

Spring 2019

## Giving Matters: Donors Making a Difference

UNLV Foundation

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# Giving UNLV

# Matters

Donors Making a Difference



Meet researcher *Martha Amaya.*  
Profile, pg. 3

## We are R1

Your investment in UNLV's success can be demonstrated by the university's recent designation as an R1 "very high research activity" institution. According to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, UNLV now places in the top 3% of universities nationwide.

### GOLD STANDARD



R1 carries a lot of prestige. It will have wide-ranging impact and inspire philanthropic support.

### RETENTION



R1 will help recruit and retain top faculty, staff, and students and broaden our research efforts.

### INVESTMENT



Research expenditures from the National Science Foundation rose from \$42 million in fiscal year 2015 to \$66 million in 2017.

### MORE DEGREES



Graduate programs are expanding. UNLV is awarding more research doctoral degrees, from 124 in 2013-14 to 162 in 2017-18.



The Strip is a perfect place to focus on the interactions between public policy, law enforcement, and tourism.



## STUDENT SUCCESS

### Relentless and Rewarding

*Bradley Boe finds empowerment in a new scholarship for students with spinal cord injuries*

Scholarship donors look forward to their student recipients finishing school and going on to lead inspiring, fulfilling lives. But one Neilsen Foundation Scholar is making a big difference already.

Meet Bradley Boe.

The Neilsen Scholarship pays for Boe's UNLV tuition and fees. As a result, the biochemistry major is freed from having to work a part-time job to make ends meet. Instead, he's embarked on a project that's connecting a very specific group of people who are facing a new way of life.

Boe established an outreach program for individuals who recently sustained spinal cord injuries. He does this because he can relate to their experience: Five years ago, the former high school athlete had an injury that left him paralyzed.

"I'd never met a quadriplegic like me," Boe says. "When I was in the ICU, no one in a wheelchair came to talk to me. Everyone else would try to encourage me, but no one had been through it. So it's important to me to be there for others."

Established by the Craig H. Neilsen Foundation, the Neilsen Scholarship Program supports students with spinal cord injuries in their pursuit of a higher education. Neilsen was an entrepreneur and founder of Ameristar Casinos. Before he passed away in 2006, he created the Foundation that today is the largest private funder of spinal cord injury research and program support in the U.S.

The Neilsen Scholarship at UNLV provides full tuition and fees for students with spinal cord injuries, as well



*Neilsen Scholar  
Bradley Boe competes on UNLV's High Rollers Wheelchair Rugby team. A grant from the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation funds sports wheelchairs for team members.*

as providing supplemental support funds to remove barriers to academic progress related to SCI-associated needs (i.e., housing or a personal care assistant). Boe is among the first cohort of recipients.

"Brad is amazing," says Bryan Hilbert, director of UNLV's Disability Resource Center. "He has a warm, magnetic personality. He's the communitarian student – pre-med and able to manage it all."

Boe also competes on UNLV's High Rollers Wheelchair Rugby team, having found inspiration in the documentary *Murder Ball* after his accident.

The rugby tournaments provide additional opportunities to meet athletes and get tips on navigating the world from a chair: "You learn a crazy amount of stuff, from finding the right hotels, to what equipment to use, to what kinds of tricks they know. You meet mentors," Boe says.

"You learn a lot about life stages – not just occupational therapy but real-life skills."

None of this would have been possible without the Neilsen Foundation Scholarship.

"This scholarship," Boe says, "has been huge."



## COMMUNITY

### Welcome

A volunteer board of 57 members serve as trustees of the UNLV Foundation. Meet these nine community leaders who joined the board in the 2018-19 academic year.

#### ANDY ABBOUD

is senior vice president of government relations and community development for the Venetian Resort Hotel Casino and the Las Vegas Sands Corporation. He is on the board of the Sands Foundation and is active with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's TradeRoots program.

#### TED DAKE '06

is managing director of US Trust Bank of America, Las Vegas. He was honored as one of the 40 under 40 Las Vegas business leaders in 2014. He serves on the boards of Opportunity Village and Special Olympics Nevada.

#### GERALD "JERRY" GORDON '70

is founding partner and chairman of Garman Turner Gordon law firm and its business restructuring and bankruptcy department. He has been voted among the Best Lawyers of America for Bankruptcy and Creditor Debt Rights for 25 years. He is a regional board member for the Anti-Defamation League.

#### DEBBY JACOBS '81

is co-owner of Rancho Valencia, a 45-acre resort north of San Diego. She came to UNLV to play tennis on an athletics scholarship. Since graduating, she has been an industry leader in tennis and hospitality.

#### TOM KAPLAN

is senior managing partner of the Wolfgang Puck Fine Dining Group. He oversees business and financial management, marketing, philanthropy and more for the company's 26 locations. He serves on the boards of the Council for a Better Nevada and the Fulfillment Fund Las Vegas.

#### JOE MICATROTTO, JR.

is principal of KAIROC, a retail development firm with an emphasis in hospitality. He is also vice chairman of the Nevada Restaurant Association's Education Foundation and founding chairman of the United Way's Young Philanthropist Society.

#### CYNTHIA KISER MURPHY '80, '95

is president and COO of New York-New York Hotel & Casino. She has worked for MGM Resorts International for more than 25 years. She is a board member of the Nevada Medical Center and serves on the Healthcare Reform Policy Council.

#### DANIEL J. TUNTLAND '94

is principal of DJT Enterprises, a commercial and residential real estate brokerage company. He is past chairman of Boys Hope Girls Hope Nevada, is an Executive Committee member of the Las Vegas Founders, a trustee of the Las Vegas Founders Golf Foundation, and a board member of Boys Town Nevada.

#### K. WARREN VOLKER, M.D., Ph.D.

is chief clinical officer of HealthCare Partners Nevada and was founder and CEO of WellHealth Quality Care before its merger with MedSource Medical Management to form DaVita Medical Group in 2017. He is on faculty at the UNLV School of Medicine, Touro University, and Harbour-UCLA and is chief of staff at Centennial Hills Hospital.

## TRANSITION

### A Note of Gratitude



Dear Friends,

In the last three years, I have had the distinct honor of serving you as the president of the UNLV Foundation and vice president of Philanthropy & Alumni Engagement. So it is with mixed emotions that I am writing to announce my departure from UNLV in May.

It is always bittersweet to leave an institution you love, but I have accepted a new opportunity as president and CEO of the University of Connecticut Foundation.

I am so proud of all we have accomplished in the past nine years. During this time, donors have come together to raise a cumulative \$500 million in private funds. You've started a medical school. You've completed the world-class Hospitality Hall. You've built a new state-of-the-art football training complex. You've enabled UNLV to reach Carnegie's top R1 research category. And you've provided the support for thousands of students to complete their college education through scholarships.

“ I will take with me great inspiration from this community's generous spirit. ”

As I head into the next chapter of my career, I will take with me great inspiration from this community's generous spirit.

In the meantime, please know that the work of philanthropy will continue. The university will begin a national search for my replacement immediately. You are in good hands with a dedicated, talented staff, and the leadership of UNLV Foundation Board of Trustees and Chairman Greg McKinley.

With deep gratitude,

Scott M. Roberts

## INCLUSION

### Getting Millennials to the Table

*Hospitality alum Aron Kock designs games for a new generation*



*Aron Kock with a GameCo prototype at UNLV's Konami Gaming Lab*

What do millennials want? When it comes to Las Vegas, millennial tourists – those born between the early 1980s and late 1990s – are more interested in nightlife than gambling.

“The number one reason some millennials say they don't play slots is that they find it boring,” says Aron Kock '14, '17. “People raised on video games want more action.”

Kock's master's research explored how to make gaming more attractive to young adults. He served as a graduate assistant at UNLV's International Gaming Institute (IGI) Center for Gaming Innovation.

He now is employed by GameCo, a Las Vegas start-up that is creating skill-based gambling machines to attract a new generation of gamers. Raised in Aruba, Kock came to UNLV in 2012 as a gaming management major. He was one of the first students to sign up for a new gaming innovation class at IGI.

With help from instructors Dan Sahl and Mark Yoseloff, the former CEO of ShuffleMaster, Kock sold an original card game he designed that is a variation of traditional blackjack.

Kock readily acknowledges that UNLV would have been out of reach if not for the support he received as a UNLVino Scholar. The award is funded through the Hospitality College's annual UNLVino event, sponsored by Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits.

“UNLV would never have been a possibility for me without this scholarship,” he reflects. “Studying gaming in Las Vegas was a dream come true — and more.”

“ UNLV would never have been a possibility for me without this [UNLVino] Scholarship. ”



## The Future of Work

Researchers at MGM Resorts Public Policy Institute at UNLV explore the American workforce



Creating pathways to the workplace is the focus of research at the MGM Resorts Public Policy Institute at UNLV. Government, academic, and business leaders came together to address fundamental questions about the future of work at a symposium hosted by the Institute on April 23.

Institute co-chairs former U.S. Sen. Harry Reid and former U.S. House Speaker John Boehner participated in a panel discussion that zeroed in on education and policy.

Institute Director Benoy Jacob names job insecurity as a problem that is haunting America's middle class. "The Institute is jumping in to generate actionable solutions," he says.

Among those seeking solutions is assistant research professor K.C. Brekken [pictured, left] who was recently hired to assist in this effort under Jacob's direction. Brekken cites evidence-based studies that show that higher education helps people adapt to a world — and workforce — that are rapidly changing.

"At an individual level, there is research to support that quality education can help you adapt and learn new skills or change occupations as the economy evolves," she says.

# The Faces of R1

### DISRUPTION

#### Blockchain Boosters



Blockchain technology has been around for a decade, but it's just recently that it's been exploding into the mainstream. UNLV Computer Science Associate Professor Yoochwan Kim and his students are conducting research into the technology that fueled cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin — and could disrupt business practices forever.

The program is supported by computer science community partners, including City Ledger, LLC, a Las Vegas blockchain lab.

Blockchain proponents tout its ability to provide greater transparency and security. "Blockchain technology has tremendous potential to change not just our business practices, but our society," says Kim.

### INNOVATION

#### Artful Science



Kendahl Servino is a sophomore biology major exploring the intersection of science and art. The MGM Resorts International Academic Excellence Scholar's research illustrates how art can be a tool for learning scientific concepts.

Servino has surveyed professors and peers about what they think of when they hear the word "hand". Her findings are the basis for a series of pieces she is creating that depict the hand in association with abstract ideas, juxtaposed with anatomical paintings.

"Being a scientist and an artist allows me to approach life and its problems from different angles," she observes.

### WELLNESS

#### Links for Longevity



New insights into healthy aging and long life are Saruna Ghimire's long-term research goals. The public health doctoral candidate studies 'telomeres': caps at the end of chromosomes that seem to protect chromosomes from deteriorating.

What should everyone know about her research? "Chronic stress and eating a poor diet were associated with a decline in telomere length," she says. And, "Shorter telomere length is a biomarker of aging."

Ghimire's research is supported by a UNLV President's Fellowship, funded through gifts to the UNLV Foundation.

### RESEARCH

## Standing Out in a Crowd

Everything about the Strip fascinates this tourism safety researcher



Martha Amaya is, in a word, amazing. The Honors College junior is triple-majoring in criminal justice, French, and political science. She works 25 hours a week in the Student Union; puts in at least three hours a week as a Hixson-Lied Success Scholar mentor; and is a research assistant in UNLV's Center for Crime and Justice Policy where she investigates Tourism Safety and Crowd Science. She is a recipient of the Hixson-Lied Success Scholarship, the Michael & Geri Rumbolz Scholarship, and the Earl & Hazel Wilson Scholarship. She'll be spending the summer at Princeton University, where she earned a full ride to participate in the 2019 Public Policy & International Affairs Junior Summer Institute.

#### What impresses you most about your UNLV experience?

A lot of people mention diversity when they talk about UNLV, but I'd go further. I really value the diversity of

thought, of working with different theories and opinions. It's important to not just hear an echo chamber.

#### What fascinates you about your research?

Everything about the Strip is fascinating and it's a perfect place to focus on the interactions between public policy, law enforcement, and tourism. My lab [directed by Dr. Tamara Herold] has been examining "dialogue policing" where police talk with, or coach, demonstrators before and during protests to avoid escalation. This is done more in Europe, so I've been summarizing research in this area from French- and Spanish-language publications.

#### Where do you get the drive to take on so many challenges?

My family, definitely. My mom is from Mexico and my dad from Colombia, and they worked so hard for me. I want to be able to give back to them. And my friends inspire me! I work hard to keep up with them!

#### Why do you want to join the U.S. Foreign Service?

When I was younger I wanted to work for the CIA as a spy, like a Ninja. It was the thrill factor that attracted me. Well, now, the thrill factor isn't as strong. And I realize that I can still do incredible work in the Foreign Service — but more professionally. In a suit.

#### How have scholarships made a difference in your UNLV experience?

Without a doubt, I couldn't complete my work at UNLV without my scholarships. They mean I don't have to work full-time. I can live on campus, so I don't have to commute two hours each way by bus. I have more time to study, more time for research — and more time to just be a college student.

#### What might people be surprised to learn about you?

I like to watch dog and cat videos on Instagram. They're under a minute long and I can fit them in between classes.





BECAUSE OF

*God,*

DREAMS COME TRUE!

## Giving Matters | *INSIDE*

**P1**

Wheelchair Warrior & Scholar Bradley Boe

**P2**

Designing for a New Generation of Gamers

**P3**

The Many Faces of R1

### SERVICE

## From Army Medic to Med School Scholar

*The Michael and Renée Yackira Scholar is clearing the way for better veteran health care*



“ Instead of post-traumatic stress, we have post-traumatic growth. ”

Putting his life on the line as a medic with a company of U.S. Army combat engineers helped drive Maran Shaker’s desire to become a physician.

Now a student in UNLV’s School of Medicine Shaker, 34, served in Afghanistan with a unit charged with finding and disabling improvised explosive devices, or IEDs, planted to kill U.S. troops. He not only treated combat injuries, but also provided routine medical care such as physicals and immunizations.

A native of Egypt who did some of his K-12 education in Australia, Shaker graduated on a student visa from Rutgers University in New Jersey. He was

fortunate to learn about a U.S. Defense Department program through which which legal non-immigrants with critical skills are recruited into the armed services and offered U.S. citizenship at the end of their basic training. Because he was fluent in Arabic, he qualified.

After his military discharge, Shaker returned to Rutgers for a master’s degree in biomedical sciences and was admitted to UNLV’s first medical class. He was awarded the Michael and Renée Yackira Scholarship.

“My military experience is definitely what gave me the passion that got me here today,” Shaker says.

Once when serving in Afghanistan, an armored vehicle near his was blown up. He hustled to help the wounded with head injuries.

“I had to get four men medevacked out. Although some were injured, they all survived.”

His current interests include trauma surgery and emergency medicine.

While advancing his studies, Shaker was the first student board member of the Clark County Medical Society. He also participates as a peer advisor for pre-med student vets, and is the founder of Veterans in Medicine, an initiative that

aims to bring more vets into medicine and enhance the cultural skills of medical providers and their veteran patients. Shaker says he is trying to ensure that veterans aren’t seen as “broken individuals,” but as individuals who have a motivation for service.

“Instead of post-traumatic stress, we have post-traumatic growth. From what we have seen and experienced in the military, we have plenty of reasons to continue to serve our community.”