



‘There is hope’

Economics professor Bot Rith, a survivor of the Dec. 6 campus shooting, returns to the classroom



The unexplained moments that brought officers Damian Garcia and Nate Drum together



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Nearly a year after they brought an end to the violence of Dec. 6, officers Damian Garcia and Nate Drum reflect on the relationships that make them part of this community.

+ After months of recovery in private, professor Daraboth "Bot" Rith returns to the classroom to share his love of economics.

THE COVER



Professor Bot Rith, a casualty of the Dec. 6, 2023, campus shooting, returns to teaching.

[PHOTO: JOSH HAWKINS]

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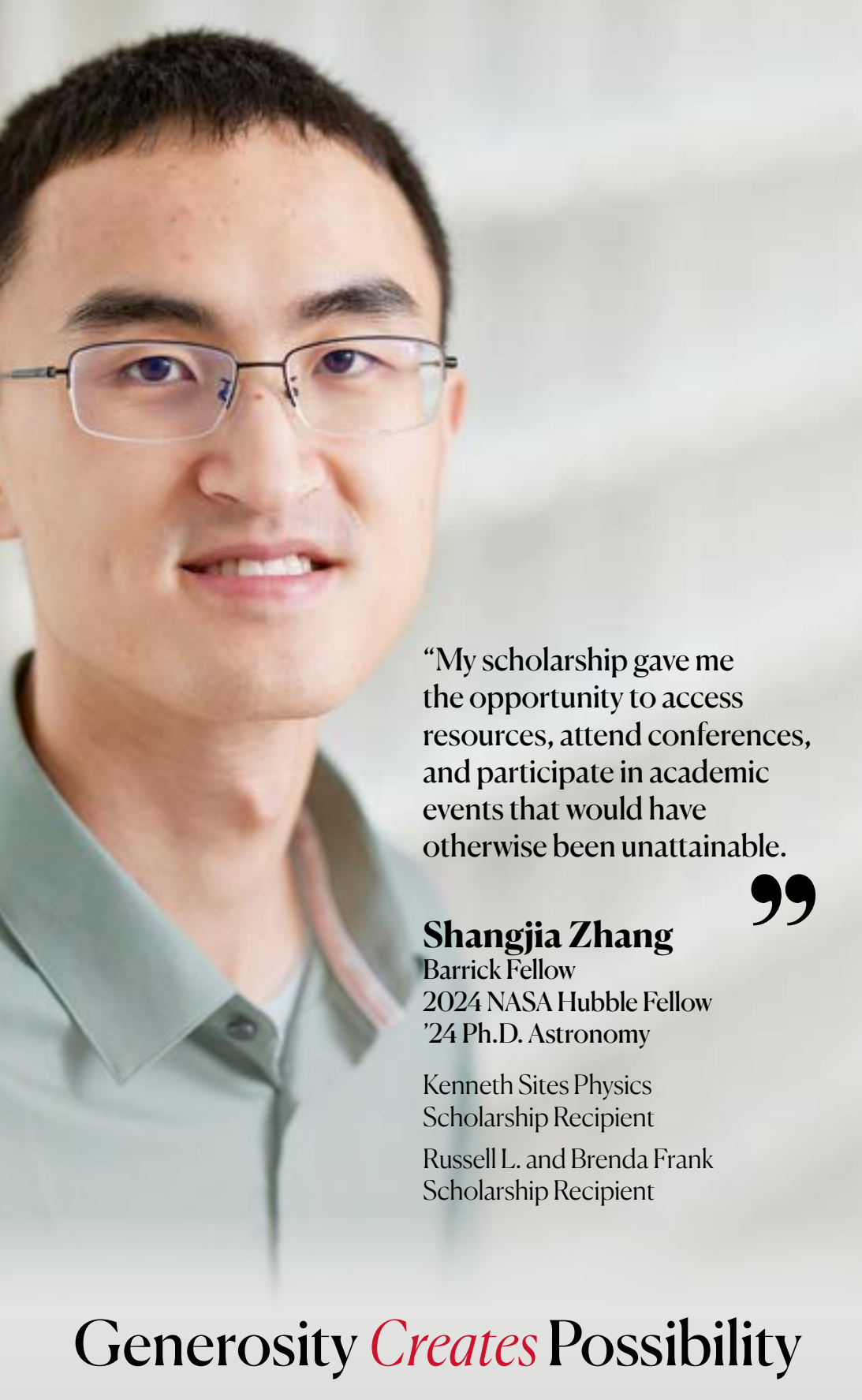
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“My scholarship gave me the opportunity to access resources, attend conferences, and participate in academic events that would have otherwise been unattainable.”

”

Shangjia Zhang
Barrick Fellow
2024 NASA Hubble Fellow
’24 Ph.D. Astronomy

Kenneth Sites Physics
Scholarship Recipient
Russell L. and Brenda Frank
Scholarship Recipient

Generosity *Creates* Possibility

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UNLV

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
The University of Nevada, Las Vegas, wishes to acknowledge and honor the Indigenous communities of this region, and recognize that the university is situated on the traditional homelands of the Nuwu (noo-woo), Southern Paiute (paioot) People.

Full statement:
unlv.edu/land-acknowledgement

From the President

The Meaning of Family

It has been almost a year since tragedy struck our campus on Dec. 6, 2023. In the months since the shooting, we have learned so much about ourselves and each other and about what we mean when we say “the UNLV family.”

The expression has helped me, and I suspect many others, find comfort through difficult days. It offers a way to express our emotions and to convey to those hurting just how much they mean to us. To be family is to share an almost indescribable bond of love and support for one another.

In this issue, you’ll find two stories that go to the heart of what it means to be a Rebel – to be part of this family – from a few of the people most profoundly impacted that day.

You’ll learn about Detective Nate Drum and Officer Damian Garcia. They are the two University Police officers who heroically confronted and stopped the shooter. Both are committed to their profession and an asset to University Police. Damian is a gregarious, joyful person who brings wisdom and care to our campus. Nate is steadfast and determined, and in the story, he shares how one of his former professors unknowingly had a profound impact on him.

You will also read the story of professor Daraboth “Bot” Rith and his wife, Dimanche Pharath Rith. Bot was the fourth victim on Dec. 6. His injuries were so extensive that it took months for him to recover physically. He chose to recover in private until he was ready to once again be what he says he is meant to be: an economics professor. That came this fall, when he returned to full-time teaching.

I hope in Nate, Damian, and Bot’s stories you find the same powerful message that I did: Though we may come from different cultures, different places, and different decades, we are all part of this Rebel family.

As a campus, I believe we’re getting better every day. There is a collective



power that comes from sharing our joys and pains, our struggles and triumphs. I thank all of you for your resiliency and your support of your fellow Rebels. I’ve learned that there’s no single playbook for how to do this, and it requires all of us working together and supporting one another to get

where we want to be.

The UNLV family will gather Dec. 6 to remember those we lost – professors Naoko Takemaru, Jerry Cha-Jan Chang, and Patricia Navarro Velez – and to reflect on the resilience, strength, and spirit of UNLV that has helped us heal since. More information about the event can be found at UNLV.edu/strong.

I continue to be awed by the way our community has come together for one another – checking in on colleagues and classmates to see how they’re doing, offering services and support for those in need, and proving – time and time again – what it means to be UNLV Strong.

This is a truly special place, and it’s because of each and every one of you.

Keith E. Whitfield,
UNLV President



REBEL RALLY CARS

President Keith E. Whitfield prepares his ‘69 Chevy Blazer for the inaugural UNLV Car Show:

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5 REASONS TO BE PROUD REBELS

ENROLLMENT

1 WE'RE DEFYING COLLEGE TRENDS – LIKE REBELS

UNLV surpassed its own record-breaking achievements again this fall, reaching a new enrollment milestone even as universities nationwide face declining enrollments. What's more is that:

- ▶ Total enrollment reached 32,911 students this fall, up nearly 6% over the previous year and the highest in UNLV's 67-year history
- ▶ Degree-seeking undergraduate enrollment is 24,623, a 2.1% year-over-year increase
- ▶ Graduate enrollment is 4,510 students, an 11.7% increase
- ▶ More than 80% of undergrads are taking a full-time course load, an increase of roughly 5% over last fall
- ▶ First-year retention is up to 79.2%, more than a percent increase over last fall
- ▶ At 50.4%, the university reached a new high in the six-year graduation rate
- ▶ More than 50% of all UNLV undergraduates will be the first in their family to earn a four-year degree
- ▶ Nearly 88% of students are Nevada residents

As a Minority-Serving Institution (MSI), Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI), UNLV continues to lead in diversity.

The number of students identifying with one or more minority categories has surged to 22,882, or about 70% of the student body. This is led by 34% of students who identify themselves as Hispanic, a figure that continues to increase every year.

"Diversity enhances the educational experience by more fully reflecting the world we live in. Our community at UNLV is as diverse as the world itself," said Chris L. Heavey, executive vice president and provost. "This diversity creates a living, learning laboratory where students can develop the skills needed to succeed in a global, interconnected society."

— Jennifer Hurtado

A folklorico group performs on Pida Plaza during the 4th Annual Minority-Serving Institution Week.

[PHOTO BY JOSH HAWKINS]

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

2 WIGGING OUT IN NORTH LAS VEGAS

Haith Johnson had been in the beauty industry for 40 years when she and her husband received the opportunity of a lifetime: an offer from Walmart to franchise their salon concept inside one of the mega retailer's stores.

The only catch? The couple had to move their business from Detroit to Las Vegas. They jumped at the chance. "It was an incredible opportunity," she said. "Ninety days later, we had packed everything up and moved."

Le'Host Hair & Wigs began the process of opening a storefront inside the Walmart on Craig Road in North Las Vegas, but they knew they needed a little help.

"Being here in North Las Vegas, it was a new space. I know hair, I know wigs, and I know extensions, but I don't know this space," said Johnson. "But I also knew it was possible if I got training and wisdom from those who came before me."

That's where the North Las Vegas Small Business Connector comes in — a one-stop shop for small business owners located in North Las Vegas City Hall. It was recently recognized by the U.S. Department of the Treasury for its unique model.

The Connector is a partnership between



Haith Johnson, left, opened Le'Host Hair & Wigs after getting help with licensing, financing, and employee hiring from Carlos Mejia Castillo and the North Las Vegas Business Connector. Mejia Castillo is part of UNLV's Nevada Small Business Development Center.

the City of North Las Vegas, UNLV's Nevada Small Business Development Center (SBDC), EmployNV Business Hub, and Access Community Capital.

Once clients are licensed and have a solid business plan in place with the help of the SBDC, they're referred to the Connector's other partners. EmployNV helps with talent and provides funding for on-the-job training, while Access Community Capital offers loans with low interest rates.

"There are so many resources out there. Most business owners don't even know where to start, they don't know what door to go through," said Zachary Miles, senior associate vice president for economic development at UNLV, which oversees the SBDC.

"The Small Business Connector provides that door."

By opening the office in North Las Vegas City Hall, the university is extending its reach to a new community of entrepreneurs.

"The impetus for UNLV was that we wanted to be a stronger community partner," Miles said, noting that SBDC hopes to establish more offices to make the services available without undue travel. "Great communities are built around great universities, but only because they work together. Yes, we teach students, we do research, and we have sporting teams, but here's what else we are we doing to leverage our resources for the greater community."

—Carolyn Kressler

the partnership was both practical and perfectly timed. His department started a wellness and resiliency program last year for employees.

"[Our officers] are in an interesting profession, and it is a challenging profession where they are exposed to tragedy and trauma and negative things in life," Togliatti said. "UNLV brings all kinds of expertise and passion — people with fire in the belly to help people."

Leading the UNLV Tourist Safety Institute is an interdisciplinary team of faculty in social work, public policy, criminal justice, communication studies, and journalism.

—Afsha Bawany

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> unlv.edu/news/newsletter

PHOTO: JOSH HAWKINS

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

4 A PARTNER FOR HEALTH CARE EXPANSION

The future home of Southern Nevada's first standalone children's hospital? UNLV's Harry Reid Research and Technology Park in Southwest Las Vegas.

Intermountain Health announced its selection of the site during an October event, noting that the new hospital is intended to reduce the strain on families who have had to travel for comprehensive, subspecialty care for their children. Design of the hospital, clinical activity development, and workforce planning are under way.

UNLV President Keith E. Whitfield noted that building a strong medical infrastructure in a rapidly growing community requires strong partnerships.

"More than a decade ago, the community and state rallied behind a vision for a school of medicine at UNLV as a way to help meet the evolving health care needs of our region," Whitfield said. "The Kerkorian School of Medicine is now celebrating 10 years, and its reach and impact grow every day. This project by Intermountain Health will do the same."

He acknowledged the many contributions from University Medical Center, HCA, Valley Health System, and Dignity Health, in addition to the donors and community leaders.

Gov. Joe Lombardo and County Commissioner Michael Naft also spoke in favor of the project and its location on a UNLV campus.

The Harry Reid Research & Technology Park recently was named the region's "most catalytic place" by the Urban Land Institute Nevada. The park serves as a high-tech home for collaboration between the university and private industry.

—Tony Allen

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF CHRIS KYLE AGUILAR

STUDENT LIFE

5 THE CRANES COME HOME

In the days after the Dec. 6 campus shooting, students Kylee Brahma and Chris Kyle Aguilar, and a group of their friends felt compelled to do something to honor Naoko Takemaru, their Japanese professor, who was one of the victims killed in the tragedy.

Brahma suggested senbazuru, the Japanese tradition of folding 1,000 origami cranes to symbolize hope, healing, and peace.

The idea blossomed and so, too, did their ambitions. They set a new goal of 4,000 cranes so they could also honor professors Patricia Navarro Velez and Jerry Cha-Jan Chang, who were killed, and Daraboth "Bot" Rith, who was seriously injured. [See story, Page 32.]

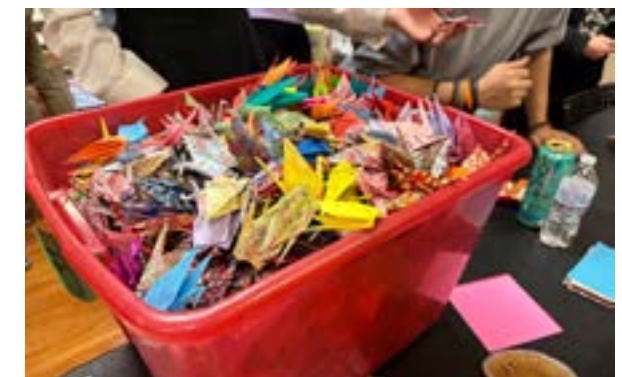
They envisioned spelling out the UNLV letters in vibrant red, surrounded by colors and patterns to reflect the diversity of the UNLV campus.

Aguilar continued to shepherd the project after he graduated in May with a bachelor's in psychology and while working full time for Proud Moments, a clinic for autistic children. More than 200 people participated in crane-folding sessions in Las Vegas' Chinatown, the Discovery Children's Museum, and the Honors College. Those who could not attend sent in their cranes, with contributions coming from as far as Japan.

"I'm not an artist, but I am an organizer," Aguilar said. "I actually used all those skills from group projects [as a UNLV student] to keep this going. I feel very grateful to have been able to contribute in this way."

"I'm not an artist, but I am an organizer. I actually used all those skills from group projects [as a UNLV student] to keep this going. I feel very grateful to have been able to contribute in this way."

Chris Kyle Aguilar '24 BA Psychology



'CRANES FOR UNLV'

The origami cranes will be displayed in the Beam Hall atrium shortly in conjunction with the one-year Dec. 6 Remembrance Ceremony, to be held in the Alumni Amphitheatre.

URBAN AFFAIRS

3 SUPPORT EMOTIONAL WELLNESS IN FIRST RESPONDERS

A new program designed by the UNLV Tourist Safety Institute is helping Nevada Highway Patrol employees focus on their social and emotional wellness.

Law enforcement officers are learning skills in mindfulness, emotional regulation, attention control, and maintaining effective interpersonal relationships. The

program builds the Greenspun College of Urban Affairs' resiliency curriculum to help first responders improve their health, operational performance, and abilities to manage challenging situations as first responders.

George Togliatti, director of the Nevada Department of Public Safety, said



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PRIDE, NOSTALGIA, AND A GREAT T-SHIRT

BY BETH DEBOUCK

The “P” in Premier UNLV might as well stand for passion since nothing stokes Rebel spirit like this annual tradition to kick off the academic year. Some 3,000 students take over the Intramural Field to kick off the academic year with free food, music, and games.

Two of the event’s biggest enthusiasts are Robin Grove and Kevin McVay. They attended as students and now volunteer as employees (both now work in the College of Sciences advising office).

“I’ve always loved to volunteer, period,” says Grove, 15 BA Psychology and ’23 MPA. “But coming back to school at 44 years old, never getting the college experience growing up and actually getting it at that age — you can still get the experience no matter what age you are.”

An ulterior motive for volunteering, however, is to snag the commemorative T-shirt. It’s designed each year by Rebel Events Board students, a group that McVay used to supervise in a previous position. “[Premier UNLV] is the spark,” says McVay, ’14 BA Journalism and ’17 M.Ed. in Higher Education. “The spark to being a Rebel, to feeling connected to campus, to new lasting friendships, to seeing your potential as a scholar and mentor, and to, of course, feel motivated to continue to help students achieve their goals.”

“Coming back to school at 44 years old, never getting the college experience growing up and actually getting it at that age — you can still get the experience no matter what age you are.”

Robin Grove

KEVIN AND ROBIN’S FAVORITE TEES

2016: A 21st birthday is a big deal when you’re living in Las Vegas! This heathered shirt was for the 21st anniversary. It feels luxurious, and it’s the only design we know of with gold lettering. This was also the year UNLV also broke the Guinness World Record for the most LED lights lit simultaneously!

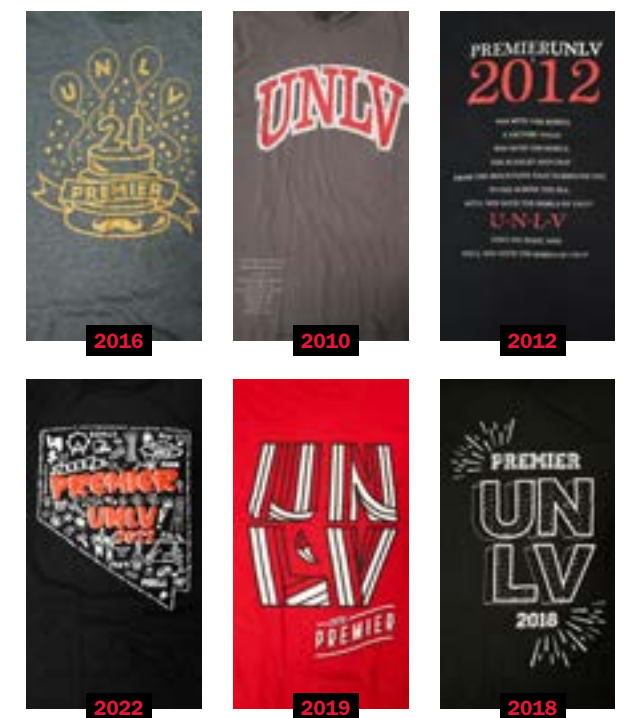
2010: Kevin on his first Premier: “This simple gray shirt design has a classic look. I met some of my best friends at Premier 2010, and 14 years later we find time every month to catch up. Can you believe that lifelong friendships started from a chance encounter?”

2012: Robin on her first Premier: “I have received more than 80 T-shirts from UNLV throughout the past decade, and this shirt is one of my favorites — not just for nostalgia, but because it also displays the UNLV Fight Song on the front so that I could sing along!”

2022: This paints a holistic, sketch-like picture of the many involvement opportunities at UNLV. It’s essentially a resource guide that students can wear! The icons are top-notch, and it’s fun to spot an icon that reminds us of something fun we’ve done.

2019: This bright red Premier T-shirt is a real showstopper. It’s meant to be seen and also heard. When we see this shirt, we can’t help but yell U-N-L-V from the top of our lungs in excitement! When you wear this shirt, you want others to know you’re a Rebel, with all the perks of being part of the UNLV family.

2018: It was really hard to choose our Top 5 Premier T-shirts, so we wanted to give a quick shout out to the 2018 design. This shirt radiates fun, and the firework lines on the edges bring everything together in celebration of the new academic year!



Rebel Rally Cars

From muscle to modern and European to electric — all makes and models lined the Thomas & Mack Center parking lot for the inaugural UNLV Car Show, sponsored by the UNLV Alumni Association and President Keith E. Whitfield. Meet a few of the more than 100 car enthusiasts who joined the spring event. — Beth DeBouck

"I try to come to every basketball game. I'm a season ticket holder for football. This university has been so good to me and my family, I like to give back whenever I can."

Leon Symanski
Class of 1987



'69 VOLKSWAGEN TYPE II BUS

Returning to UNLV with a car similar to what he owned while attending UNLV was #30 Runnin' Rebels legend **Leon Symanski**. His chill attitude matched the vibe of his turquoise bus. "When I first came here, this parking lot was dirt," Symanski said, smiling.

Symanski was a member of the 1986-87 UNLV Runnin' Rebels basketball team, which set a school record for most wins in a season (37-2), ended the regular season ranked No. 1 in the country, and went to the Final Four.

After graduating with two degrees at UNLV — '87 BS Business Administration, '94 MPA Public Administration — Symanski went on to become part of the inaugural class of the Boyd School of Law, earning his JD in 2001. He is now an attorney with Craig P. Kenny & Associates.

He wanted to support UNLV's first go at a car show. "I try to come to every basketball game. I'm a season ticket holder for football," he said. "This university has been so good to me and my family, I like to give back whenever I can."



PHOTOS: JOSH HAWKINS



'69 FORD MUSTANG COYOTE MACH 1 '70 MERCURY COUGAR XR7

Pam Bailey, '82 BS Education and '87 M.Ed., and her husband, Doug, brought double the trouble with their 1969 Ford Mustang "Aztec Aqua" Coyote Mach 1 and 1970 Mercury Cougar XR7.

Their shared love of Mustangs brought them together for the first time, but it wasn't exactly a romantic moment. "It was my first day at UNLV, and it was my 18th birthday," Pam said. She drove a Mustang at the time. "I was out looking for a job, and my car broke down at the intersection



of Sahara and Eastern during rush hour traffic."

She called her dad, who recommended a mechanic he'd heard of named Doug Bailey. Two years after meeting, the two began dating.

'84 DATSUN 300ZX

Yalunda "Yolie"

Washington, whose son Jadon Rosendo is a senior music major, drove their 1984 Datsun 300ZX in from Denver, Colorado, just to be a part of the event.

The Datsun belonged to her late aunt who lived in Texas and has a history of its own, having survived multiple hurricanes, including Katrina and Harvey, without any serious damage.

Cars, like sports and food, are just one



of those interests that can bring people together regardless of their backgrounds, she said.



'06 PONTIAC GTO

Darren Paulson and **Rebecca Paulson**

both got their undergraduate computer science degrees from UNLV in 2007. And nearly 20 years later, they both work here, too. He is director of telecommunication services, and she is executive director for administration & shared services in the Division of Business Affairs.



As he tells it, their GTO was a practical indulgence: "When I graduated from UNLV with my bachelor's, my truck died, and we needed something," Darren explained. "So, we called this a joint graduation present from my wife and myself to me."



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Woodard for the Win

From the football field to the classroom to the community, highly decorated linebacker Jackson Woodard is consumed with being the best version of himself.

BY MATT JACOB

"I treat everything with a winning attitude. Because winning is everything in my life. Winning is all I care about. That's my obsession."

The words flow effortlessly from Jackson Woodard's lips — and they're delivered with the intensity of the linebacker he is.

So it can seem odd that someone who professes to care only about winning voluntarily chose to leave his hometown university's football program to join one that, in the 28 seasons prior to his arrival, did very little winning.

Yet that's precisely what Woodard did, following Barry Odom to UNLV shortly after Odom resigned his defensive coordinator position at Arkansas in December 2022 to become the Rebels' seventh head football coach since 1995.

The two first connected in 2020 when Woodard enrolled at Arkansas as a non-scholarship walk-on and quickly made an impression on the guy in charge of the Razorbacks' defense. So when the Arkansas native entered college football's transfer portal following the 2022 season, Odom immediately pounced.

"He's a great player with a tremendous football IQ," Odom says of Woodard. "First and foremost, though, I knew that from the day he walked into the building, he could move this program forward culturally."

That's precisely what happened.

Upon arriving on campus in January 2023, the 6-foot-3, 230-pound Woodard

wrapped his arms around a leadership position like it was an opposing quarterback. Soon, the team captain's passion — for football, for hard work, for winning — spread through the UNLV locker room like a virus.

It's a huge reason why the Rebels ended the 2023 regular season with the program's best record (9-3) in four decades. And why the success has carried over to 2024.

To be sure, Woodard isn't solely responsible for the program's remarkable turnaround. However, his influence cannot be understated. Certainly not when he says things like: "Winning is everything in my life. I can't get enough of it."

TACKLING THE CHALLENGE

Football is religion in America's heartland. So the sport has been ingrained in Jackson Woodard's DNA for as long as he can remember. That's why, when his older brother first started playing organized football, a then 5-year-old Woodard desperately tried to be part of the team.

"Obviously, I was too young [to play]," he says. "But I would sit on the sidelines with my gear on."

When it finally came time to gear up



42,228

fans attending the Rebels' Oct. 25 Homecoming showdown with Boise State, a record for a UNLV home game

for real a few years later, Woodard was all-in from the word go. By the time he got to high school, though, Woodard's baseball skills had surpassed his football skills — a fact made clear by the college recruiters who showed interest in him (and those who didn't).

That reality didn't sit well with Woodard. So he had a serious conversation ... with the mirror. "During my senior year, I told myself, 'You need to quit acting like you want to play baseball in college and just focus on football.'"

He then buckled his chinstrap, had a stellar senior season, and received several scholarship offers. Unfortunately, none came from big-name programs. Determined to play at Arkansas, he rolled the dice on himself and was granted a preferred walk-on spot.

"I knew I could play at that level," he says. "All I had to do was put my head

down and outwork everyone."

He did just that. Unfortunately, between a COVID-shortened 2020 campaign and Arkansas' immense depth at linebacker, Woodard played sparingly in 28 games through his junior season. He was a lock to move up the depth chart in his senior year, though.

Then Odom bolted for UNLV and brought his linebackers coach with him. Soon after, Woodard packed up, left his home state, and rejoined his coaches in Las Vegas.

The goal for all: Take a program that had produced just two winning seasons in the previous 28 years and turn it into a winner.

WINNING ON AND OFF THE FIELD

A few notable accomplishments for the 2023 Rebels: more victories (nine) than the previous three seasons com-

bined (seven); the first Mountain West Conference championship game appearance in history; and the school's fifth bowl berth.

Woodard's personal accomplishments: 14 starts, 117 tackles, three sacks, an interception, and a first-team all-conference selection.

The 2024 season has brought more of what Woodard craves most: winning. In fact, after a 4-0 start, UNLV entered the *USA Today* coaches poll at No. 25 — the first national ranking in program history.

Woodard's contributions? Put it this way: He earned conference Player of the Week honors three times before midseason. This came on the heels of being named to the pre-season watchlists for several national awards.

By now it's obvious that Woodard was right to put baseball aside and pursue his

football dreams. But remember those "winning is everything in my life" and "winning is all I care about" declarations? He wasn't just talking about football.

This past spring, Woodard completed his kinesiology degree (in four years) and became the first UNLV football player to earn first-team Academic All-America honors. Then in October, he became the first Rebel to be named a finalist for the National Football Foundation's 2024 William V. Campbell Trophy, which recognizes a player for his combined academic success, football performance, and leadership.

So much for the "dumb jock" narrative.

"I treat school the same way as football," Woodard says. "If I'm in a class and the instructor is going to put the name of the person with the best test score on the board, it better be mine. I have to be the best."

THE WOODARD FILE

Linebacker, Senior

6-foot-3, 230 pounds

Hometown: Little Rock, Arkansas

Playing experience: 50 games (28 at Arkansas; 22 at UNLV)

UNLV stats (through Nov. 1, 2024): 193 total tackles, 5.5 sacks, 5 interceptions, 1 fumble recovery

Academics: '24 BS kinesiology (pre-dental tract); currently pursuing graduate certificate; three-time member of Dean's Honor List; 2023 First Team Academic All-America (first in UNLV football history)

Notable awards: Three-time Mountain West Conference Defensive Player of the Week (2024 season); Bronko Nagurski Trophy and Walter Camp National Defensive Player of the Week (Week 1 of 2024 season); finalist for the National Football Foundation's 2024 William V. Campbell scholar-athlete award; semifinalist for the 2024 Jason Witten Collegiate Man of the Year award; named to 2024 preseason watch lists for three prestigious national honors (Nagurski Trophy, Butkus Award, and Chuck Bednarik Award)

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For more information, scan the QR code or visit unlv.edu/alumni/career-engagement

A Call to Immortality

Nearly 35 years after shining on the softball diamond, Christine Parris returns to campus for a well-deserved induction into the UNLV Athletics Hall of Fame.

BY MATT JACOB

Seeing a 702 area code was unusual for Christine Parris. She lives in her native Canada and hadn't called Las Vegas home in a quarter century. Intrigued, she picked up.

After some quick pleasantries, the reason for the reach-out was revealed: The 1991 UNLV softball team that Parris played for had been selected for induction into the UNLV Athletics Hall of Fame.

"Of course, I was super elated and almost started crying," she says.

A beat later, the tears would start to flow with a second piece of news: Parris was chosen for individual honors as well. "I absolutely did not see that coming," Parris said. "But it means everything because this place [UNLV] was a second home to me."

Only a few months before accepting a scholarship from softball coaching legend Shan McDonald, UNLV wasn't even on her radar. She knew so little about Las Vegas that she arrived for her recruiting visit on a sweltering June day wearing patent leather shoes.

"I remember the athlete who took me around during my visit asked, 'Do you want some flip flops?' because my feet were on fire," she said. "She took the shoes off her feet and gave them to me."

The Canadian also didn't know she needed to take college entrance exams to play for a four-year university in the U.S. So she started out at a junior college in Missouri. "I just figured somebody would find me and something would happen."

That someone was Brian Kolze, an assistant coach who invited her on that recruiting trip. The softball team had just completed a mediocre 32-28 season, and the coaching staff viewed Parris and similarly talented recruits as keys



Parris

to taking the then 5-year-old program to the next level.

Playing short-stop in her first season, Parris collected 84 hits and batted .398 (at the time, both were school records). She helped that 1990 squad crack the Top 25 rankings and advance to the Women's College World Series.

Parris shifted to third base the following year and didn't miss a beat. She hit .356 and helped the now-Hall of Fame team return to the World Series and finish the season ranked No. 5.

"We had a surreal [combination] of a lot of incredibly talented athletes, no egos, and everyone really knowing their roles," Parris said. "You're rarely on a team with no drama ... We were there for a common purpose: We all loved the game."

It was not, however, the only game that Parris loved. Basketball was her main sport in high school, but it didn't align with her ultimate goal: to represent her home country in the Olympics. That, she realized, would be easier through softball.

Still, after exhausting her softball eligibility at UNLV, she tried out for the 1992 Lady Rebels basketball team. Although she didn't receive much court time during her lone season on the hardwood, simply being a two-sport scholarship athlete was — and remains — extremely rare. And it only added to her UNLV legacy and Hall of Fame credentials.

After graduating ('92 BS Education), Parris embarked on a professional softball career — and she reached that Olympics goal with Team Canada in the 1996 Summer Olympics.

2024 HALL OF FAME CLASS



» Defensive lineman **Talance Sawyer**, who led the conference in tackles for loss in 1997 and 1998 and went on to play five seasons in the NFL

» Ultra-versatile **Hunkie Cooper**, who played at six positions for the UNLV football team and is back now as director of player development

» First baseman **Kevin Lofthus**, who in 1989 slugged more home runs than any other player in college baseball



» Men's golf head coach **Dwaine Knight**, whose list of accomplishments are as long as any of the drives unleashed by the 48 All-Americans he coached



» Former equipment director **Paul Pucciarelli**, who spent 31 years gearing up UNLV's teams



» Distinguished supporter **Bruce Bayne**, past president of the UNLV Football Foundation and a founding member of the Runnin' Rebel Basketball Club



» Former Rebel quarterback **Steve Stallworth**, who received the Silver Rebel Award for his accomplishments as a sports executive in Southern Nevada



» The **1991 softball team**, which set or tied 67 school records, including most shutouts (28) and lowest ERA (0.62)

PHOTOS: LUCAS FELTNER

Quantum Physics is Freaking Cool

A new dilution refrigerator in the College of Sciences is capable of chilling objects to temperatures far colder than the near-absolute zero of outer space.

BY BETH DEBOUCK

After experiencing so many consecutive days above 110 degrees in Las Vegas this summer, it's hard to believe that UNLV could also lay claim to having the coldest spot in the state.

That bragging point came on June 22, when the College of Sciences' new dilution refrigerator first reached its bone-chilling low temperature of 8 millikelvin.

"For some more perspective, the temperature of outer space is 2.7 kelvin," astronomy and physics assistant professor Joshua Island said. "So, the new fridge can cool objects down to a temperature that is 300 times colder than outer space."

Granted, that low temperature, approximately 459.6556 degrees below zero Fahrenheit, is reached only in a tiny space, but it allows UNLV physics and astronomy faculty to make big advancements in fields like quantum computing.

"There are interesting phenomena in materials that can only be measured at very low temperatures," Island said. "For instance, phases of matter that occur due to interactions between electrons generally cannot be observed at room temperature because the electrons and the parent crystal have too much energy."

"The dilution fridge allows us to cool the materials down, lowering the electron temperature and reducing crystal vibrations, in order to reveal new states of matter."

Researchers received a \$621,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Defense to purchase and install it this summer. And it's the only such device in Nevada.

TAKING THE QUANTUM LEAP

Island said that there are a few different research directions his team can pursue.

"The first," he said, "is fabricating and measuring new types of qubits that could be used for better quantum computers."

Quantum computers aren't a physical object, and you can't use one to check your email. They are a system of artificially created particles (quantum bits, or qubits for short) that work like a brain and, together, can solve difficult computations much faster than a classical computer.

"We are also using the fridge to look for correlated (interacting) states in new materials that have not yet been explored."

Both the "bits" used in classical computers and qubits use a binary code of 1s and 0s to make computers perform functions. In the case of bits, the 1s and 0s can only stand for a single value: just 1 or just 0. Sort of like a switch being in either the on or off position.

Qubits, on the other hand, can hold multiple values at once through the laws of quantum mechanics (imagine a light being both on and off at the same time). This is what is called "superposition," and it's why quantum computers can perform complex computations.

Adding to that, the qubits can become "entangled" with each other, making it possible for them to share information, almost like a network of neurons that grows and becomes intertwined. These machines use algorithms to solve complex problems, but they do have some limitations.

"These quantum machines might not be able to perform even the simplest



"Twenty years ago, many scientists thought it would be impossible to build such a machine. Because of incremental advances, today, a majority of scientists believe that a fully functional and commercially viable quantum computer will be built within the next 10 years."

Bernard Zygelman
Physics professor

calculations, like 1+1," said astronomy and physics professor Yan Zhou, "but due to their inherent quantum properties, they could detect specific signals that are difficult or impossible to observe with classical detectors."

Zhou intends to use the dilution refrigerator to pursue his research in artificial optomechanical systems and quantum computation.

"At higher temperatures, such as those above 100 millikelvin, thermal noise becomes a significant issue," he said. "This noise, particularly in the microwave regime, can interfere with the quantum states of the superconducting qubits. Thermal energy at these higher temperatures can cause qubits to decohere."

When qubits decohere, they lose their quantum superpositions and entanglements. This results in computational errors, Zhou said, limiting the performance and reliability of the quantum computer.

"Quantum computers are challenging to work with because the quantum states of the qubits are very sensitive to noise and decoherence," Island confirmed. "This means that they can lose their information in short amounts of time."

Which is why Island is focused on creating a more resilient qubit — one more immune to environmental factors — through the use of fractional electrons. "These qubits are theoretically predicted to be protected from decoherence and noise, which will then extend computation time and memory storage."



Physics professor Joshua Island and graduate student Justin Alvarez load a semiconductor sample (pictured at left) into the College of Sciences' new dilution refrigerator. Super-low temperatures are required for the duo's research related to quantum computing.

SEEING ONE FINISH LINE

The first "modern" quantum computer was built by researchers at Oxford University in 1998. Since then, big tech companies such as Google, IBM, and Microsoft have, like Island, been in the race to develop a more stable and reliable quantum computer.

"There is an international race to build a fully functional quantum computer, with both large companies and start-ups participating," physics and astronomy professor Bernard Zygelman said.

Zygelman, a theoretical physicist, used to use a publicly available quantum computer from IBM for his

quantum computing and information course. But now, these machines are in such high demand, gaining access to them is very difficult. And the ones that do exist are not powerful enough for widespread use.

"Twenty years ago, many scientists thought it would be impossible to build

PHOTOS: JOSH HAWKINS

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- Monday through Friday by appointment (702-895-2231 or 702-895-5819)
- Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, walk-in from 3:00 – 5:00 p.m.



such a machine," he said. "Because of incremental advances, today, a majority of scientists believe that a fully functional and commercially viable quantum computer will be built within the next 10 years."

One significant application: cybersecurity. "Our encryption systems are based on the inability to factor very large numbers. Quantum computers, in theory, will be able to factor large numbers much faster than regular computers." But at the same time, they'll render current encryption protocols useless, so researchers will need to find better ways of encrypting data.

As he starts his career, Justin Alvarez expects to see applications of these highly complex "machines" transition from what could be to what is.

"An example of one of the future uses for quantum computing can be the ability for researchers to simulate the quantum mechanical behavior of complex molecules," said Alvarez, a graduate student in physics. "Today, even the best supercomputers struggle with this problem."

Quantum computers could lead to

Graduate student Justin Alvarez designed and fabricated a holder to secure semiconductor samples before placing them in the dilution refrigerator.

further advancements – and jobs – in the fields of medicine, logistics, manufacturing, and finance. "I believe not only researchers will benefit. For example, in the future, industries such as those involved in pharmaceutical development could use the benefits of quantum computing to study molecules quickly and speed up drug development stages."

Inspired by his time in Island's lab, Alvarez now plans to pursue his doctorate in physics. He pointed out that he's gained both practical and theoretical knowledge during his graduate studies. "I started working with Dr. Island during my undergrad degree and, not only have I learned countless hands-on skills, such as circuit design, nanofabrication techniques, etc., I've also learned how to take measurements of nanoscale devices, interpret data, and present my research."

BRIEFLY



THE RESEARCH-WORKFORCE CONNECTION

Academic research is inextricably linked to developing a region's workforce. Here's the latest proof: A team led by chemistry professors **Zhang Feng**, above right, and **Hanqing Pan** just brought in a \$2.1 million Department of Energy grant aimed at training the next generation of experts in soil and groundwater remediation.

"The goal is to foster a sustainable and diverse workforce pipeline for environmental management and to boost environmental protection and economic development in Southern Nevada," Feng said.

Along with expanding UNLV's chemistry curriculum, Feng and Pan will purchase an atomic force microscope that will assist their research. But the microscope also elevates the level of instrumentation available to students – experience their future employers will seek. The team is also developing workshops and annual tours of national laboratories for students.

These national facilities offer strong job opportunities once students have completed their degrees.

"We plan to build on these connections and recommend our students for internships as they become available," said Feng. "Internships will allow students to gain experience prior to applying for a permanent role to make sure it will be a good fit for them."

Project leaders have already lined up guest speakers from facilities and agencies such as the U.S. Department of Energy.

"The unique aspect of this program is the connection we are creating between the classroom and real-life research for these students," Pan said. "The structure of the program will lead to hands-on experience for students to get the training they need to be valuable members of the workforce."

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What Makes Time Fly?

For your brain, it really is when you have a lot going on.

BY KEYONNA SUMMERS

People may think of their brains as being synced to a clock, ticking through time in specific, minute-by-minute increments. But a UNLV study in *Current Biology* shows that our brains perceive the passage of time by our experiences — and how many of them we have packed into a given period.

“The brain is not a clock,” said psychology professor James Hyman, who led the study. “It acts like a counter. Our brains register a vibe, a feeling about time.”

When there’s not much happening, our feeling about time is slow, he explained. “And if this is how our brains objectively tell time, then the more that we do and the more that happens to us, the faster time goes.”

For the study, Hyman’s team tasked rodents with using their noses to respond to a prompt 200 times, then analyzed activity in the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC), an area important for monitoring activity and tracking experiences.

Researchers discovered that as the brain state progressed as the animal worked through a task involving a series of motions, small groups of firing cells began to collaborate — essentially passing off the task to a different group of neurons every few repetitions. Picture runners passing the baton in a relay race.

“So, the cells are working together and, over time, randomly align to get the job done. One cell will take a few tasks and then another takes a few tasks,” Hyman said. “The cells are tracking motions — and thus, chunks of activities and time — over the course of the task.”

Regardless of how slowly or quickly the animals moved, however, the brain patterns followed the same path, essentially counting up the repetitions to form the beginning, middle, and end of carrying out the task. The patterns were consistent from one brain to the next, and when researchers applied a machine learning-based mathematical model to predict the flow of brain activity, bolster-

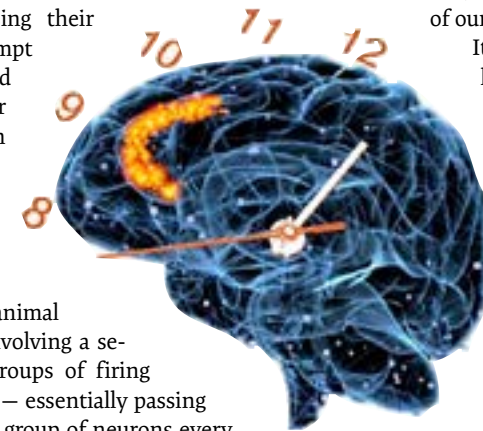
ing evidence that experiences produce the change in our neurons’ activity patterns.

The pattern also applies to activities, like a dinner conversation. “Think of the flow of conversation and you can recall things earlier and later in the dinner,” Hyman explained. “But to pick apart one sentence from the next in your memory, it’s impossible. You [just] know you talked about one topic at the start, another topic during dessert.”

By observing the rodents who worked quickly, scientists also concluded that pace influences time perception: “The more we do, the faster time moves. They say that time flies when you’re having fun. As opposed to having fun, maybe it should be “Time flies when you’re doing a lot.”

THE TAKEAWAY

While there’s already a wealth of information on brain processes over very short time scales, Hyman said that the study is groundbreaking in its examination of brain patterns over minutes to hours, “which is how we live much of our life: one hour at a time.”



It’s among the first studies looking at behavioral time scales in the ACC, which is an important area for behavior and emotions as well as for sequencing tasks. It’s also an area of therapeutic interest for mood disorders and dementias characterized by distortions in time, like Alzheimer’s.

The research team speculates their findings could

lend insights for navigating everyday tasks. And understanding of the brain as a physical entity, like those collaborating cells demonstrate, may help us control our subjective experiences, Hyman added.

“If we want to remember something, we may want to slow down by studying in short bouts and take time before engaging in the next activity. Give yourself quiet times to not move the brain state forward, so to speak,” Hyman said.

Conversely, if you want to move on from something quickly, like a bad meal, you can get involved in another activity right away. “People already do this, but it’s empowering to know it’s a way to take control of your own mental health.”

BRIEFLY

DIMINISHING RETURNS

Free-play campaigns — or gambling money on the house — are a big incentive for getting players in a casino’s door. But their effectiveness may be on the decline with some groups, according to a study led by hospitality researcher Anthony Lucas.

“What we found was there was no decline in spend per trip after reducing the awards,” he said. “I don’t think there is anyone in the industry who would have predicted that.”

Companies may seek new ways to attract customers, perhaps investing in experience upgrades rather than expanding free-play programs.

“It’s difficult for casino ownership to make changes because corporations are naturally risk-averse,” said Lucas. “The data shows that you could do so many other things with that money with minimal to no consequence. You could improve customer service and the physical environment.”

The study was published in *UNLV Gaming Research & Review Journal*.

ILLUSTRATION: TALHA K. SOLUOKU/UNLV



Officer Damian Garcia and Detective Nate Drum of University Police Services received the Award for Valor from the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators (IACLEA) for their response during the shooting on Dec. 6, 2023.

‘This is what the job is’

On Dec. 6, 2023, two University Police officers found themselves confronting an attacker. The man had just taken the lives of three faculty members – Patricia Navarro Velez, Jerry Cha-Jan Chang, and Naoko Takemaru – and seriously wounded a fourth. They brought the gunman’s violence to an end.

This is their story. It is a story of camaraderie and connection. And of the small moments and odd coincidences that tie the Rebel community together.

STORY BY FRANCIS MCCABE
PHOTOS BY BECCA SCHWARTZ

CHAPTER 1: A CALL TO SERVICE

Approximately 11:45 a.m. Dec. 6, 2023

Officer Damian Garcia was in a restroom inside the University Police headquarters, adjusting his bullet-resistant vest. He planned to do some maintenance work next. National Finals Rodeo was to begin the next day, and heart defibrillators needed to be installed in patrol vehicles.

He stepped out into a frenzied scene. Officers were grabbing gear and rushing out the door. Calls were flooding in to University Police dispatch with two dreaded words: active shooter.

Damian shouted at Detective Nate Drum, “Grab your vest.” “There’s no time,” Nate answered.

The two hopped in a car and drove from the Gateway parking garage on the east side of Maryland Parkway down University Drive. They turned north onto the sidewalk in front of Tonopah Hall, making their way to the campus interior.

Throngs of students were running from Beam Hall. “I saw fear on these kids’ faces as they’re running. I’m like, ‘This one’s real,’” Damian said.

At 62, Damian Garcia doesn't strike you as someone who has worked more than 30 years in law enforcement. A jovial, gregarious presence, he's like the uncle you're happy to see during the holidays or run into at the grocery store.

Born in the Buffalo area of New York, he first got the idea to be a police officer because his uncle was chief of police in Niagara Falls. At a young age, his parents moved the family to Southern California, settling in San Diego. "My dad was just tired of all the snow," Damian explained.

His father was a restaurateur, but it was his uncle's career in law enforcement that stayed with him. "He started off on patrol and worked his way all the way up to be the chief of police," he said.

Damian played high school football — both on offense and defense, he likes to remind his fellow officers. He was good enough to play at San Francisco State University, where he played on offense as a wide receiver, even though he preferred playing defense. "Defense is how you win championships," he said. "If you don't let people score, you win."

He studied criminal justice and began his career in law enforcement on San Francisco's BART public transit system before joining the Carlsbad Police Department in Southern California.

He worked nearly every job there was. Street patrol. Motorcycle cop. Beach patrol. And while the different roles all had perks, one job just seemed to fit his temperament best: school resource officer.

"I did that twice. Yeah, that was my favorite," he said. "It was probably one of my favorite jobs because I coached high school football at the same time. But I didn't just coach high school football; I made sure I was at every basketball game, I was at every softball game, I was at every water polo game. I even went to the beach to watch the surf team."

Many of Damian's colleagues in the police department disliked dealing with young people, he said. "I had no problem with it, and I really made it a point to connect with them. I wanted those kids on the campuses to realize that police officers weren't the bad people. We were there to help."

For the "tougher kids" or the ones who seemed to challenge authority more than the average teen, Damian's calm demeanor seemed to help. So the calls about young teens illegally playing roller hockey on school property often came his way.

One of those roller hockey kids was Ian McDonough.

"He was always the responding officer," McDonough said, noting that Damian would usually grab a stick and take a couple of shots before prompting the teens to move along. "That's how I first really got to know Damian. He would show up and just talk to us."

"With a guy like Damian, you didn't feel that threat of intimidation by law enforcement. He was just like, super *casz*h."

CHAPTER 2: ARRIVAL

Approximately 11:50 a.m., Dec. 6, 2023

Nate parked on the southeast side of Beam Hall, and both officers entered the building and began methodically checking each room on the first floor for threats.

"I'd say within 30 seconds to a minute after we got in, five more shots went off and we weren't sure whether that was our people [other officers firing] or not," Damian said.

When gunfire first started echoing throughout the building, faculty and staff pulled colleagues and students into offices, locking doors and setting up barricades. Eight people huddled in the fifth-floor office of the Economics Department chair, Ian McDonough, that same high school hockey player from Carlsbad. The son of a police officer, McDonough knew what gunfire sounded like. Inside his office, once person called 911 while others heaved stuffed file cabinets and desks, as if they were empty boxes, in front of the doorway.

Professor Daraboth "Bot" Rith was in a fourth-floor restroom when he heard the alarm. Maybe a fire? he thought. He went up one floor to check on a student taking a final exam in his office. He found his door open, but the student was gone.

Rith closed his door and walked down the hallway to evacuate. Standing by the elevator doors was a man, taller than Rith, wearing a black trench coat. "I saw him. He was dressed up, you know, like one of us, like one of the faculty, like a professor," Rith said. "When he saw me, he pulled something out of his black coat."

"Oh, it's you," Rith recalled the man saying to him before opening fire.

Rith was shot 10 times in his torso and left arm. Somehow, he was able to run down four flights of stairs and escape the building. Outside, two Metro officers loaded him in a police cruiser and took him to a nearby ambulance. Their quick actions saved Bot's life. [Read his story of recovery on Page 32.]

McDonough and those in his office heard the gunfire. Then came kicking on his door. The group stayed quiet, but prepared to fight using office furniture and supplies, whatever was around.

McDonough peeked under the doorway and saw the light flicker as the person kicking the door walked away.

Nate Drum, 31, had been in Beam Hall many times before. First as a UNLV student, then later as a University Police officer.

Born in San Diego, Nate is the son of a police officer and a nurse. His mother, Nicole Drum, describes her son as a good listener and a rule follower.

"He was just an all-around good kid and very well-behaved and very disciplined. He was always motivated, always striving to be the best that he could be. He was always trying to

reach his maximum potential. It was something his dad really instilled in him as a child."

Nate was very much in awe of his dad, Tim Drum, and his accomplishments as a police officer. "Nathan knew all along that's what he wanted to do. He wanted to help people like his dad," Nicole Drum said.

Like Damian, Nate played football. In high school, he was a wide receiver and punter, but a broken wrist caused him to focus on the latter. He played at a junior college in California, hoping to eventually make the roster of a Division I team.

He moved to Las Vegas and tried out for UNLV as a walk-on punter. He didn't make the team but stayed to finish his undergraduate degree here. "He loved the campus," Nicole recalls.

He got an apartment and a job at a nearby Starbucks. He began studying criminal justice. "He was busy, and he loved it. It was probably some of the happiest times of Nathan's life," his mother said.

Nate remained focused on his long-term goal, hitting the gym and studying hard to finish his degree early. "I didn't want to waste any more time. I just wanted to get school done with so I could start my career as a cop," Nate said.

One class, taught by now-retired professor Karen Seale, stood out. "It wasn't even criminal justice. It was a stress management class," he said. "We had to share different parts of our lives through songs we liked. And then you'd get feedback from your classmates.

"Then we would open up. And so it was essentially like counseling, but in the form of a class. It didn't feel like counseling. It was just sharing parts about my life. You could go as deep as you want and then you have your classmates giving you feedback on it, and it was all good stuff."

What he learned has stayed with him, helping him engage when working with victims of crime and dealing with tragedy.

Nate graduated with a bachelor's in criminal justice in December 2015 and headed back to San Diego, where he applied to the city's police department.

CHAPTER 3: INSIDE BEH

Approximately 11:52 a.m

Damian and Nate took up positions near the entrance to Beam Hall's atrium. There was so much noise with the fire alarm blaring as people fled the building.

University Police and Las Vegas Metropolitan Police officers poured into the building, climbing the stairs to the second floor, shouting directions to each other and following training protocols for school shootings.

The elevator doors opened, and a man in a black trench coat emerged. As seen in body-camera footage, a Metro officer pointed a rifle at him from the second floor and yelled at him to leave the building.

The man kept walking.

"He totally looked like a professor," Damian said. "The fire alarms were blasting, and I started yelling at him, 'Sir, come to us. We're the police. Come to us!'"

Nate told Damian he was going to go talk to the man and ask what he saw.

The veteran officer's "Spidey-sense" started tingling. Something was off. "He just didn't respond. He didn't even look up at us," Damian said. "I said [to Nate], 'I think that might be our shooter.'"

But Nate didn't hear him. He holstered his gun and followed the man out the front doors of Beam Hall.



As a member of the UNLV football security team, Detective Nate Drum runs with the team across the field at Allegiant Stadium.

Nate has a gift for calming and de-escalating tense situations, his mother said. "He knows the difference you can make in someone's life with quick action, intervention, and showing compassion. Mental health is one of the first things he thinks of when he's talking to a victim."

After returning to California from Las Vegas, Nate was accepted into the San Diego Police Academy. He was 23 years old. His father was 22 when he became a police officer.

Halfway through the program, his training was nearly derailed by a family tragedy, but Nate was determined. He finished his training and joined the department. About a year later, he decided to move back to Las Vegas. "I wanted to be able to be a homeowner," Nate explained. Even working full time for the San Diego Police Department, he couldn't afford to live there.

University Police Services offered him a position, and he started in October 2017.

CREATING A RESILIENT COMMUNITY



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CHAPTER 4: THE CONFRONTATION

Approximately 11:54 a.m.

Nate caught up to the man in the black trench coat, just past the steps of the front entrance to Beam Hall. "The reason I holstered my gun was because I recognized at that point that I was just wearing a dress shirt and a pair of slacks," Nate said. "If I approached this person with my gun out, it would cause a fear in him to, you know, he may not respond to me. He may be scared that I'm the shooter."

The man in the black trench coat never said a word to Nate. "He looked at me with a straight face and then he puts his left hand into his satchel, and all of a sudden I see him pull out a black gun," Nate said.

Damian was trailing several steps behind Nate, but he saw the gun too, and his training took over. He raised his gun and fired, striking the man at least three times. Damian began to reload.

The gunman kept charging at Nate. There was a scowl on his face, Damian recalled. "It was evil."

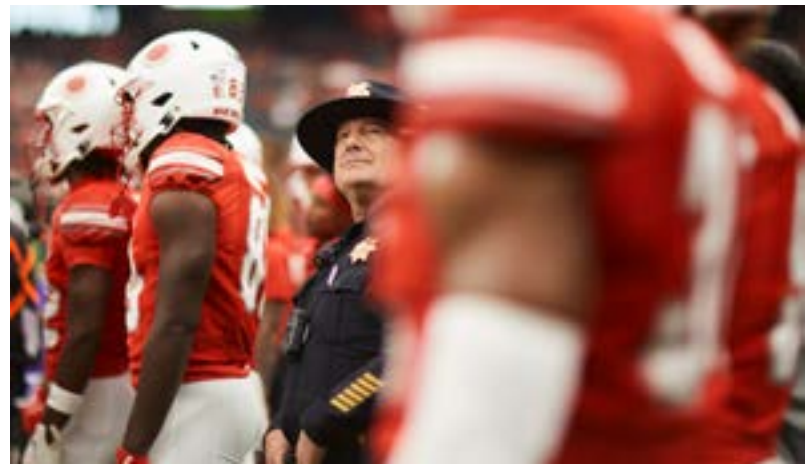
After more than 30 years in law enforcement, Damian retired and moved to Las Vegas to be closer to his mom and dad. "I knew pretty quickly retirement wasn't for me," he said.

He became a bailiff in the North Las Vegas Municipal Court system, but that wasn't for him either. When he heard about a part-time job in events security at University Police, he applied and was hired in 2018. Damian quickly found himself working full-time hours, often doing security for the UNLV football team.

Soon after both joined the department, it became clear that Nate and Damian would have a special relationship. Both were from Southern California, had worked in police departments there, and had played football. And both loved to give each other a hard time — Damian about Nate's time as a punter rather than a "real" football player and Nate about Damian's Legoland police beat in Carlsbad. Don't get them started on their age difference.

They worked well together, and often.

Since the shooting, Officer Damian Garcia has sensed a change in how UNLV football players view him. He's not just working a job, he's part of their community, he said.



CHAPTER 5: A LEFT TURN

Approximately 11:55 a.m.

As gunfire exploded around him, Nate was very aware he was not wearing his bullet-resistant vest. He ran, dove, rolled over, and sprung back to his feet before finding momentary cover behind a police cruiser.

With his sidearm now unholstered, Nate scrambled toward the rear of the police cruiser. He'd lost sight of the shooter and didn't know which way he might be approaching. Nate pointed his gun north, toward the mall and Wright Hall and — unbeknownst to him — away from the gunman.

Something pushed him to turn left, he said. For the second time, he came face-to-face with the gunman. Nate squeezed his trigger, firing multiple shots. The man in the black trench coat fell forward to the ground. About 10 minutes had gone by since that first call for help.

To this day, Nate has only one explanation as to why he turned left. He never saw the shooter in his peripheral vision. He didn't hear him approaching. He just ... turned left.

"Something just told me that I needed to look left. It was almost like — I felt as though — my head was kind of like forced that way. I do think my dad was with me that day."

Nate's father died on June 4, 2016. He was about halfway through the San Diego Police Academy when his father took his own life. "I was with him at home when it happened."

Nate doesn't have firm answers as to why his father did it. "I think it was the trauma of the work he did," Nate said his father, a child-abuse detective, carried the job with him, physically and mentally. It wore on him. He had chronic back pain from an on-the-job injury and, Nate said, likely suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder.

At the academy, the instructors were shocked Nate didn't quit. "I told them this is where I belong. I knew that's where I needed to be," he said.

To stay, they required him to do six months of psychological counseling, one session per week. "It was the hardest thing I've ever had to do in my life. But it kind of helped me. I was able to learn to process a lot," Nate said.

Counseling helped Nate learn to cope with the loss. He also learned to handle trauma and high-stress situations.

"I had to move on and make the most of my own life," Nate said.

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UNLV

REBELS MAKE IT HAPPEN

CHAPTER 6: THE AIRPORT

Sometime after 8 p.m.

Nate suffered scrapes and bruising as he evaded gunfire, but otherwise neither Nate nor Damian was physically injured further.

After the confrontation ended, officer-involved-shooting protocols began. Damian and Nate were isolated from everyone else and then interviewed by Metro detectives. Hours later, Nate and Damian left UPD headquarters together to pick up Nate's mother from the airport. He had texted her earlier and asked her to come to Las Vegas as soon as possible. He couldn't tell her why, but she soon figured it out.

In the dark of the evening, after 8 p.m., the detectives went together to meet Nicole Drum at Terminal 1 at Harry Reid International Airport. Nate hugged his mother. It was a different type of hug — "not one of those 'I'm-just-here-to-visit' hugs," she said.

The two wept. Then she scolded him for not wearing his vest.

The two officers were placed on leave, per department protocols, while Metro detectives and the Clark County District Attorney's office reviewed their actions on Dec. 6. And both have gone through counseling.

Nate and Damian received local and national recognition for their bravery. On June 26 in New Orleans, they were awarded the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators (IACLEA) Award for Valor.

When they both returned to active-duty last spring, they were assigned to work events security and for the UNLV football team, which includes traveling with the team. At the end of each game, Damian and Nate, wearing navy blue uniforms and triple-brim, campaign-style hats, run alongside the players and head coach Barry Odom as they cross the field to shake hands with the opposing team.

At a preseason practice over the summer, Odom introduced Damian and Nate to the players and told them they were the officers who had ended the violence on Dec. 6.



"I wanted to recognize them for serving our community, and I wanted our guys to understand that they're part of our family and our team," Odom said. "I wanted to pay them respect for the job of what all officers and service people do in the line of duty."

After that, Damian said, "they all seemed to treat us a little differently. We have more of a personal relationship now." Kind of like the relationships he built with McDonough and the kids in Carlsbad, Damian said.

Odom understood the change. "Everybody's going to have a different description on what they describe as a hero, but in my scope, I would say they would deserve that label."

Nate and Damian don't mention the word hero when they talk about themselves and what happened on Dec. 6. They do, however, use the word hero when they talk about professor Rith, or Bot, as he's known, and everything he's done to get back to teaching students. They talk about the families of the victims who didn't make it and all they've gone through. They talk about the staff with UNLV's counseling and psychological services who have helped so many people recover emotionally.

"Damian and I do not consider ourselves at all this way. This is what the job is," Nate said.

"I'm supposed to feel good right now, but I'm so shocked, still. From everything. I'm so frustrated and upset about what happened. I'm not superhuman or a superhero. I think given the circumstances that I had, I did the best that I could.

"This is not something I ever want to do — to take a human life. [The gunman] forced my hand to do that, because it's not something I had ever wanted to do."

When Nate and Damian found out a few hours later about the victims, Nate said, "It just made me furious, because it was just, why would somebody do that?"

It's something we all will struggle with, they both agreed. "I think we need to move forward and not forget. But we need to move forward," Damian said.

Dealing with the "why" in the wake of traumatic events is something Nate has dealt with for a long time. It goes back to the death of his father.

"The whole time I grew up, I wanted to be like him. And I wish he could be here to go through the aftermath of this experience. And that's frustrating."

But Nate is certain it was his father who saved his life.

"He was there on Dec. 6. I truly believe that. Me looking to the left? There was no way. I felt my head just forced that way.

"I can't explain that." ♦

Economics professor Daraboth “Bot” Rith, seated, and Dimanche Rith, a business manager for UNLV’s Office of Online Education



After Months of Recovery, a Return

Critically injured professor Bot Rith is back to teaching – with g ratitude for the officers who saved him and for the colleagues who worked behind the scenes to make Las Vegas home to his family.

STORY BY FRANCIS MCCABE | PHOTOS BY JOSH HAWKINS

As a young boy returning home from school in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, Daraboth “Bot” Rith was often greeted by his Yeay, or grandmother in Khmer. Her name was Chhea, and when school was challenging or he wasn’t feeling well, she would comfort him by preparing his favorite meal—nom banh chok, a traditional Cambodian rice noodle dish.

This simple act of care would give him the confidence to overcome the difficulties he faced at school.

“She raised me. She taught me to study hard. Work hard. And she fed me good food,” Bot joked. “Every time I got out of school, she had food on the table. She really took care of me.”

After her passing in 2017, Bot kept a picture of his Yeay with him wherever he moved. On Dec. 6, 2023, the picture was in his office in Beam Hall, still in an unpacked box.

On that tragic day on the fifth floor of Beam Hall, Bot encountered a man, taller than him, wearing a black trench coat and dressed like a professor. “When he saw me, he pulled something out of his black coat. I thought it was a notebook or something,” Bot said.

It was a gun and the man, whom Bot had never seen before, shot him 10 times.

The bullets tore through his left arm, with five of them entering his torso. Blood soaked his shirt. “I knew immediately this is real. This is life threatening. I knew I needed to run as much as I can. I could hear some gunshots behind my back. I pushed through the exit door and took the stairwell from the top floor all the way down.

“And I was praying to my grandmother, my late grandmother. ... I prayed, ‘Please get me out of here! Please keep me safe from this monster.’”

His voice cracked as he explained, “I prayed to stay alive to see Abbie. To see my daughter again.”

Bot ran down four flights of stairs and escaped to the east side of Beam Hall. Outside, he happened upon Jake Noriega

“This experience has taught me so much about the power of community, the importance of compassion, and the incredible things that emerge in times of adversity. And it has shown me that even in the most challenging times, there is hope; there’s always a path forward.”

— Daraboth “Bot” Rith
at his first campuswide appearance since the shooting



Rith found comfort in memories of his grandmother as he recovered.

and his partner Ty Vesperas, both Las Vegas Metro police officers. Bot recalled telling Noriega that he couldn't breathe. "He was trying to close the wounds. I began to lose my sight at that moment. I had an image of my daughter, and I thought that it could be my last one."

The two officers, who had just arrived at the main entrance to the building, acted quickly, moving Bot into their police cruiser. Noriega provided medical care as Vesperas drove to an awaiting ambulance.

"Without them," Bot said, "I could be gone. I feel that I owe gratitude, immense gratitude, for the service they do to save people's lives."

OCEANS AWAY

Bot and his wife, Dimanche Pharath Rith, now a business manager with UNLV Online Education, began sharing their story with the UNLV family in September. The couple had met in high school in Cambodia and began a long-distance relationship a couple years after Dimanche's family moved to Australia, and her with them.

When an opportunity arose for Bot to attend the Southern New Hampshire University in the U.S., he jumped at the chance. When he wasn't studying, he was trying to convince Dimanche to join him.

In the United States, there were so many opportunities, he would say. She could achieve her educational goals alongside him.

After earning his undergraduate degree and working at a bank in Boston, Dimanche joined her high school sweetheart and attended the University of Massachusetts, Boston. They were married, and 10 months later, they welcomed their daughter, Abbie.

Both of them went on to pursue graduate degrees at Suffolk University. As Bot was finishing his Ph.D. work and looking for a professorship, Dimanche and Abbie returned to Australia to be close to her family. He was offered a job as a visiting professor at UNLV by then economics chair Jeff Waddoups.

On Jan. 17, 2023, his first day at UNLV, Bot stopped outside Beam Hall to take a selfie. "Teaching economics is more than a job," he said. "It's the way to change

lives. That I can show off the beauty of economics," he says, sometimes halting to gather his words. "For me, teaching is more than a dream come true."

Bot had been at UNLV less than a year when the tragedy happened. He was beginning to pursue his research goals and networking with colleagues. He was also in a new city. He missed his wife and daughter and his friends in Boston and Cambodia.

It was a Friday afternoon in Australia (Thursday in Nevada) and Dimanche was working from home when she received a call from a friend in Boston about the shooting at UNLV. As Bot was undergoing extensive and multiple surgeries, she didn't know how to find out what was happening to her husband.

"I just knew there was a shooting at UNLV and Bot was one of the victims and, at the time, no one knew if he was OK," Dimanche said.

As a social worker at Sunrise Hospital connected her with Bot's doctors for medical updates, UNLV helped orchestrate an emergency journey to Las Vegas for Dimanche and Abbie. Provost Chris Heavey and his chief of staff, Tondra De, would play a huge role in helping the family recover together, Dimanche said. They helped set up living arrangements and encouraged her to apply for a job with UNLV. The university also arranged for Bot's parents to be with him as he recovered in the hospital.

"All this heartfelt support — each phone call from family and friends — served as a lifeline," she said. "It helped knowing that there were so many people out there trying to help our family."

'A JOURNEY OF STRENGTH'

Early on in his recovery, Bot's spirits were lifted by the many cards and notes he received.

"And all the words from anyone — from my family, from my colleagues, from my students, from friends — they are very meaningful to me," Bot said, gesturing to the stack of cards he spread out on a table.

Colleagues like professor Ian McDonough would visit him, and some snuck food into the hospital, Bot remembered. "They would offer: Is there

something that I really wanted to eat? I could only eat a little, but they brought in some delicious food."

Bot's goal has been to get back to who he was on Dec. 5, 2023. He remembers telling his physicians: "I want to stand up and be able to walk again. I want to be the person I used to be."

He was in a medically induced coma for about two weeks following the shooting. As he regained consciousness, sedation left him confused, and he would mix reality with dreams. He had compression boots on his legs to prevent blood clots. When they would inflate, he thought someone — someone who shouldn't be there — was dragging him by his legs.

The lights in the room would bother him, too; they seemed so bright. "I was so angry that someone kept turning an overhead projector on — like in school — and shining it at me. I couldn't understand why they would do that to me."

Physical therapy was a slow and deliberate process. With both fear and uncertainty to work through, Bot requested that the university continue to keep his identity private.

First he had to learn how to sit up. Then it was standing up. Then it was climbing a step. He described doing the most rudimentary movements: "I would feel so fatigued."

But Dimanche saw something else. "I witnessed a remarkable journey of strength, resilience, and hope," she said.

Bot's Buddhist upbringing and the teachings of his Yeay played an important role. Buddhists believe in the importance of finding joy despite life's suffering. Bot recalled a lot of physical pain, especially at night. "I kept crying. I would call (for medical staff) and ask them to stay with me," he said.

But he wouldn't give up.

"Life is precious. It's a gift from God or Buddha, that we have a chance to experience the beauty of the world. When you're in a down moment, as long as you keep trying, you have room to grow," he said.

It's a message he shares with his students as well. "I tell them, 'You can't give up. You may feel overwhelmed but if you give up, then there's no room to grow.'"



Nine months after the shooting, he slung his ever-present backpack over his shoulders and walked back onto campus. He taught an online course during the summer and is now back to teaching four in-person classes — the same number he was teaching when the shooting occurred.

"From day to day, I keep progressing to be a better person. I think less about what happened and focus on what's more important, especially my family and my teaching and my research."

"The person I am now, I am not just a survivor," he added. "I am someone who has been profoundly transformed by a tragic experience. But I am back, ready to embrace my role as a professor with renewed passion and enthusiasm."

"This is my calling, my way of positively impacting lives and elevating our shared humanity."

AT HOME IN NEVADA

Reserved and pensive, Dimanche considered everything they've been through. Before the shooting, the couple was uncertain of when they might live in the same place again. Dimanche had hoped Bot would join her in Australia.

"Being back together like we are now — it is like fate. Like we are meant to be together," she said.

The family has settled into life in Las Vegas. Abbie is now in a magnet program at a local middle school, and the family recently bought a home.

In September, they invited Buddhist monks to their new home for a blessing. "They blessed it so it would be a place to live with happiness," he explained. "Every time we come home,



Abbie Rith feeds ice chips to her father during his months-long recovery after the Dec. 6, 2023, shooting.

At left: Professor Bot Rith shows Las Vegas Metro officer Jake Noriega the scars on his arm during a thank-you luncheon in August. Rith credits Noriega and his partner, Ty Vesperas, with saving his life.

2024 ALUMNI AWARDS

What ties the 22 UNLV Alumni Association honorees together? A strong sense of gratitude for the opportunities that being a Rebel has brought to them.

STORIES BY MATT JACOB | PHOTOS BY MICHAEL ROBERTS PHOTOGRAPHY



Randy Garcia
'77 BS Accounting

“Having known Fred Albrecht personally like I did and known about his immeasurable contributions to and love for UNLV, I was deeply moved to receive this honor. UNLV benefited enormously from Fred’s campus and community involvement, and to this day, I can’t imagine another person on campus who was loved as much as him.”

The 2024 **Fred C. Albrecht Outstanding Alumnus** is the founder, CEO, and chief investment officer of The Investment Counsel Co., Nevada’s first and largest independent investment advising corporation. After years of working for one of the nation’s top investment advising firms, Garcia established his company in 1987 to align with a personal philosophy to put the best interests of clients above all else. Garcia serves on several charitable boards and organizations; is past chair of the UNLV Foundation’s Investment Committee; and is an ongoing supporter of the Honors College, College of Fine Arts, Kirk Kerkorian School of Medicine, and UNLV Jazz Ensemble.



Benjamin Barborika
'13 Dental Medicine

“Dentistry is a great career that offers a variety of practice options other than clinical dentistry. There are careers in dental education, research, general practice, and many other specialties. I encourage dental students to spend time shadowing a dentist and dental specialists to better learn where their niche in dentistry might be.”

The **School of Dental Medicine Alumnus of the Year** is a board-certified endodontist in private practice at Las Vegas Endodontics and an assistant professor in residence with the UNLV School of Dental Medicine. In addition to teaching, Barborika often brings dental students into his practice for shadowing opportunities. He’s a multi-time recipient of the Outstanding Faculty Award as decided by UNLV students. And when UNLV dental students encounter patients whose dental challenges are a bit too extensive, Barborika is quick to step in and offer free or discounted services to the clinic’s patients.



Craig Billings
'97 BS/BA Accounting

“No matter if you’re younger or older, it can be difficult when you’re not able to fully visualize your future. I have learned over time that if you’re in such a situation, the best thing to do is identify the next best move and aggressively attack it. And then the next best move begets the next best move, which begets the next best move. It’s like climbing a mountain with a very windy path.”

The **Lee Business School Alumnus of the Year** is CEO of Wynn Resorts. He previously held positions at Goldman Sachs, International Game Technology, and Aristocrat. Born and raised in Las Vegas, Billings followed up his undergraduate degree with an MBA from Columbia Business School. He maintains close ties to his hometown university as a regular donor and guest speaker in classes. Billings also was there for UNLV in the wake of the Dec. 6 campus shooting, hosting the families of hospitalized victims at Wynn Las Vegas.



Justin Carley
'06 Juris Doctor

“When I was at Boyd, there were no major league pro sports teams in Las Vegas, just minor league baseball and minor league hockey. So if a law student really wanted to get into pro sports, it was likely they would have to leave town. That’s no longer the case.”

The **William S. Boyd School of Law Alumnus of the Year** is senior vice president and general counsel for the Las Vegas Raiders. While in law school, Carley clerked for the Las Vegas offices of Snell & Wilmer. He went to work for the firm full-time after earning his juris doctor and remained there for 13 years, eventually making partner. Carley is a generous contributor to the Boyd School of Law’s scholarship fundraising efforts and also has been a guest speaker in classes. Additionally, he regularly mentors students and has invited members of the school’s Sports and Entertainment Law Association to tour the Raiders’ headquarters.



Fabian Doñate
'18 BS Public Health

“I realized that many of the state’s problems weren’t going to be fixed until someone like myself was represented in the political process. Given my public health background and the experiences that my family went through — whether it was my dad’s diabetes diagnosis or the fact that I had to assist in filling out my family’s unemployment forms during COVID-19 — I wanted to make sure others in similar situations had a voice advocating for them.”

The **School of Public Health Alumnus of the Year** became the youngest state senator in Nevada history in February 2021 when the then-24-year-old was appointed to fill a vacated seat. He won re-election in 2022 and currently chairs the Health and Human Services committee. A first-generation college student, Doñate caught the political bug through student government at UNLV. In the private sector, the public health advocate is the director of strategic planning for Astrana Health.



Janice Enriquez

'23 Doctor of Nursing Practice

"I have always loved teaching, whether it's students, new graduates, patients, families, or my own kids. Nursing students are amazing; they are so curious and excited to learn. They really want to make a difference, and they – like me – all have a story that pushed them into this career choice."

The **School of Nursing Alumna of the Year** juggles careers in both the medical and academic worlds. She is a certified nurse midwife and women's health nurse practitioner. She also teaches the next generation of nursing professionals as an assistant professor in residence and volunteers with numerous community organizations. The holder of four nursing degrees, Enriquez traces her passion for her profession to when, at the age of 15, she gave birth to her first child and faced judgmental comments from health care providers.

Raquel Shohet Floyd

'96 BS Engineering

"My experience as a founding member of the UNLV women's soccer team taught me about teamwork, collaboration, communication, grit, and resourcefulness. Those key characteristics are paramount to my ability to be a leader, mentor, and advocate for our industry."

The **Howard R. Hughes College of Engineering Alumna of the Year** is the founder and president of Rock Solid Project Solutions, a Las Vegas-based construction management firm. The company has managed more than 500 public and private projects – both nationally and internationally – across multiple industries. As an alumna, Floyd sponsored the launch of the university's American Public Works Association student chapter, serves as a student mentor, and frequently returns as a guest speaker.



Wyndee Forrest and Dave Forrest

'04 BS Hotel Administration (Wyndee); '04 BS Recreational & Leisure Studies (Dave)

"The phrase Rebel Spirit personifies a profound sense of determination and innovation, two qualities that resonate deeply with us. Owning a business in a vibrant city known for being the pinnacle of hospitality is the epitome of Rebel Spirit – a spirit that urges us to continually push boundaries and redefine success."

The **William F. Harrah College of Hospitality Alumni of the Year** own and operate CraftHaus Brewery in Henderson. The husband and wife team first discovered their passion for craft beer during their graduation trip to Europe. With the opening of CraftHaus a decade ago – followed by a taproom-only location in the Las Vegas Arts District in 2019 – the Forrests were at the forefront of building Southern Nevada's thriving craft beer community. They created Rebel Spirit, a crisp golden ale that is the official beer of UNLV, and they donate a portion of its proceeds back to their alma mater.



Gretchen Grierson

'92 BA Psychology, '94 MA Clinical Psychology

"When I was in middle school, a friend gave me the nickname 'Dear Abby,' because I enjoyed being a listener with my friends and was always curious about why people made the decisions they did in their circumstances. For that, I owe a great debt to my beautiful mother and father, who taught me how to love and find the good in others."

The **College of Liberal Arts Alumna of the Year** is a licensed marriage and family therapist in Las Vegas. Grierson also works as a mental health counselor at Mission High School, a public high school for students in recovery. Being a Rebel is a true family affair, as her husband, two siblings, and son are all alumni. In addition to supporting her alma mater, Grierson founded My Cause My Gift, a fundraising vendor for nonprofits.

Juan Gutierrez Jr.

'15 BA Romance Languages, '18 Doctorate Physical Therapy

"My UNLV experience was unique, from not knowing what my true calling was as a freshman to then switching to a totally different career path. Eventually, I was able to combine my passion for languages and culture with the world of physical therapy – to the point that as many as 70% of my patients are Spanish-speakers, which means I get to work closely with members of my community every day."



The **School of Integrated Health Sciences Alumnus of the Year** is a physical therapist and a part-time instructor in the Department of Physical Therapy. The first-generation college graduate has helped UNLV students gain valuable on-the-job training in hospital settings through the department's Integrated Clinical Education (ICE) program.



Lynn Manning John

'04 ME Education

"I am humbled to have been involved in the efforts to lobby for and obtain legislation to build a new school for my community. It's a legacy that will be felt by my community for years to come. Because when kids from the next generation succeed, I feel like I have succeeded."

The **College of Education Alumna of the Year** is principal at Owyhee Combined School on the ancestral lands of the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes on the Duck Valley Indian Reservation in northeastern Nevada – a school she herself attended through high school. In 2023, Manning John's testimony before the Nevada Legislature helped secure \$65 million for capital projects in the state's school districts, including funds to replace the now-dilapidated Owyhee Combined School.

Scott Hoffman

'12 BA Political Science

"Thanks to the people I met in my Honors College classes and living on campus, I never felt alone, even when times were stressful. ... I felt like my presence mattered. These experiences made me fall in love with higher education. Now I can't see myself working in any other field."



The **Honors College Alumnus of the Year** is the assistant director for care management at UNLV and the chair of the UNLV Support Team, which works with distressed students to ensure they receive appropriate wellness support. During his time as a Rebel student, Hoffman was involved in several organizations, including a two-year stint as president of UNLV's Residence Hall Association – an experience that convinced him to pursue a career in university student

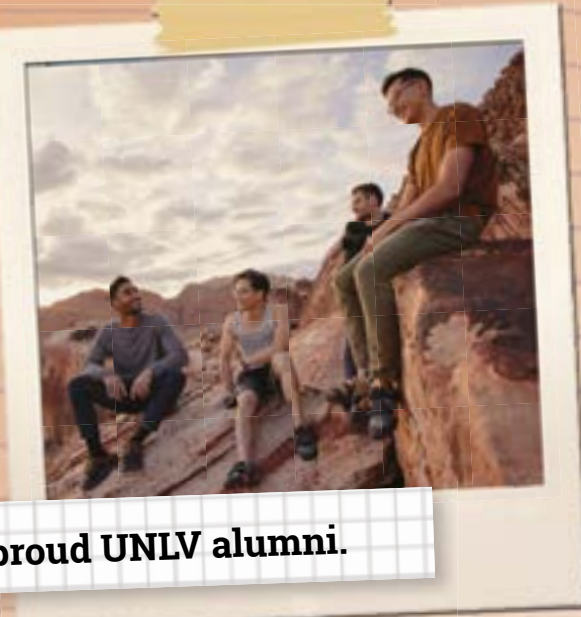


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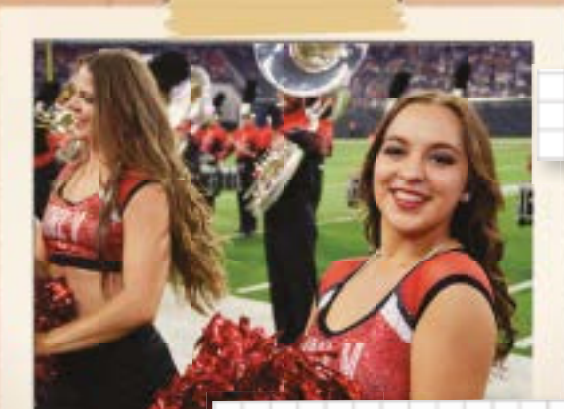
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Aleen Pastor
'08 BA Journalism & Media Studies, '13 MA Public Administration

"Service has always been part of my life. Couple that with the friendships I've made on campus and through events, and it has been easy to maintain a connection with UNLV. Plus, as a proud and grateful UNLV graduate, giving whenever and however I can is simply the right thing to do."

The **Greenspun College of Urban Affairs Alumna of the Year** is the manager of events, detours, and partnerships for the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada. A UNLV class assignment first connected Pastor with the RTC and soon led to an internship, then a full-time job, and nearly two decades of employment with the transportation planning agency and transit authority. The lifelong Las Vegan and first-generation college student often assists at Alumni Association events and mentors student interns at the RTC.

Wendy Kveck
'07 MA Fine Arts

"I truly believe that art can change the world, one encounter at a time. It can inspire joy, elicit empathy and understanding, share stories and cultures, and imagine futures that allow us to consider new ways of being in this world together."



The **College of Fine Arts Alumna of the Year** has taught art at UNLV since 2018, currently holding the dual role of assistant professor in residence and coordinator of the graduate program. An accomplished painter, Kveck is a dedicated advocate for the arts community. That includes founding Couch in the Desert, a collaborative online effort that highlights the work of artists, writers, and thinkers in Southern Nevada.



Dr. Chase Shropshire
'15 BS Biology, '21 MD

"My experience [as a medical student] not only validated my commitment to medicine, but it has instilled a deep sense of responsibility to uphold the values and aspirations upon which the School of Medicine was built. Being trusted to shape the legacy of the institution and set a standard of excellence for future classes wasn't something I took lightly."

The **Kirk Kerkorian School of Medicine Alumnus of the Year** is completing his diagnostic radiology residency with HCA Healthcare in Las Vegas. A member of the school's charter class, Shropshire is the first to be honored as its Alumnus of the Year. A bit of a late bloomer, Shropshire didn't develop an interest in medicine until getting to know a fellow biology student who aspired to be a doctor. That student, **Nicole Parriera**, is now his wife, the mother of his two sons, and a graduate of UNLV's pediatrics residency program.

Alison Sloat
'14 Doctorate Geoscience

"I initially became a geologist because I naively thought that I could mitigate climate change during my career. But as I've gained more experience, I can better appreciate that it is a much larger problem that will take generations of scientists to help solve. That's the phase of my career I'm in now: mobilizing the next generation of scientists to take on this important task."



The **College of Sciences Alumna of the Year** is a professor in residence. Sloat has developed numerous community outreach programs to promote STEM education, slow the impact of global warming, and preserve the environment for generations to come. Most recently, she spearheaded an urban forestry initiative that secured federal funds for a tree-planting and workforce-development program to mitigate extreme heat in disadvantaged communities throughout Clark County.



Claytee White
'97 MA History

"I had no idea that I had an interest in preserving history until I participated in my first workshops to learn about oral history. Prior to all this, I just wanted to learn the history of this unique place that was referred to as the 'Mississippi of the West.' But once I entered the field of oral history, preservation was just a natural progression."

The **University Libraries Alumna of the Year** is the founding director of the Oral History Research Center at UNLV. For the past two decades, White has chronicled Southern Nevada's past — both the good and the bad — through the collection of more than 4,000 first-hand accounts of historical events. Subjects have spoken with authority on topics ranging from the origins and early growth of Las Vegas to the little-known musicians who played behind the legends of Las Vegas Strip entertainment.

Joe Murphy
UNLV donor and Rebel Athletics fan

"The simple fact is this university represents the community that I have called home for more than 40 years. It's a community I love. That's why I'm involved and why I'm happy to do whatever I can to support UNLV's missions."

The **Silver State Award recipient** was introduced to UNLV in the early 1980s when he was stationed at Nellis Air Force Base and attended his first Runnin' Rebels game. Following his Air Force commitment, Murphy became an electrician and founded Murphy Electric. As Murphy Electric and sister company NexGen Integrated Solutions grew, so, too, did his philanthropy. He and his wife, Julie, are donors to the Rebel Athletic Fund and to the Kirk Kerkorian School of Medicine.



Lonnie Wright
'78 BS Hotel Administration, '84 ME Education, '15 Doctorate Curriculum & Instruction

"Growing up, my parents and grandparents always emphasized education. My mother and father sacrificed financially to send my brother and me to private school starting when I was in the first grade. When I came to understand those sacrifices — that's when I knew college was a given. Not just attending, but graduating."

The **Graduate College Alumnus of the Year** has enjoyed an impactful career as an educator, hospitality professional, entrepreneur, and philanthropist. Born and raised in Las Vegas, Wright attended UNLV and was part of the first Runnin' Rebels team coached by Jerry Tarkanian. He founded the UNLV Basketball Alumni Association, which raised money to help student-athletes complete their degrees. He is a tenured professor in hotel management at College of Southern Nevada, an active member of the Dean's Leadership Council for the Graduate College, and co-founder and operator of Hospitality International Training.



Izack Tenorio
'15 BA Business Management, '15 BA Entrepreneurship, '17 MA Public Administration, '22 Doctorate Public Policy

"Receiving this recognition means so much, because I owe a great deal of who I am to Patrick T. Smith. He demonstrated unconditional service, lived a life with high moral character, and exemplified class. He's the person I emulated, and I wholeheartedly followed in his footsteps."

The 2024 **Patrick T. Smith Achievement in Service Award** recipient developed an affinity for service during his freshman year when he got involved with the student government. Tenorio held multiple positions in CSUN, the Interfraternity Council, and Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity. He also served the Graduate & Professional Student Association, the Administrative Faculty Committee, and the Faculty Senate, as well as the Alumni Association. He is vice president of government relations for Strategies 360.

Federick Ngo
College of Education professor

"This truly is an honor, because I know these nominations come from the UNLV community. It's also humbling, as it means some people learned about who I am as a scholar and teacher, and they thought what I was doing was important and worth recognizing. That's an amazing feeling."



The 2024 **Outstanding Faculty Award** recipient is an assistant professor of educational psychology, leadership, and higher education. A first-generation American, he teaches graduate courses to those pursuing careers in higher education administration. His students have consistently placed him among the highest-rated professors in the college. His research focuses on college access and community college student success.

1970s

Jill Derby, '70 BA Anthropology, published her memoir, *When You Dare to Say Yes: Jill Derby and Nevada Activism*. In 1988, she was elected to the Nevada Board of Regents. She was the Democratic candidate for Nevada's Second Congressional District in 2006 and 2008. Derby is a senior fellow with the Association of Governing Board of Universities and Colleges, and past chair of the board of the American University in Sulaimani in Iraqi Kurdistan.



Derby, '70

Alan Kilker, '78 BS Hotel Administration, has been a senior sales executive at the JW Marriott Phoenix Desert Ridge Resort & Spa in Phoenix for 18 years. He previously worked for the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess, Wyndham/Doubletree Paradise Valley Resort, and the Arizona Biltmore. In 2023, his team won Resort Sales Team of the Year. After UNLV, he received his MS in hotel and restaurant management from Florida International University. He lives in Scottsdale with his wife of 36 years, Gina. They have two children.



Kilker, '78

1980s

Jason Schwartz, '80 BA Social Work, received an MS in social psychology from University of California, Santa Cruz, in 1995. He is director of community support services at Mojave Mental Health, where he has worked for 31 years. Schwartz has been married 34 years and has three children. He enjoys jam music.



Sandoval, '93

1990s

Emigdio Sandoval, '93 BS Business Administration, retired from the Air Force as master sergeant in 1995. In 1996, he was director of Tonopah Test Range of Nye County. He is married to Alma Sandoval and has two children. This year, he will be interviewed on *60 Minutes* about his exposure to downwind radiation.



Velure, '96

Paul Novack, '95 BS Education, is a building and construction teacher for Central Technical Training Academy.



Scharfenberg, '98

April Stewart, '95 BA Communications and '05 M.Ed. Health Education, was appointed by Gov. Joe Lombardo in May 2023 to serve as a commissioner with Nevada Volunteers. Stewart



Smith, '98



Dziminski, '01

has been a community volunteer for more than 25 years. Her organizational involvement includes Clark County Medical Society Alliance, Daughters of the American Revolution, P.E.O. International, National Charity League of Las Vegas, and UNLV School of Public Health Alumni Board. Stewart enjoys reading and has been chair of the Clark County Medical Society Book Club for the past five years. She enjoys traveling to Southern California and Europe.



Villagran, '01

Matt Velure, '96 BM Music Education, was appointed a senior flight instructor at Alaska Airlines. He teaches new-hire pilots and those upgrading to the captain's seat. He has been teaching at the airline since 2001.



Branton, '08

Timothy Gupton, '97 BA Romance Languages, received a Ph.D. from the University of Iowa in 2010. He was promoted to the rank of full professor of Spanish linguistics in the Department of Romance Languages at the University of Georgia.

Brigitta Romanov, '98 BFA Theatre, is executive director of the Costume Designer Guild IATSE Local 892 in Burbank, California. The labor union represents costume designers and illustrators in film, television, commercials, and other media. Her costume design credits include the films *Dance Camp*, *Billy Boy*, and *Alongside The Road*, and TV shows *Glee* and *Entourage*.



Plunkett, '09

David Scharfenberg, '98 BS Hotel Administration, was named senior vice president of Northland, overseeing the company's multi-family property management operations. He previously served as senior vice president of operations at Waterton Property Management and Investment, was also a regional director for Holiday Retirement, and spent nine years with Oakwood Worldwide.



Atanasova, '11

Ronald L. Smith, '98 MA Ethics and Policy Studies, is an executive with experience in international and domestic business, security affairs, military training, and diplomatic negotiations. He was the commanding officer and director of the Logistics Readiness Center for Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Atlantic Fleet for Operation Sea Signal. Smith was appointed by the speaker of the North Carolina House of Representatives to the Judicial Standards Commission. Since 2021, he has worked with Rescue From Chaos/Operation 620 and serves on the Global Friends of Afghanistan Advisory Committee. He and his wife, Joan, have three children.



Rubin, '12



Maurice Perkins, '03 MS Educational Leadership, is the principal at Hughes Middle School in Mesquite, Nevada. He was honored as the Principal of the Year for Clark County School District at the annual Starlight Awards in April 2024.



Joseph Kielminski, '13 BA History and '19 M.Ed., is a special education teacher at Foothill High School in Henderson. He was presented with the 2023-24 Milken Educator Award. The award came with a \$25,000 cash prize.



Jenna Preszler, '23 BS Education, was named New Secondary Educator of the Year for the Clark County School District. She teaches resource math in grades 6-8 at Jack and Terry Mannion Middle School.



Alexa Ching, '23 BS Education, teaches second grade at Stanford Elementary School. She was awarded New Elementary Educator of 2024 for the Clark County School District. Ching likes to spend time with loved ones, binge watch the *Star Wars* saga, and enjoy the outdoors.

2000s

Lis Dziminski, '01 BS Education, is a STEM program manager at the Governor's Office of Science, Innovation, and Technology. She received a Master of Education in advanced teaching and leadership from Sierra Nevada College with a specialization in gifted studies in 2010.

Michele A. L. Villagran, '01 BSBA International Business, was awarded tenure and

promotion to the rank of associate professor at San Jose State University School of Information, effective Aug. 19, 2024.

Wanda Brister Rachwal, '04 Doctor of Musical Arts, attended an elite performing arts school, performed around the world, and taught at Baylor University, the University of Arizona, and Florida State University. In February, she had a double lung transplant. Brister Rachwal would like others to be aware about the act of becoming a

donor. She suffered from pulmonary sarcoidosis, a disease that is underreported.

Tim Rainey, '04 BA Communication Studies, is the program director of heritage at KKRZ and KXJM in Portland, Oregon. Rainey previously was the senior director of content marketing for the Southern California News Group. He also worked for Audacy Top 40 KUDL Sacramento from 2015 until 2021; CBS Radio Top 40 WZLH Detroit; and WNOU Indianapolis.

Sheri Beyer, '07 M.Ed. Higher Education Leadership, successfully defended her dissertation, "Muslim international students' perception of Islamophobia during their immigration journey to the U.S." The study explored the experiences of Muslim international students who arrived in the United States under former President Trump's executive orders restricting admission of citizens from specific countries.



Jason Aaron Goldberg, '00 BFA, along with **Joseph Campanale, '01** BA Architecture, and **Hylarie Aguilar, '05** BFA, worked together to produce the film *Every 85 Minutes*. It received grant support from the UNLV Fine Arts Alumni Association as well as NV Arts/NEA. It was screened in June at the 10th Annual Nevada Women's Film Festival at UNLV.

Nathaniel Niles, '07 Political Science, is a special agent in the Criminal Investigation Section of the Colorado Department of Revenue. Niles works with various district attorneys throughout the state of Colorado. He has four children and lives in Denver. Niles enjoys going to the gym, traveling, and sports. He's a fan of the Vegas Golden

Knights, the Las Vegas Raiders, and the Rebels.

Jodi Branton, '08 MS Education, started a cultural consulting business, Awishinaabe, to share Ojibwe culture and help others teach and learn from a multicultural perspective of appreciation over appropriation.

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Riesenbeck, '13

Arthur "Richie" Plunkett, '09 BA Anthropology, graduated with a master's in mental health counseling and worked for the Kent, Washington, Police Department. He now works for the Spokane Police Department and was promoted to sergeant. Plunkett teaches for the Washington Criminal Justice Training Commission. He was named the Washington State Officer of the Year by Police1 in 2020. Plunkett lives in Spokane with his wife, Katie. They have been married 10 years and have one son. He enjoys fishing, biking, running, working out, camping, and reading. He follows UNLV football and misses his days playing at Sam Boyd Stadium on the offensive line. He's also a huge Formula 1 and Vegas Golden Knights fan.

Osborn Medical Center. Ayuen received an MBA from Regis University and a Doctor of Business Administration from Capella University. Ayuen and his wife, Jona, have four children: Nyanwel, Angeth, Alier, and Akuoc. He enjoys bowling, running, going out, and spending time with family.

Zheni Georgieva Atanasova, '11 Bachelor of Music, '13 Master of Music and '19 Doctor of Musical Arts, recently published a book, *One-Handed Piano Compositions and Injury Awareness: History, Study of Selected Works, and Mindful Practice*. Among the educational institutions featuring her book are Yale University; Columbia University; Indiana University; the Manhattan School of Music; the University of California, Berkeley; and the University of British Columbia. She enjoys practicing piano, singing, and reading.

Brian Jones, '11 BS Recreation and '14 MS Hotel Administration, is the associate director for the PGA Golf Management University pro-

gram at UNLV and successfully earned his PGA Master Professional Designation, the highest education designation a PGA of America golf professional can obtain.

Lisa Rubin, '12 PhD Educational Leadership, was promoted to full professor at Kansas State University and was recognized as a research fellow by the College Sport Research Institute at the University of South Carolina.

Jeremiah Riesenbeck, '13 BS Education, has been teaching at Roanoke City Public Schools since 2021. He is one of the Virginia Council on Economic Education's Personal Finance Teacher Fellows. He previously taught at Centennial High School in Las Vegas. He volunteers as an EMT with his local rescue squad. He enjoys spending time with his partner, Paige, and their pets, Raleigh and Roscoe. He also likes *Magic: The Gathering*, computer gaming, video editing, and learning.

Glenn Webb, '14 DMA Percussion Performance, is associate dean for the College of the Arts at Utah Tech University. He directs the percussion, new music, and jazz programs at Utah Tech.

Grant Mercer, '17 BS Computer Science, co-founded embolt.app, which focuses on providing a digital-first approach to running member-based clubs. Mercer co-founded the startup alongside alumni **Gabe Cleto**, '13 BA Art, and **Michael Gutierrez-Nery**, '17 BS Biology, who help with product design and marketing. The app is being used by several UNLV clubs and is provided for free.

Ammir Aziz, '19 BA Sociology and '24 M.Ed., joined UNLV's School of Public Health as the regional program manager of The Defensive Line, a nonprofit organization co-founded by former Las Vegas Raiders (and current New York Jets) defensive end Solomon Thomas to end the epidemic of youth suicide, especially for young people of color.

Jensen Radley, '19 BS Athletic Training, works as a certified and licensed athletic trainer in the industrial setting for the Panasonic/Tesla Gigafactory. Radley is also the head athletic trainer for Truckee Meadows Community College men's and women's soccer teams.



Dagher, '23

2010s

Mabior Ayuen, '11 BSBA Business Administration, is the director of the environmental services department at HonorHealth Scottsdale

2020s

Leya Dagher, '23 BA Political Science, is Lebanese and passionate about spreading her culture and tradition. She was born and raised in Vegas, and enjoys outdoor activities, swimming, and traveling.

David Galich, '23 BA Psychology, is a psychologist. He enjoys reading, technology, RC's, music, and extreme sports.

Obituaries



Heidi Marie Burkley-Gomez, '01 BSBA Marketing, died Oct. 23, 2023. Burkley-Gomez was born June 19, 1968, in Lake View Terrace, California. She

was raised by her mother, both grandmothers, aunts, and uncles. In 1981, she moved to Las Vegas. She attended Spelman University in Atlanta and Georgia Tech before returning to Las Vegas to complete her degree at UNLV. She was inspired to reinvigorate UNLV's Black Student Union and became its president. In 2003, she met her husband, Michael Gomez, and the couple settled in Chicago.



Vicki Rosser, professor emerita, died April 30, 2024. In her time in the College of Education's Department of Educational Psychology, Leadership, and Higher Education, Rosser made significant contributions to the academy on faculty work-life balance, satisfaction, and morale. She was honored in 2014 with the university's Outstanding Graduate Faculty Award. Rosser also served as 2020-21 chair of UNLV's Faculty Senate and was a tireless advocate for the university's faculty and students.

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Terrence Michael Clauretie, retired professor emeritus and influential figure in the study of real estate, died June 3, 2023. In the 22 years he spent at

UNLV before retiring in 2012, Clauretie was a well-respected economist and was instrumental in founding the Lied Institute for Real Estate Studies (now the Lied Center for Real Estate). Clauretie earned his degree in economics from Stonehill College and his Ph.D. from Washington State University, where he met his wife, Patricia. He was honored by the American Real Estate Society with the Pioneer Award. He was also a long-time supporter of UNLV Athletics.



Charles William Zobell, who taught news writing in the Greenspun School of Journalism and Media Studies for more

than 20 years, died Sept. 11, 2024. Zobell was a former managing editor for the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. He was set to be inducted into the Nevada Newspaper Hall of Fame on Sept. 14. Zobell was born March 17, 1950, in Provo, Utah. He graduated from Brigham Young University in 1974 with a degree in communications and married Marilyn Earl in 1978. Zobell also previously worked as director of intergovernmental affairs for the City of Las Vegas and as a lobbyist at the Nevada Legislature.



Joyce Mack, a longtime philanthropist and UNLV Foundation trustee of 25 years, died Oct. 11, 2024, at age 99. Her and her family's influence on UNLV dates back to its inception. In the 1950s, her husband, Jerry, partnered with businessman E. Parry Thomas to acquire land for what became UNLV and its Maryland Parkway campus. The two families later joined forces and donated \$1 million to spark the development of the Thomas & Mack Center, home of the Runnin' Rebels.

Mack continued in her philanthropy after her husband's death, giving millions to the William S. Boyd School of Law to establish its legal clinic, moot courtroom, and a law professorship. The clinic has since provided free legal services related to poverty law, capital defense, and immigration policy, a topic she took special interest in.

At the legal clinic's 15th anniversary, Mack said, "There is an old saying: Education is the soul of society as it passes from one generation to another. I hope all of you enjoy the university, knowing it's the greatest gift we can give our children."

She also was a supporter of the arts and a funder of the Lenahan, Saltman, Thomas, and Mack Professorship in UNLV's College of Fine Arts. Outside UNLV, she contributed to numerous nonprofits and several Jewish congregations. Mack is survived by three daughters, Karen Mack Goldsmith, Barbara Mack, and Marilynn Mack, who serves on the UNLV Foundation Board of Trustees.

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In 1964, Jon Cobain, second from right, became the first graduate to receive a degree from UNLV, then named Southern Regional Division of the University of Nevada. Also pictured, from left, are the university's president, Charles Armstrong; Nevada Gov. Grant Sawyer; and William Carlson, dean of Nevada Southern.

LEADING THE CENTENNIAL CLASS

As student body president, **Jon Cobain** was the first graduate to cross the commencement stage in 1964 at what would become UNLV. Ambitious, talented, and hard-working, this original first-generation student embodied the spirit of a growing city and university.

Cobain died March 22, 2024, in Monarch Beach, California, after an extended battle with throat cancer. He was 81.

Born Sept. 4, 1942, he was raised in Las Vegas when the Strip was dotted with a few hotels and Maryland Parkway a regular flood zone. He graduated from Rancho High School, where he was known for getting his pilot's license along with his driver's license.

At UNLV, Cobain graduated with a business degree, top of his class of 29 students, known as the "Centennial Class" in honor of Nevada's 100th anniversary.

After graduation, Cobain earned an MBA at Northwestern and worked in product development for Beatrice Foods, Lear Siegler, and International Harvester. In 1979, he founded Las Vegas-based Fomento, Ltd., a mergers and acquisitions firm. He gave back to UNLV by funding scholarships for first-generation students and by supporting business, arts, radio, and library programs.

"As the first graduate of UNLV, I felt a responsibility to lead by example and to try to get other alumni and donors in the community to really support the institution," he once said. "I strongly believe that a well-educated populace is the very best solution to any problem we have or any potential problem we are confronted with."



"As the first graduate of UNLV, I felt a responsibility to lead by example and to try to get other alumni and donors in the community to really support the institution."

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