

Spring 2018

Giving Matters: Donors Making a Difference

UNLV Foundation

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Giving Matters

UNLV Foundation | Donors Making a Difference

Hospitality Hall reflects donors' shared vision

Multiple donors show the hospitality industry's commitment to UNLV



When the breathtaking Hospitality Hall – equipped with experiential learning spaces, sweeping views of the campus and the Strip, and environmentally sustainable design – opened in January, it marked the culmination of years of cooperative efforts to build a state-of-the-art hospitality training facility at UNLV.

More than \$25 million of the \$59 million building was funded by private donors – representing a wide array of global hospitality leaders.

“Hospitality Hall will serve as a bridge between the industry and our students,” says Dean Stowe Shoemaker of the William F. Harrah College of Hospitality. “This is a competitive industry, and we are impressed by the spirit of collaboration shown by our donors.”

The 93,500-square foot facility features an immersive test kitchen, a golf management center and swing lab, and spaces designed to inspire spontaneous interaction between students and faculty.

Rather than name the building after one major donor, designated spaces within the building are named for different Founding and major donors [see sidebar].

“We’re very much tied to the industry,” says Shoemaker. “We wanted to create an environment where students are regularly exposed to the names of the individuals and corporations that are running the hospitality industry. Thanks to our many generous donors, that has become a reality.”

HOSPITALITY PARTNERS

FOUNDERS - \$2.5 MILLION

- Caesars Entertainment Foundation | Lobby
- Las Vegas Sands | Auditorium
- Konami Gaming Inc. | Interactive Technology Lab
- MGM Resorts International | Cafe and Plaza
- Boyd Gaming Corporation | Office of Student Services
- Red Rock Resorts Inc. | Executive Boardroom & Terrace
- J. Willard and Alice S. Marriott Foundation | Executive Kitchen
- Engelstad Family Foundation | Event Terrace

LEADERS - \$1 MILLION

- Don and Dee Snyder | Learning Studio
- Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits | Beverage Academy
- Hainan Sunup Investment Group | International Student Success Center

PARTNERS - \$500,000

- Ambassador Hotel Group | Classroom

BENEFACTORS - \$250,000

- Robert L. Boughner (\$300,000) | Career Services Center
- Cynthia Kiser Murphy | Kay Kiser Boardroom
- William Paulos | Nicholas Paulos Garden



A star's legacy will live on at UNLV

Actress' son creates Debbie Reynolds Performing Arts Scholarship

Performing artists have a new opportunity to pursue their craft at UNLV's College of Fine Arts.

Todd Fisher, son of actress Debbie Reynolds, recently pledged \$1 million to establish the Debbie Reynolds Performing Arts Scholarship at UNLV.

Reynolds, who owned a hotel and casino in Las Vegas in the 1990s, starred in numerous films, musicals, and television shows. She won the Screen Actors Guild Life Achievement Award in 2014, and the Academy Awards' Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award in 2015. She was also the mother of actress Carrie Fisher.

Todd Fisher, an actor, director, producer, cinematographer, business executive and curator, established the UNLV scholarship to help students who are overcoming challenges to pursue their performing arts career. Reynolds grew up poor in El Paso, Texas, the daughter of a carpenter and a laundress.

“One of the advantages of having been poor is that you learn to appreciate good fortune and the value of a dollar, and poverty holds no fear for you because you know you've gone through it and you can do it again,” Reynolds was quoted as saying in a 1963 newspaper interview.

Reynolds passed away on December 28, 2016, at age 84, one day after her daughter Carrie died at age 60.



Illustration Credit:
Debbie Reynolds

Dennis McBride Collection
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You matter to UNLV!

The stories in this edition are wonderful examples of how donors like you have a profound and widespread impact.

Every year, the UNLV Foundation honors our supporters whose giving surpasses \$1 million. We welcome Buck and Aurora Wong and Selma Bartlett as our newest Palladium Society awardees.

As longtime donors, the Wongs made a transformational gift to the College of Engineering that is jumpstarting plans for a new Advanced Engineering Studies Building. They also serve as role models and mentors to Asian Pacific American students and alumni.

Selma's support of higher education spans decades, and many engineering students owe their education to her generous scholarships. She was one of the first female bankers in Nevada, and has been instrumental in the entire community's growth.

I'm grateful to all of you who are helping UNLV succeed and grow. Thank you.

Scott M. Roberts
President, UNLV Foundation

Master of Philanthropy

Victoria Fertitta recalls a tradition of family giving



“I’ve lead such a normal life,” Victoria Fertitta reflects – and yet, somehow you know that this gracious, soft-spoken woman is anything but ordinary.

Fertitta humbly wears the mantle of matriarch of one of the most influential founding families in Las Vegas. She grew up in Galveston, Texas, raised with two sisters by a single mom who saw to it that her daughter studied dance, jazz, and tap. She met Frank Fertitta while in high school. They married and moved from Galveston to Las Vegas in 1960.

Frank got a job as a bellman at the Tropicana, before becoming a dealer at the Stardust; by the mid-1970s he invested in his first casino. That investment later led to the Station Casinos empire.

“It is a very American story,” Fertitta says. It is also a story that has long intersected with the history of UNLV. “We decided to support UNLV back in the 1970s,” she recalls. “We were told that if UNLV had a great tennis team, they would attract great students. That’s what the university wanted, and we wanted to help.”

Driven by a \$1 million gift, the Frank and Vicki Fertitta Tennis Complex is just one manifestation of their ongoing investment in Rebel Athletics and UNLV.

“We’ve always supported the basketball team – everyone did back then. But athletics still draws people to the university: fans, families, and students,” she says.

She is proud of her own family, all raised as Rebel fans, and is grateful that all of her grandchildren have set down roots in Las Vegas. Her sons, Frank and Lorenzo, spearheaded the efforts to build the new Fertitta Football Complex on campus.

Her own support bridges sports, academics, and the arts. Her enduring love of dance inspired her to help send ten UNLV Dance students to the 28th Annual International Association of Blacks in Dance Conference in Denver, Colorado.

“I studied dance from age four to 18, and even helped teach dance. It meant so much to me as a child, and still does to this day. I’m happy to give current students a chance to be inspired, challenged, and successful at something they love.”

Helping to heal

UNLV donors step up after Oct. 1

Emergency medical training. Ongoing counseling. Scholarships for hospitality students whose careers will include emergency response planning.

These are just a few ways that UNLV donors joined the effort to help our community after the mass shooting on the Strip in October.

MGM Resorts Foundation and NASCAR Foundation Chairman Mike Helton made significant donations to the UNLV School of Medicine’s Department of Emergency Medicine Residency Program Fund.

Helton donated a vehicle from his personal collection that raised \$100,000 at auction by Barrett-Jackson. The vehicle was one of only 50 2016 Jeep Wrangler Red Rock Editions.

Expedia Inc. established scholarships for students who were affected, and those whose careers in event planning must address safety for emergency scenarios. The company’s \$100,000 gift will support any UNLV student experiencing need as a result of tragedy, and also create an endowed scholarship for Harrah College of Hospitality students.

“We wanted to create a meaningful gift that will positively impact the Las Vegas hospitality community,” says Daniel Wathen, Expedia’s director of market management in Las Vegas. “Our intent is that this scholarship and endowment, in honor of the fallen victims, will serve as a legacy tribute.”

Another key donor focused on the mental health challenges that such a tragedy creates. Charles Schwab Bank made a gift to UNLV’s community mental health training clinic. The PRACTICE – the partnership for research, assessment, counseling, therapy and innovative clinical education – is using the funds to help victims and to enable graduate student clinicians to work through the summer months with ongoing case work.

“This will make a lasting impact in serving the needs of our community,” says Michelle Paul, director of The PRACTICE.

“Not only will it help people who were impacted by the October 1 tragedy receive the mental and emotional support they need now, it will allow us to train a future generation of mental health providers.

“We are deeply grateful and committed to making this donation matter.”



Well-being in the balance

Professor makes strides in brain research

Sometimes, having a fear of falling can be more dangerous than the fall itself.

For people who suffer from Parkinson's disease and other neurological disabilities, being overly cautious about standing and walking can lead to harmful health outcomes: a sedentary life style, loss of strength, social isolation, and depression. And, ironically, an increased risk of falls.

"Being afraid of falling can be the first step of a vicious downward cycle," observes Merrill Landers, chair of UNLV's physical therapy department and Cyrus Chung Ying Tang Foundation Professor. "It makes people avoid risky behaviors, and too often that means they don't resume normal day-to-day activities."

Landers is spearheading research that seeks to understand and correct this behavior in Parkinson's patients.

In Southern Nevada, there are more than 16,000 people who suffer from the disease. With the help of private funding from the Cyrus Chung Ying Tang Foundation, Landers and his team are exploring the effects of fall-avoidance behaviors and how to rebuild confidence in those who suffer from it, along with other important physiological and psychological research.

"Having the funding to conduct research will lead us to find evidence-based treatments faster," says Landers. "In our Parkinson's studies, for example, this funding has made it possible for us to complete studies in probably one-third the time it would otherwise take."

Private funding is used to recruit study participants, cover travel expenses for those who can no longer drive, and enlist the help of qualified therapists and practitioners. It also supports student researchers and allows them to present their findings at major conferences. This not only fosters collaborations with colleagues around the globe but also raises UNLV's profile as a research institution.

With additional resources, Landers and colleagues can delve deeper into research that has the potential to improve the lives of thousands of Nevadans not only with Parkinson's disease, but also those impacted by Alzheimer's disease, stroke, and other cognitive impairments.

For example, preliminary studies indicate that aerobic exercise early in a person's life may help protect against Parkinson's disease later in life. At UNLV, Landers and his



team are researching how a chemical called "brain derived neurotrophic factor", or BDNF, is related to exercise, and how it may help protect against development of Parkinson's. So far, more than 75 people have taken part in the study.

Ultimately, says Landers, his research strives to meet a trifecta of critical goals: improve the health of populations, reduce the per capita cost of health care, and improve the patient experience of care.

Overcoming the obstacles of addiction

Attorney gives to those who faced challenges like hers

Her dad kicked her out. Her mom disappeared. At 15-years-old, Las Vegas Lori Kalani was on her own. Soon, she dropped out of school and started doing meth.

For the next decade, she managed to survive. She had a slew of different jobs, all while wrestling with addiction. Still, she got her GED and enrolled at UNLV, earning bachelor's and master's degrees. She hoped to go to law school. Unlikely? Maybe, but Kalani kept that vision in mind: Someday, I will be a lawyer.

By 27, though, "I just sort of slipped into a black hole," she says. One day, while she was at her drug dealer's house, federal Drug Enforcement Agency officials busted down the door.

"They let me go," she says. "But it made me think I can't do this anymore. I'm either going to die or go to jail." So on March 8, 1998, she threw the rest of her drugs in a dumpster and vowed never to do drugs again.

Clean and clear-headed, she was working as a bartender at the celebrated restaurant Piero's Italian Cuisine when she applied to the new UNLV William S. Boyd School of Law. She was wait listed. Frustrated, she confided in Piero's owner Freddie Glusman, who encouraged her to stay the course. "He believed in me," she says.

In 1999, she was accepted to UNLV Law.

"I knew I had the ability to be an advocate," Kalani says. "I like negotiations and details. I like thinking critically. This was my calling."

While at Boyd, she fell in love with a man in Baltimore and transferred to George Mason University Antonin Scalia Law School to be with him (19 years later, they're still together). She earned her J.D., became in-house counsel for DISH Network, and later developed a prestigious private practice in Washington, D.C.

"I am fortunate to earn a great living," she says. When she decided it was time to give back, she created a scholarship for UNLV law students who had overcome similar adversities.

And she named it 'The Freddie Glusman Scholarship'.

"He's the reason I went to law school. I always wanted to somehow thank him. Should I buy him cuff links? A Mont Blanc pen? None of that seemed right," Kalani says. "I finally figured out how to honor him with this scholarship, and when I told him, it was the proudest day of my life."

Glusman, 81, still owns Piero's.

Her success is not lost on Ben Leavitt, the second year Boyd School of Law student who is the first recipient of the Freddie Glusman scholarship.

Leavitt, also raised in Las Vegas, developed an addiction to painkillers when he was 15, and also dropped out of school. With support from his family, he went to live in Idaho, got clean, and graduated high school.

"I wanted to go to UNLV, but I was worried about being back where I became addicted," he says. "So I decided to get involved in as many student activities at UNLV as possible to keep me on the right track."

From the beginning, he plunged into student life.

With friends, he started a grassroots student section at the Thomas and Mack called The Rebellion. "I was able to make connections, develop relationships, and ultimately, stay clean," he says. He applied to Boyd School of Law and received the Freddie Glusman Scholarship. In 2016, he met Kalani.

"We both hit a rock bottom and decided that we would overcome it and make something of ourselves," he says. "That's a bond we share. Lori's attitude inspired me." Today, Leavitt is married and has a 1-year-old child.

Kalani says everyone experiences adversity differently.

"This scholarship is not just about financial support. I wanted to recognize Ben's courage and let him know that someone knows what it's like to have to weather the storm and keep going."





SEE HOW YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE

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Creating smiles

UNLV Dental students help South Americans in need



Alessandro Retis remembers the poverty-stricken small towns in Peru where he grew up.

“Some people there have nothing,” says the UNLV School of Dental Medicine student. “I always knew I wanted to go back and help.”

Retis and other students got a chance to help those in need through the UNLV Hispanic Student Dental Association. He and Jorge Quiroz, a native of Bolivia, organized the association's first international aid mission and chose its destination: Saavedra, Bolivia. The town's groundwater is over-fluoridated and it severely discolors teeth — turning them dark green or brown.

“They don't, and the majority of people suffer from a dental condition that makes them hesitant to even smile.

“The ability to smile is a big thing. It affects their entire lives.”

To help pay for their venture, the students created a crowdfunding campaign on RebelRaiser.unlv.edu. The UNLV platform is open to all faculty, students, and staff who are fundraising for UNLV-based projects.

Absolute Dental donated \$10,000 in cash toward the more than \$15,000 raised to help pay for transportation, housing, and dental materials for 12 students and faculty to travel to Saavedra.

The company also supports the UNLV Absolute Dental Saturday Morning Children's Clinic.

The impact of the trip to Bolivia on patients, students, and faculty was profound.

“We had patients who walked in and they would not even open their mouths. They were too self-conscious,” Retis says. “One 13-year-old girl was still reluctant to smile after treatment, until she was given a mirror and saw herself. She couldn't believe it. She was so happy she couldn't stop smiling.”

In four days the group treated 40 patients, doing cleanings, fillings, extractions, and direct composite veneers.

UNLV faculty advisor Dr. Davin Faulkner says trips like this help people who otherwise wouldn't get dental care. They also help UNLV students and faculty gain a better understanding of other cultures while improving their Spanish.

And, says Faulkner, “They experience what true poverty is and develop more compassion because of it. These are things the students normally get very little exposure to in dental school.”

The association is planning another trip to South America in 2018 — this time to Retis' native Peru.

“You can't overstate how powerful these trips are both for the people who get dental care, and for us,” Retis says.

“It makes us understand how important our work can be.”