 2011, she accepted former Vice President Al Gore’s invitation to moderate a climate change panel during four hours of 24 Hours of Reality, a global environmental broadcast watched by 9 million people.

That year also saw Hauc promoted to correspondent for Noticiero Telemundo, the network’s prime 30-minute evening newscast. She has reported from North and South America and Europe, covering both the election of Pope Francis and the re-election of President Obama.

Telemundo’s news reporting is centered around issues important to its core audience of native Spanish speakers in the United States.

“I have to learn a little about everything: education, politics, the environment, terrorism,” Hauc said. “But 80 percent of our audience comes from Mexico, and there are viewers from Puerto Rico and all over Central and South America. So we try to look for those stories that are going to be important for them. Immigrants are still very close to their roots in other countries.”

SOME 27.3 MILLION VOTERS OF HISPANIC BACKGROUND are projected for the 2016 election, a share greater than any other racial or ethnic group of voters, according to the Pew Research Center.

The stories Hauc has filed leading up to the U.S. presidential election have given her key insights into the issues on the minds of voters increasingly seen as a prized voting bloc by both major parties. Education and the economy are key concerns among them. “People come here with a dream to have a better life and better opportunity for their children,” she said. “Education is the key to break the cycle of poverty. They care about this country and care about having better jobs.”

But one issue is of paramount importance to the Spanish-speaking voters Hauc interviews: immigration reform. “If you think about all of the children who were born here who have parents who aren’t, they’re afraid their families will be deported. We have to find a way to solve this problem.”

When she’s not traversing North America for Telemundo, Hauc travels to give seminars for Sachamama, the nonprofit she co-founded four years ago with her marine biologist brother. The group’s name means “Mother Jungle” in the Quechua language spoken in the Amazon, and it works to raise awareness of the environmental movement and sustainable culture among Latinos.

“Whenever I have days off, that’s what I do,” she said. “This is my passion, so it’s not like work.”

Follow Vanessa Hauc’s reporting
Instagram: vanessahauc
Twitter: @vanessahauc
Career In Overdrive

How alumnus Jordan Shiraki’s degree in biology fueled his career as a commercial photographer for Lamborghini and Dodge.

BY MATT JACOB

Rare are the moments in life when pure joy intersects with paralyzing anxiety on the human emotional spectrum. There’s childbirth, of course, when the thrill of creating a new life is simultaneously matched by a feeling of, “Oh, crap — now what?”

Another? When cap-and-gown-wearing college students waltz across a stage to receive a degree. At that moment, graduates are justifiably filled with a profound sense of accomplishment. Then they exit stage left and, again: “Oh, crap — now what?”

After four grueling years as a biology major — “My partying happened in the library, where I studied for my next exam.” — Jordan Shiraki received his bachelor’s of science degree. It was supposed to lead to dental school and then back to his native Hawaii to take over his father’s orthodontic practice.

Shiraki was overcome with dread. “I knew I would be a good dentist,” Shiraki said. “But I wanted to be great at something.” That something was exotic car photography.

So barely a month after graduating, Shiraki called a life audible: He put aside his application to dental school and picked up his camera. He did so much to the horror of his parents “because when you’re Asian, you only have three career choices: a doctor, an engineer, or an accountant. Being an artist is definitely not in the mix, and I really felt I needed to prove myself.”

Prove himself he most definitely has: In six years, Shiraki has become a sought-after automobile photographer with two of his biggest clients being Dodge (he shot its 2015 international ad campaign) and Lamborghini.

SHIRAKI’S AFFINITY FOR BOTH EXOTIC CARS and photography goes back to a pair of seminal moments. The first occurred at age 8, when he received a die-cast model of a Lamborghini as a Christmas gift. “I remember being blown away by its aesthetics; the design was beautiful yet aggressive, with utterly insane proportions. It looked like it was going 200 miles per hour just sitting on my desk.”

Five years later, a 13-year-old Shiraki got his first peek through a camera lens while visiting the tiny Hawaiian island of Lanai. “I saw this beautiful landscape and I wanted to capture it, so I grabbed my parents’ point-and-shoot camera,” he said. “But when we developed the film, it looked nothing like what I had originally seen. And I’m like, ‘What the heck? Why can’t I capture the scene that was in my mind?’”

Once he got his hands on a 1960s Nikon camera that his grandfather found in his attic, he began experimenting. “All of a sudden,” he said, “I could print a picture of what I saw in my mind. I’ve been fascinated with photography ever since.”

HE CAME TO UNLV IN 2005 WITH HIS CAMERA GEAR IN TOW and squeezed some shooting time in when his heavy course load allowed. Whenever he went in search of a car to shoot, he did so with a philosophy. “When I was about 16 and first started out with car photography, I told myself that every photo shoot I performed, the car had to get better and my photos had to improve as well,” he said. “This was to ensure that I would be taking steps to better my art on a never-ending staircase so that I wouldn’t become stagnant.”

By his senior year, Shiraki had picked up some work for J-Tuned, a site for automobile photography, and secured his first big commercial job: shooting photos for the national debut of Lexus’ LFA supercar.

Shiraki’s next big break came not long after graduation. Desperate to lock up some work, he attended the Saturday morning Cars & Coffee gathering for owners of vintage cars, trucks, and exotic rides on Eastern Avenue in Henderson. His goal: to convince some of the owners to pay him to take high-quality photos of their vehicles.

When a Lamborghini drove past him, Shiraki flagged down the driver, who happened to be in charge of the marketing department for Lamborghini Las Vegas. “I gave him my business card and said, ‘If you can find a better car photographer in a 300-mile radius, call them instead. But if you can’t, give me a call on Monday,’” Shiraki
said. On Monday he got a call to come out and shoot the Murciélago SuperVeloce.

Lamborghini Las Vegas loved what Shiraki produced and then folks at headquarters took notice. Ironically, one corporate gig called for Shiraki to travel to New York and photograph the life-sized version of the dye-cast model he’d received on Christmas morning some 20 years earlier. “It was the exact same color, model, everything — it was like I came full circle.”

Shiraki has since partnered with high school classmate Johnathan Walk, who is a producer and director. Together, they can execute photography, video, and design for marketing campaigns.

Asked to share the secret to his relatively rapid success, Shiraki credits an old-fashioned American ethos.

“Hard work and being a good person,” he said. “I know it sounds cliché, but eventually you’ll rise to the top if you do those two things. I see a lot of talent (in my industry), but also really big egos. I also see really big egos and not too much talent. It’s hard to find big talent and small egos. I’ll outwork just about anyone, and I refuse to throw in the towel no matter how bleak the circumstances may seem.”

AS HIS PHOTOGRAPHY CAREER CONTINUES TO FLOURISH, one can’t help but wonder about that biology degree he earned. While he may not spend his days treating patients and encouraging them to floss, he nonetheless acquired a great deal of knowledge from his time at UNLV that’s applicable to his career.

“Some people argue with me that college was a waste of time, that I should’ve just gone into photography (instead of going to school),” he said. “And I tell them that, even though I don’t use my degree directly, I learned so much about persistence and fortitude. I gained this sense of tenacity from struggling through really difficult courses like organic chemistry.

“Had I quit school, I don’t think I would’ve made it through a lot of the adversities that I’ve encountered since then. That regimen, and those classes, had a tremendous impact on me and really helped to develop my character, which enabled me to get to where I am today.”

See Jordan Shiraki’s portfolio: JordanShiraki.com and ShirakiPhoto.com.
Eugene Grace, ’71BS Hotel Administration, was president of Grace Management, a 32-year-old national company specializing in senior housing with services environments. He sold the company two years ago to a private equity group and now is advising that group. Semi-retired, he also works as a qualified expert witness for court cases involving senior housing with services, development, marketing, and management. His hobbies include piano, motorcycle trips with friends, skiing, scuba diving, international travel, real estate investments, and photography. He and his wife of 33 years, Mari Jo, maintain a second home in Santa Rosa, California, but recently moved to Colorado, making Vail their primary residence.

Lonnie Wright, ’78 BS Hotel Administration, ’84 Masters of Secondary Education, ’15 PhD Curriculum and Instruction, is a tenured professor at CSN where he has taught for 25 years and served in a variety of positions, including as dean and associate vice president of the Hospitality Institute. He previously taught at UNLV and served as a dean of the Hotel School at the American College of Singapore. An entrepreneur, he launched the Urban American Television Network — one of the first African-American television networks. He and his wife, Shermie, have a consulting company called Hospitality International, which helps Native American tribes open hotels. He has served on the Governors Commission on Juvenile and Adult Corrections and on the boards of Innovation International Charter School of Nevada and the Better Business Bureau of Southern Nevada. He is most proud of having been a founder in 1977 of the UNLV Basketball Alumni Association, which helps former student-athletes finish their degrees, and of starting programs to train homeless people in culinary arts at CSN and prisons through Hospitality International Training. He says he gives back to the community because of the Upward Bound program, which paid for him to take college courses the previous year. Mari Jo, maintain a second home in Santa Rosa, California, but recently moved to Colorado, making Vail their primary residence.

Gary Vallen, ’79 BS Hotel Administration, is a founding faculty member at Palmer, Alaska. Watching Turner Classic Movies and meeting his wife, Shermie, on Juvenile and Adult Corrections and on the boards of Innovation International Charter School of Nevada and the Better Business Bureau of Southern Nevada. He is most proud of having been a founder in 1977 of the UNLV Basketball Alumni Association, which helps former student-athletes finish their degrees, and of starting programs to train homeless people in culinary arts at CSN and prisons through Hospitality International Training. He says he gives back to the community because of the Upward Bound program, which paid for him to take college courses the previous year. Mari Jo, maintain a second home in Santa Rosa, California, but recently moved to Colorado, making Vail their primary residence.

1980s

David Nightingale, ’80 BS Hotel Administration, is a general manager of the Peninsula Golf & Country Club in San Mateo, California. Among his previous jobs have been as a sales manager of the Peninsula Golf & Country Club, as general manager of the Sharon Heights Golf & Country Club, and as lakeside manager of the Olympic Club. He considers himself lucky to be able to have a great career and stay in the San Francisco Bay Area where he and his wife, Melissa, grew up. Family, golf, and travel are his hobbies. He and Melissa have three adult children, Jonathan, Brooke, and Derek Nightingale. ’14 BS Hotel Administration, Derek is a sales manager for Marriott in San Francisco. David and his wife are moving to empty-nester status, but have six chickens and a goldendoodle named Madison to keep them busy. They live in San Mateo.

Willanne Winchester, ’82 BS Hotel Administration, is a memorialist and managing member of Memorials Worldwide, a family-run business offering memorials with the scattering of cremated remains (ashes) at spiritual, cultural, and historic sites around the world. She lives in Vail, Arizona.

Greg Goussak, ’84 BS Hotel Administration, ’94 MS Hotel Administration, earned a doctor of business administration degree from the University of Phoenix in 2009. He lives in Henderson.

Kaye Chon, ’85 BS Hotel Administration, is dean of the School of Hotel & Tourism Management at Hong Kong Polytechnic University. He is also a former UNLV faculty member.

Herb Santos, Jr., ’85 BA Sociology, is managing owner of the NBA development team, the Reno Bighorns. The team finished its season as the Pacific Division champions. He has been the managing owner of the team since the 2011-12 season, during which the team has had a record number of players called up to the NBA. He continues to practice law in Reno. He completed a term as president of the Nevada Justice Association (formerly known as the Nevada Trial Lawyers Association), became a Fellow of the American Bar Foundation, and was appointed by Gov. Brian Sandoval to a second term on the Nevada State Tourism Commission. He is married to his college sweetheart, Kimberly Saylor Santos.

Members of UNLV’s first graduating class gathered for a reunion in May. The Class of ’64 includes: (front, from left) Phyllis Segal Darling, Joanne Weber Trent, Mary Pinkham Spigelmyer, Sharon Ann Myers Kemna, and Binnie Syde Zink; (back) Lewis Sonderholf, Ray Rawson, Ronald Hamilton, Joanne Favero Watson, and Fred Watson, along with Jim Ratigan, ’78, executive director of the UNLV Alumni Association.

H. Rae Lamoth, ’86 BS Hotel Administration, and her partner opened a small boutique law firm, Golding + Lamoth, near Los Angeles International Airport during the summer of 2015. She primarily practices employment and health care litigation. She lives near work, which she says makes her one of the lucky few who do not need to commute in Los Angeles. She and her husband enjoy touring throughout California and frequently to Las Vegas on their Harleys. They live in Playa del Rey.

W. Vida Chow, ’87 BS Hotel Administration, ’06 Master of Hospitality Administration, is a director of Talent Management Asia Pacific for Hyatt Hotels and Resorts and is based in the company’s regional office in Hong Kong. She describes herself as happy and fun-loving. She enjoys Bikram yoga; experiencing different cultures; and exploring trends in fashion, interior design, food, and wine.

Barry Vaccaro, ’87 BS Hotel Administration, has worked in the hotel industry for 29 years, currently at the Eastside Cannery Hotel and Casino. Previously he held a variety of jobs at the Sahara, Luxor, and Excalibur. While at UNLV he was student equipment manager for the Runnin’ Rebels and coach Jerry Tarkanian from 1982-86. His hobbies include playing basketball and following UNLV sports and all teams from his hometown of Pittsburgh, which is near his hometown of Trafford. He says he is extremely proud that his daughter, Lauren Vaccaro, is a UNLV senior pursuing dual majors in communication studies and art history.
1990s

Linda Westcott Bernstein, ’92 BSBA Management and BA Human Resources, ’06 Executive Masters Hotel Administration, is a writer and author. In 2009, she published a book about how to build work ethic in your life, It All Comes Down to W.E. She was the first woman to chair the Southern Nevada chapter of the American Heart Association and has served as a board member on the Leukemia Lymphoma Society and on the development committee for Opportunity Village, where she also volunteers. She and her husband, Jeff, have two adult children, a son, Brian, and a daughter, Jennifer Bernstein, ’12 BSBA.

Glenn Garrison, ’92 BS Hotel Administration, has moved to a new position in the Pentagon as U.S. Air Force chief of morale, welfare, and recreation policy. When he left his previous Pentagon position as chief of the total force programs in the strategy and design branch, he received the Meritorious Civilian Service award. He lives in Edgewater, Maryland.

R. Scott Killian, ’92 BS Hotel Administration, operates Scott Real Estate in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Previously, he worked in the private country club business, switching to real estate in 2003. He lives in Bedford.

Hydi Mitz Verduzco, ’91 BS Hotel Administration, is co-owner of East by Southwest, the premier sushi restaurant in southwest Colorado. Previously, she was general manager of Eagles Bar and Grille in Telluride, Colorado; bar manager at Hotel Bel-Air Costa Carayes in Mexico; and assistant bar manager at the Las Vegas Hilton. In 2012, she was named the Outstanding Restaurant Professional for Colorado. In 1992, she married Sergio A. Verduzco, ’92 BS Hotel Administration, and moved to Mexico. The couple has four boys who have been raised in the restaurant industry. All the boys play a part in their current business while attending school. The couple enjoys scuba diving and family time. They have travelled to Thailand, Hawaii, Roatan, Utíla, Mexico, and other places to enjoy the natural beauty of the ocean. The family lives in Durango.

Joe Rasíc, ’92 BS Hotel Administration, ’10 Master of Hospitality Administration, owns Cypress Point Restaurants. Food, wine, and community involvement are his hobbies. He has been married to his wife, Jennifer, since 1993. They have two sons, Ryan and Benjamin. The family lives in Placentia, California.

David Porter, ’93 BS Hotel Administration, was awarded the 2015 Aloft Hotels General Manager of the Year by Starwood Hotels and Resorts at the annual conference held in Phoenix. Past awards include 2009 and 2010 Aloft Hotel of the Year. He is also a board member for Travel Portland. His hobbies include traveling, entertaining, cooking, and spending time with family. He is married and has a 5-year-old daughter who loves to travel and play “lobby” when visiting new hotels. The family lives in Camas, Washington.

Steve Rice, ’93 BS Hotel Administration, is director of catering at the Beverly Hills Hotel. Previously, he worked as vice president and general manager of CPS Events at the Plaza Hotel in New York City and as director of catering at the Hotel Bel Air in Los Angeles, the Pierre Hotel in New York City, and the Waldorf Astoria in New York. He lists family, faith, fitness, and food as his interests. He is married and living in the town where he was raised, Santa Monica, California.

Robin Harris Slipock, ’93 BS Hotel Administration, owns Jackson’s Bar and Grill with husband, Brian Slipock, ’92 BS Hotel Administration. Her hobbies include travel, food, and collecting turtles. The couple has a daughter, Dina, who is a senior in high school.

Dustin Bermingham, ’95 BS Hospitality Administration, is a general manager/head grower of a cannabis collective. Also a cannabis consultant, he lives in Morgan Hill, California.

Michael Frezell, ’95 BA Communication Studies, was promoted to communications manager for the Michigan Department of Transportation in 2014. He supervises staff, publishes a weekly legislative newsletter, and answers media inquiries related to rail, public...
Tony Canepa, '03 BA Film, is the creative director for the Tacoma Rainiers baseball team, the Triple-A affiliate of the Seattle Mariners. His sports career began at UNLV as Hey Reb!, which led to a role with the Las Vegas 51s. He is also a freelance designer and illustrator, creating work for clients around the world. His work has garnered numerous awards, including three National ADDY awards presented by the American Advertising Federation. He enjoys drawing, sculpting, and mixed martial arts, which he began as a member of the UNLV boxing club. He, wife Kelly, and dog Desi live in Seattle.

2000s

Jonathan Bell, '00 BS Hotel Administration, is senior vice president of global casino credit for the Las Vegas Sands Corp. In 2009, he earned an MBA at Arizona State University.

Adam Lopez, '00 BS Hotel Administration, is a technical senior project manager. His hobbies include camping, running, and going to yard sales. He is a graduate of the Las Vegas High School of the Arts, a boy and a girl. The family lives in North Las Vegas.

John Avery, '01 JD, is the owner of the Avery Law Firm in Arlington, Texas. He lives in DeSoto.

Christopher Hicks, '01 JD, is the district attorney for Washoe County. He oversees 180 employees, including 62 attorneys — several of whom are fellow UNLV law grads. He also serves on several Nevada Supreme Court-appointed criminal justice commissions and is the president-elect of the Nevada District Attorney’s Association. He lives in Reno.

Mark Jackson, '01 JD, recently moved into a civil service position with the office of foreign assets control at the U.S. Treasury in Washington, D.C. He lives in Sterling, Virginia.

Sabrina Orque, '01 BS Hotel Administration, started a human resources consulting firm for small to mid-size businesses in 2013. She lives in Henderson.

Sara Gaskill, '02 JD, and Brian Morris, '02 JD, were married last year and co-founded the Morris Law Center in Las Vegas.

Illiana Murray, '02 BS Hotel Administration, has worked in technology project management for more than 10 years. She is with Citigroup where she is vice president lead analyst for the equity compensation unit in Global Corporate Services. Previously, she was a project coordinator at Adelco Staffing in Melville, New York. Before moving to technology, she worked in human resources at Cantor Fitzgerald and Elevador News Network in New York City. In her spare time, she volunteers in politics, enjoys great food and wine, and entertains regularly. She says the last two pursuits are linked to her time at the William F. Hanah College of Hotel Administration. She recently returned to Southern Nevada after living in Brooklyn, New York, for 15 years.

Brenda Wexles, '02 JD, has worked at the federal public defender’s office for 13 years. She tries cases and handles the occasional appeal. She also is president of the Boyd School of Law Alumni Chapter and sits on the UNLV Alumni Association Board of Directors, which sponsors events to bring alumni together.

Kristina Welles, '02 JD, joined Richard Harris Law Firm in Las Vegas as an associate. She practices interdisciplinary, personal injury, medical malpractice, mass torts, and product liability law.

Janice Casaretto, '03 JD, practices law and currently is campaigning for the office of Butte-Silver Bow County (Montana) public administrator. She lives in Butte.

Lisa Allen Chastain, '03 BA Communication for SurfWest Wealth Management, an independent registered investment advisor. She holds the FINRA Series 65 and 66 licenses and is a candidate for her certified financial planner (CFP) designation. She volunteers at Choice Center Leadership University as a life coach in the areas of accountability, responsibility, teamwork, and community service. She also is a volunteer teacher for TechStars, a high-tech incubator and accelerator.

Patricia McAttee, '05 BS Hotel Administration, has accepted an offer as a child and family therapist and moved to the West Coast in August. Previously, she had lived in Illinois where she worked first with domestic violence perpetrators, then as a forensic pediatrician where she examined substance abuse victims, and finally in the chemical dependency field. After leaving UNLV, she earned a master’s degree in counseling psychology.

Angie Phillips, '05 BS Hotel Administration, is the front desk training supervisor for Prien Valley Resorts. She lives in Pimm.

Heather Proctor, '05 JD, recently celebrated her first year as the Nevada attorney general’s office in Carson City. She focuses on federal and state habeas corpus proceedings. She also coordinates training for Mexican prosecutors, investigators, and forensic scientists for her office. Recently, she was elected to the Board of Directors for the National Association of Extradition Officials, the largest professional organization devoted to the field of extradition in the country. She lives in Reno.

Dianna Ballash, '04 BA Communication Studies, works for a local government agency in the Portland, Oregon, area supporting communications and policy initiatives. Previously, she worked for the Las Vegas Valley Water District and Southern Nevada Water Authority.
Michelle “Shelley” McWhorter Ellis, ’04 BS Hotel Administration, was appointed general manager of the Visalia (California) Convention Center in January. She directs all aspects of the convention center’s operations and will work with the city to provide direction to increase the success of the center. Previously, she was associate director at the Three Rivers Convention Center, Toyota Center, and Toyota Arena in Kennewick, Washington. She graduated from the International Association of Venue Managers Graduate Institute in 2013. Her hobbies include running, hiking, exploring new restaurants and great beer, and going to the beach. She and her husband have two children, Sydney and Parks. The family lives in Visalia.

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Joseph McLaughlin, ’04 JD, was appointed general manager of the Visalia (California) Convention Center in January. He directs all aspects of the convention center’s operations and will work with the city to provide direction to increase the success of the center. Previously, he was associate director at the Three Rivers Convention Center, Toyota Center, and Toyota Arena in Kennewick, Washington. He graduated from the International Association of Venue Managers Graduate Institute in 2013. His hobbies include running, hiking, exploring new restaurants and great beer, and going to the beach. He and his husband have two children, Sydney and Parks. The family lives in Visalia.

Ellis, ’04 BSBA, who works for an investment company, he previously worked for Greenpum Media and for several national financial services firms. The couple celebrates their 10-year wedding anniversary this year. They have twin sons and a daughter. The family lives in Beaverton.

Bryan Thornhill, ’04 BS Hotel Administration, is a regional principal for opportunities for learning in South Central Los Angeles. Previously, as a high school math teacher, he developed a passion for helping students and families in underserved communities. Now that he is a principal for students in grades 7-12, he says he strives to inspire his staff to uncover their talents and determine how best to utilize them to eliminate the existing economic and achievement gaps. The area he serves includes Torrance, Hawthorne, Vermont Knolls, and Crenshaw Square. He describes his job as a dream come true and says he hopes to bring about an educational revolution that focuses on meeting the social-emotional needs of students so that they can focus on learning. He and his wife, Joy, have a 2-year-old-son, Trent. His hobbies include listening to books on Audible, attending professional development programs, and taking his son to the playground. The family and their pug, Sofia, live in Long Beach.

Peter Ajemian, ’05 JD, was named a shareholder with Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck. He is based in the Las Vegas office in the firm’s intellectual property department. His bio-comics, part illustrated obituary and part tall tale, profile Nevada’s obscure yet legendary inhabitants. He digs up and resurrects characters from the memory dump of Nevada history.

Bryan Thornhill, ’04 BS Hotel Administration, is a regional principal for opportunities for learning in South Central Los Angeles. Previously, as a high school math teacher, he developed a passion for helping students and families in underserved communities. Now that he is a principal for students in grades 7-12, he says he strives to inspire his staff to uncover their talents and determine how best to utilize them to eliminate the existing economic and achievement gaps. The area he serves includes Torrance, Hawthorne, Vermont Knolls, and Crenshaw Square. He describes his job as a dream come true and says he hopes to bring about an educational revolution that focuses on meeting the social-emotional needs of students so that they can focus on learning. He and his wife, Joy, have a 2-year-old-son, Trent. His hobbies include listening to books on Audible, attending professional development programs, and taking his son to the playground. The family and their pug, Sofia, live in Long Beach.

Beth Rosenblum, ’05 JD, is a partner with the Law Offices of Rhonda L. Mutchkin and has served as a pro tem domestic violence commissioner in the Family Division of the Clark County 8th District Court. She lives in Henderson.

Melissa Rothermel Biernacki, ’06 BA Journalism & Media Studies, has been appointed general manager of the Visalia (California) Convention Center in January. He directs all aspects of the convention center’s operations and will work with the city to provide direction to increase the success of the center. Previously, he was associate director at the Three Rivers Convention Center, Toyota Center, and Toyota Arena in Kennewick, Washington. He graduated from the International Association of Venue Managers Graduate Institute in 2013. His hobbies include running, hiking, exploring new restaurants and great beer, and going to the beach. He and his husband have two children, Sydney and Parks. The family lives in Visalia.
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**NOTES**

- **Chen, ’13**
- **Myszka, ’08**

been named director of public relations/reputation manager of Henderson-based Imagine Communications. Previously, she served as director of media relations. Her experience includes local and national story pitching and coordination for print, TV, radio, and online crisis communication, press conference coordination, and legislative support. She is also Imagine’s resident editor. She has served as an industry speaker and author and has been honored by local organizations with several awards, including induction in 2014 into the Women’s Chamber of Commerce’s Women’s Hall of Fame. She and her husband, Marek Biernacinski, ’06 JD, recently were recruited to an up-and-coming sales enablement company called Snowpad. He has been promoted to manager of sales engineering and is building out a team. He says it is a great company for UNLV individuals trying to make it into the San Francisco tech scene. The San Francisco resident is the father of a daughter, Rylie, who turned 4 in September.

**Ken Myszka, ’08 BS Hospitality Management,** is married to **Namam Yoon Myszka, ’08 BS Hospitality Management,** The couple lives in Bloomington, Illinois.

**Jessica Taylor, ’08 JD,** of Allen, Semelsberger & Kaelin in San Diego recently won a case in which the jury awarded more than $58 million to 10 households in compensatory and punitive damages after they lost their homes because of unreasonable rent rates and illegal practices. This was only the first phase of 39 homes that are part of the lawsuit. She lives in Poway.

**Rebecca Falk Gschwend, ’09 BS Hotel Administration,** has worked for the national nonprofit consulting firm of Campbell & Company for more than six years. Her hobbies include horseback riding, hiking, gaming, candle making, knitting, scrapbooking, and reading. She is married and has a 2-year-old son. The family lives in Wood Dale, Illinois.

**Mason Trafford, ’09 BSBA Accounting,** is a professional soccer player with Miami FC. He recently married Claudia Sarti Sturge. His hobbies include playing tennis and traveling around the world.

**Bryce Loveland, ’08 JD,** became a shareholder at the Las Vegas office of Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck where he is a member of the litigation department. He also assists with department and labor audit defense and collection of unpaid employee benefit contributions, withdrawal liability, and third-party reimbursement.

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W. Paul Miller, ‘10 PhD Civil Engineering, and Jessica Lucero Miller, ‘12 PhD English Literature, are proud to announce the birth of their first child, Isaac Catalino Miller, on May 12. Isaac already is a big Rebels fan and will be visiting the campus soon!
In the meantime, he’s looking forward to attending alumni events in Utah. The family lives in Salt Lake City.

Ryan McInerney, ‘11 JD, recently played a leading role in crafting strategic research and communications strategy for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee’s independent expenditure arm, which spent more than $68 million in the 2014 election cycle on political advertising. In this role, he manages the largest team of U.S. House researchers in the Democratic Party and works directly with pollsters, media consultants, and other political professionals to localize national issues in ways that connect with persuadable voters in districts throughout the country. He lives in Washington, D.C.

Yeonhee Seo, ‘11 BS Hospitality Management - Meetings & Events Management, is a teacher. She lives in Namnyangju, South Korea.

Staci Shute Shelman, ‘11 BS Hotel Management - Meetings & Events Management, is the head of the group sales department at an 8,000-seat concert and Broadway theater in Kansas City, Missouri, called Starlight Theatre. She is a member of the marketing department and has had the opportunity to be creative, learn marketing strategies for Broadway consumers, and also dip her toes in some public relations. Previously, she worked at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas, where she originally had worked as an intern while in college. Later she moved to the South Point as events manager for the arena. There she learned a great deal about arena operations at a venue where the main events included equestrian competitions, rodeos, and BMX and dirt bike racing. She recently married and is busy painting, refinishing, and furnishing their new home. The couple lives in Lawrence, Kansas.

David Wedley, ‘11 MS Sport and Leisure Services Management, is director of student-athlete academic services at UNLV and serves as athletic academic advisor for football, men’s basketball, and softball.

Jason Bacigalupi, ‘12 JD, joined Lewis Roca Rothgerber Christie as an associate in the gaming practice group last fall.

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Dustyn Holmes, ’12 JD, works in the Las Vegas firm of Pinion Bell as an associate attorney. He practices commercial litigation.

Christopher Husnes, ’12 JD, recently joined the board of Families for Effective Autism Treatment (FEAT). FEAT’s mission is to provide information on treatment resources for families with children diagnosed with autism, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and related disorders. He is an associate with the Las Vegas office of Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck.

Jubak Medrala, ’17 JD, and Nick Donath, ’13 JD, last fall celebrated the two-year anniversary of the opening of Donath & Medrala.

Timothy Mott, ’12 JD, and his family welcomed a baby, May Andrew, in April. Tim is an associate at Weinberg, Wheeler, Hudgins, Gunn and Dial in Las Vegas. He also is a member of the Boyd School of Law Alumni Chapter.

Colin Seale, ’17 JD, received the Community Juvenile Justice Award at the 50th anniversary gala of the Nevada chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union in June. The award recognizes his advocacy and commitment to teaching young people about justice and fairness. In June 2015, he launched thinklaw, which uses real legal cases to teach critical thinking to all learners. The program has been launched in 14 Las Vegas schools and is growing to more than 30 schools nationwide, serving more than 5,000 students in the upcoming school year. His program has been selected as a 2016 finalist for the Teach for America Social Innovation Award.

Hillary Walsh, ’12 JD, is a solo practitioner specializing in asylum appeals before the Board of Immigration Appeals and the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. Since 2014, she has worked from Oxnard Air Base, South Korea, where her husband, Shawn, flies F-16s for the Air Force. She recently has won several complex appeals for clients who were victims of heinous crimes and torture in their home countries. In

In 2016, she was awarded the American Bar Association’s Pro Bono Publico Award, authored an article on asylum law that Catholic University’s Law Journal will publish next year, and wrote an amicus brief to the U.S. Supreme Court regarding the government’s evidentiary burden when it seeks to remove an individual who claims to be a U.S. citizen. She will appear for the first oral argument before the 9th Circuit in November. She also teaches international law master’s classes for Troy University at Camp-Humphrey’s Army Base, South Korea.

Chaunsey Chau-Duong, ’13 JD, transitioned from the governor’s office of economic development to the Las Vegas Water District, Southern Nevada Water Authority, in late 2015.

Alexia Hsin Chen, ’13 Master of Architecture, was sworn in as a registered architect with the Nevada State Board of Architecture, Interior Design and Residential Design. She is a designer with architectural firm LSA where she has been instrumental in design, project management, proposal writing, and communications outreach for many complex projects. She is an ambassador presenter for the International Living Future Institute and a member of the local chapters of the International Code Council and Urban Land Institute. She recently joined the Committee of the Environment with AIA Las Vegas. At UNLV, she led a multidisciplinary team of more than 60 students to design and build a net-zero solar-powered home, for which the team eventually won second place at the U.S. Department of Energy Solar Decathlon 2013. The project, coined Desert Sol, is on permanent display at the Las Vegas Springs Preserve.

Manuel Hartmann, ’13 BS in Environmental Design, is the cost controller for Thermen Geinberg Spa Resort in Austria. His hobbies include cooking and golf. He is married to Kesine Profijnt Hartmann, ’10 BS Hotel Administration. They live in Passau, Germany.

Josh Millan, ’15 BS in Recreation, Hospitality Management, is catering sales manager for the Whitney Peak Hotel in downtown Reno. His hobbies include skiing, snowboarding, biking, beaching, traveling, learning, and eating. He said he loves his family, partner, and dogs. He lives in Reno.

Cory Fielding, ’15 JD, began working in April as an associate attorney for Thornton Byron, a boutique estate planning and tax firm in Boise, Idaho. He lives in Meridian.

Craig Friedel, ’15 JD, has joined Solo- mon, Dwygins, & Freis as an associ- ate. He focuses on trust and estate litigation, trust and estate administration, and business and commercial litigation. He lives in Henderson.

Lee Gorlin, ’15 JD, works for Justice Michael Cherry of the Nevada Supreme Court. He lives in Canvon City.

Laurel Hill, ’15 BS Hotel Administration, is part of Marriott International’s Voyage leadership development program. She is based at the Irvine Marriott in California. While she initially asked to be part of Voyage’s sales program, she switched to housekeeping because the program was seeking someone who was fluent in Spanish and had experience in that area. She had gained experience in housekeeping while at UNLV when she participated in MGM Resorts International’s hospitality internship program at the Monte Carlo Resort and Casino.

In her current job, she is involved with an innovative next-generation housekeeping system and in-room recycling program. Next-generation housekeeping expedites the rooms to the housekeepers based on priority, using Touches rather than old-school clipboards. She said that allows for enhanced communication with speedier guest requests, better guest service, and higher departmental productivity. The in-room recycling program is a gauge for the company to see how the green initiatives are working. She lives in Irvine.

Darin Prescott, ’15 Doctor of Nursing Practice, is the CEO of the new Lower Sioux Indian Community Health Center, an entity of the Lower Sioux Indian Community located in southwest Minnesota. This was the tribe’s first medical clinic ever. He is an enrolled member of the Lower Sioux Indian Community. He lives in Morton.

Benjamin Reitz, ’15 JD, is an associ- ate in the commercial litigation group at Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck. His practice includes a wide range of complex business disputes, class actions, appeals, and pro bono work. He also provides legal advice and support for Brownstein’s congres- sional lobbying practice in Wash- ington D.C. A resident of downtown Las Vegas, he can be seen jogging or enjoying bacon jam at Carson Kite Ranch. He says he celebrated sev- eral weddings this past year, none of which were his own.

Mary Tran, ’15 JD, joined the Las Vegas law office of Lewis Roca Roth- gerber Christie as an associate in May.

Anthony Hernandez, ’16 BS Hotel Administration, is in his second year working as assistant general manager of the pool at the LINQ. Previously, he worked as a cabana host. While in college, he worked in limo and valet at the Bellagio and also in clubs, including Marquee Dayclub and O’ra’s Beachclub. Last year he married his college sweetheart, Shawnee Corey Hernandez, ’12 BSBA Accounting. His hobbies include golf, traveling, cook- ing, beer, and wine.

Pamela Under Venkat, he said, learned how to be a researcher, to persist on a problem until he found a solution. Afterward, he learned how to turn that impulse and those skills into a method for finding big problems and solving them for both profit and society’s benefit. Now, he encourages UNLV’s students in the shoes he wore 20 years ago to follow his entrepreneurial path.

“What’s the worst that could happen? If it fails, you just go back and do something else,” he said. “People are not comfortable with that idea. It’s like jumping off a cliff, and you don’t know how you’ll land. You’ll have to figure it out on the way down.”

He laughed, acknowledging his exaggeration. Point stands, though: Sometimes, even with three degrees’ worth of knowledge, you have to act on faith. “People, I guess,” he said finally, “are not willing to jump off the cliff and trust that they could figure a landing on their rapid descent down.”

Hilary Stovall, ’13 BA Political Science, is engaged to Kyle Pointer, ’13 BS Mechanical Engineering. The couple will be getting married in November. They met at UNLV while working for the department of housing and residential life. Both work for Boeing. He is a design engineer, while she is a staff analyst. They live in Renton, Washington.
OBITUARIES

Bryan Andersen, ’14 JD, died June 12. A resident of Bakersfield, California, he had his own practice, Andersen Law Firm.

Andrew Freeman, ’07 JD, died May 8. A music teacher in recent years, he was a classically trained pianist and a gifted musician on multiple instruments. He lived in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Jeffrey Hensley, ’07 JD, died Sept. 24, 2015. He lived in Las Vegas.

Patricia Fell Hey, ’81 BS Biology, died Aug. 24 from an aggressive form of cancer. She was a part-time instructor in the School of Life Sciences.

Andrew Katz, ’83 BS Management, died Feb. 23. President of Manpower of Southern Nevada, he was a member of the UNLV Foundation President’s Corporate Council; a lifetime member of the UNLV Alumni Association; a member of Alpha Epsilon Pi; an emeritus member of the Lee Business School Alumni Chapter Board; and a longtime supporter of the Runnin’ Rebels. In 2003, he and his mother received the Zimmerman Leadership Award from Hillel at UNLV. He championed funding for a scholarship at the UNLV School of Medicine. An endowed scholarship has been established in his name at UNLV.

Kelly Kuzik, ’86 BS Hotel Administration, died May 30. A U.S. Navy veteran, he worked for the state of Nevada for 24 years, including time with the Industrial Insurance System and the Taxicab Authority. While at UNLV he was a disc jockey with KUNV, serving as host of “Nothing But the Blues.”

Stella Mason Parson, ’88 MS Educational Psychology, died July 29. The first black woman to graduate from college in Nevada, she earned a bachelor’s degree in English from UNR in 1952. The daughter of sharecroppers, she taught in Clark County schools for 33 years. The Clark County School District honored her and her husband, the late Rev. Claude Parson, by naming the Claude and Stella Parson Elementary School in their honor.

Gregory Schraw, professor of educational psychology, died Sept. 15 following a 15-month battle with cancer. A faculty member since 2000, he received numerous awards, including the Barrick Distinguished Scholar Award. He also served as associate dean for administrative affairs and research in the College of Education and director of the Center for Research, Evaluation, and Assessment. He authored or coauthored more than 90 journal articles, more than 40 book chapters, and a dozen books. Among his survivors is Lori Olafson, executive director of UNLV’s office of research integrity—human subjects.

Ronald Serota, ’01 JD, died April 2 from injuries sustained in a motorcycle accident. He lived in Las Vegas.

E. Parry Thomas, a major donor to UNLV throughout several decades, died Aug. 26. A number of locations and programs on campus carry his name along with that of his late business partner, Jerry Mack. Best known is the Thomas & Mack Center, home to the Runnin’ Rebels. Also of note are the Thomas & Mack Court Facility and the Thomas & Mack Legal Clinic. In the earliest days of the university the duo were instrumental in acquiring the land where the university’s Maryland Parkway campus sits today. The UNLV Foundation has established the E. Parry Thomas Scholarship in his memory. He was a Foundation trustee emeritus and also a member of its Palladium Society.

Michael Young, ’06 JD, died Oct. 29, 2015. An instructor in the department of international languages at CSN, he lived in Las Vegas.

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Flower Power to Funding Protests

The voices of students and administrators alike come through in the new exhibit Please I’d Like to Grow. It highlights student activism from UNLV’s founding up until the present. Through student newspaper articles, posters, T-shirts, flyers, and other documents, the exhibit chronicles student-led social and political activism around issues such as racism and civil rights, war, gender and sexuality, immigration, and the environment. One recurring theme: insufficient funding for higher education.

“Activism has been a part of student life from the beginning of the campus’s days as ‘Tumbleweed Tech,’” said social sciences librarian Heidi Johnson, who curated the exhibit. “That nickname stuck after students constructed a mock campus out of shipping crates and plywood to protest against inadequate funding and the desolation of the campus.”

The title of the exhibit, inspired by an image from a Vietnam War protest in the 1968 Epilogue yearbook, evokes the idea that the growth of the university has mirrored that of individual student activists, Johnson said. “As student activists address issues of immediate concern, they look inward to discover themselves and then outward to the causes of others, gaining a greater understanding of their influence on more local, national, and global concerns.” Likewise, she said, the university has grown from a small, fledging commuter campus where teaching programs were foremost and minority groups were tiny into a university with a very diverse student body and international research programs.

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