

# Moving at the speed of Gillemot

By Keiko Weil '87

Driving the herd or jetting cross country, it is nearly impossible to keep up with the Gillemots. In retirement, George Gillemot '00 (Honorary Doctor of Human Letters) is businessman turned cattle rancher on a sprawling 650-acre property in Franktown, Nevada in the heart of Washoe Valley. Married 61 years, George and his wife Dorothy have raised a family, achieved tremendous success in a variety of business ventures, and traveled extensively in their personal airplane piloted by George across the United States, Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean.

George and Dorothy's remarkable acts of generosity to and vision for their adopted state and community are matched in magnitude only by the big Nevada sky that envelops the Sunset Ranch they call home. Several years ago the couple made the decision to set aside an inspiring \$10 million donation, as part of their

*Keiko Weil '87 is the director of donor relations in the Division of Development and Alumni Relations*

charitable trust, to the University of Nevada, Reno Foundation to benefit the arts on campus. The gift, inspired by Dorothy's love of music and dance, is among the largest donations to the University.

President Milton Glick praised their commitment: "From its earliest days, the University's history is filled with generous benefactors who came to Nevada and made it their home. From John W. Mackay, pioneer miner on the Comstock Lode, to the Gillemots, the University would not thrive without the foresight of these remarkable individuals. I am humbled by the Gillemot's commitment to our future. When this gift is realized, it will have a lasting impact on the University's arts programs, and will elevate the

already impressive caliber of the arts in our region."

Both George and Dorothy grew up in Santa Monica, Calif. George received his bachelor's degree in engineering and master's in business administration from UCLA, where he attended before and after his three-year WWII service in the U.S. Navy. Some of his war-time duty, testing repaired aircraft for return to the carrier fleet, was at Barber's Point Naval Air Station Oahu, Hawaii, a place the couple still often visits. It was after the war and his honorable discharge that he returned to Santa Monica to look up his best friend from school, and found instead his friend's attractive sister, Dorothy. The couple married on Valentine's Day 1947, enjoyed a honeymoon snowed-in in the mountains, and began raising their family, a daughter and two sons.

In those early days after the war, George began working in construction but decided his future was with a small telephone company in Santa Monica. He worked his way up the ladder at Associated Telephone Company, which would later become General Telephone Company, eventually becoming the methods engineer designing outside plant telephone equipment. One of his early designs became an outstanding patent, one of more than 300 U.S. and foreign patents he eventually developed for products unique to the communications industry. Dorothy fashioned her own career in the telephone industry and later with the Howard Hughes Corporation as an executive secretary. George founded his own company in 1967, Communications Technology Corporation, which flourished with manufacturing plants and operations in the United States, Germany, Puerto Rico, Hong Kong and Formosa, the main island of Taiwan.

With an attractive offer for purchase, the company was sold in 1979 and George and Dorothy moved in 1983 to the home they

built at Lake Tahoe in Glenbrook. Not content to sit down to enjoy retirement, George immersed himself in the wine business in Napa and Sonoma, becoming a partner in the famous Schramsberg Champagne Winery. He purchased and then later sold the successful Alderbrook Winery in Healdsburg, Calif., the wines garnering numerous awards in the United States and Europe, along the way developing "Dorothy's Vineyard" Chardonnay, a Dry Creek Appellation Gold Medal winner.

The couple moved to Washoe Valley where they have woven a remarkable tale of local philanthropy. In addition to their support of the University, in 2005 George and Dorothy donated their Cessna T-210 Centurion to the Nevada Highway Patrol. In appreciation, Governor Kenny Guinn issued a state proclamation recognizing the generosity of the donation for the valuable aircraft that is used daily by the state. The couple's numerous donations to the Boys and Girls Club of Western Nevada include a highly prized pristine classic automobile.

Of their philanthropy to the University, George says, "Way back in 1983, when Dorothy and I first came to Nevada, there were only 190,000 people in Washoe County (920,000 in the entire state). The pace was much slower then, so we became acquainted with the people at the University. It was clear that the state population and the University were going to grow and now we know just how much. The last I heard, the state is now over two and one-half million, with student demand ever growing at the University. In those early days, the University opened their arms to us and really treated us as alumni. Being included as one-time students, we were compelled to grasp the friendship offered. So, working with two, now three presidents of the University, we made it a point that some of our gains should also be the gains of the University. By the year 2000, it was finalized that a substantial gift would be

For more information about planned giving opportunities at the University, contact Bob Eggleston or Lisa Riley at (775) 784-1352 or [beggleston@unr.edu](mailto:beggleston@unr.edu) or [lriley@unr.edu](mailto:lriley@unr.edu).




*TOP: Now retired, George and Dorothy Gillemot call their 650-acre cattle ranch in Washoe Valley home. RIGHT: The Gillemot's generosity not only toward the University, but the state of Nevada has been recognized by Governor Kenny Guinn.*



made by us to the University, making both the University and us very happy indeed.”

Not resting on their laurels, their recent activities include an elaborate celebration for George’s 80th birthday in 2005, keeping

up with their family, and flying around the country—moving at full speed. At home on their ranch, George and Dorothy could sit and enjoy the beautiful view of expansive country at the base of the Sierra Nevada

Mountains. They long ago earned the right of contentment. Always on the move and with an abundance of active interests, they wouldn’t be satisfied to sit for long. There is much still to do. 

# Elias Ghanem, M.D.

*Laying stepping stones for the next generation*

By Mark N. Levine

A wise person once observed that “the measure of a man is not the number of his servants but in the number of people whom he serves.”

That observation reflects the life and accomplishments of Dr. Elias Ghanem, a Lebanese immigrant who moved effortlessly among the diverse worlds of medicine, politics and boxing, yet never forgot his humble roots.

Although Dr. Ghanem passed away in Aug. 2001, his legacy continues to live on through numerous charitable endeavors including the Dr. Elias Ghanem Medical Scholarship Fund, which supports medical students at the University of Nevada School of Medicine. The Ghanem scholarship is the only award offered at the School of Medicine that provides full financial backing including tuition, fees, books and a housing stipend for all four years of study.

“Elias came from humble beginnings and loved the opportunity to give a great, hard working student the opportunity to become something in their life to help others,” says Jody Ghanem, Dr. Ghanem’s widow. “It’s a great honor to see this medical scholarship go to young people who love medicine as much as he did.”

*Mark N. Levine is senior director of health sciences communication for the School of Medicine*

“Elias was passionate about helping people whether they had money or no money, insurance or no insurance. If someone needed help he was there for them.

Elias helped nurses

who worked for him continue their medical education and training.”

The story of Dr. Ghanem and Jody is comprised of parts of War and Peace, Cinderella, Rocky and Love Story. Dr. Ghanem was born in 1939 to a poor Lebanese Catholic family in Haifa, Israel. His childhood was rooted in continuous conflict. As a 7-year-old having grown up witnessing death and destruction first-hand, Ghanem vowed to become a doctor so he could help people.

Ghanem had a passion for politics and

loved American history. He once observed, “As a student, I just could not get over my love for this country and all that it provided. I was the perfect American cheerleader.”

In 1963 he came to the United States with \$90 in his pocket and a dream. He would go on to earn a scholarship to Duke University, but the path would not be easy. He often slept in his car, unable to afford both a home and a vehicle. He opted for a car so he could go on dates.

Dr. Ghanem was highly regarded for his diagnostic skills as well as his charm and generosity. At one point in his medical career he was dubbed “the physician to the stars.” His patients included Elvis Presley, Liberace, Michael Jackson and President Clinton’s mother, Virginia Kelley. However, he was much more than that. He was a creative thinker, who started the first 24-hour medical clinic in Las Vegas despite being told by colleagues and others the concept was doomed to fail. He understood that as Las Vegas was becoming a 24/7 town people would need medical care on their schedule. “When Elias was determined to do something he did it and worked hard to accomplish it,” says Jody.

He opened his own medical clinic in 1977 behind the Las Vegas Hilton, where he became the hotel doctor. He is credited by many with changing how medical care is provided in Las Vegas by launching innovative, comprehensive, cost-containment programs. “Elias was a visionary who helped change the face of medicine in Las Vegas,” notes Jody.

Despite the fact that many Las Vegas luminaries called him their doctor, Dr. Ghanem never forgot his own humble beginnings. During the six year strike at Las Vegas’ Frontier Hotel, Ghanem treated every worker free of charge and delivered more than 100 babies for the striking workers. In order to bring attention to their cause, the striking workers organized a solidarity march from Las Vegas to Los Angeles to raise public attention to their issues. Hundreds of cooks, maids and food servers set out on the trek. Dr. Ghanem made certain that medical care vans equipped with first



Jody Ghanem

Photo by Edgar Antonio Nunez

aid supplies and water accompanied the striking workers on their trip.

Dr. Ghanem was different than most other physicians of his time. He believed he was not only treating the patient, but the entire family. If someone were sick, whether husband or wife, he checked up on each of them. Jody remembers the many evening telephone calls. “Elias would always call the family to ensure both the patient and family were OK,” she recalls.

Dr. Ghanem served on the Nevada Athletic Commission. During his 14-year tenure Las Vegas hosted dozens of major championship fights. He was instrumental in handing down discipline to boxer Mike Tyson after the boxer bit Evander Holyfield’s ear. Tyson was slapped with a \$3 million fine and his license was revoked for 15 months. Many of the improvements in boxing and the stature enjoyed by the Nevada Athletic Commission are credited to Dr. Ghanem’s leadership and stewardship. He donated the check he received for serving on the commission to Opportunity Village, a Las Vegas-based charity that serves people with intellectual disabilities, believing that serving the commission was an honor, not something he needed to be reimbursed for.

Dr. Elias Ghanem’s life is testament to the fact that the greatest thing any generation can do is to lay stepping stones for the next generation.

To learn more about helping School of Medicine students, please contact Stefanie Scoppettone at (775) 682-9143 or [scops@unr.edu](mailto:scops@unr.edu).

# Marie Crowley Foundation

*funds geography student research*

A substantial gift from the Marie Crowley Foundation of Reno has established an endowment to support undergraduate and graduate students in the Department of Geography. Endowment earnings will be used for student expenses associated with research projects and geography conference participation.

The geography department resides in the Mackay School of Earth Sciences and Engineering and offers small class sizes, award-winning faculty and excellent research opportunities—now greatly enhanced by the generosity of the Marie Crowley Foundation.

“The Department of Geography owes a debt of gratitude to the Marie Crowley Foundation, for many generous contributions donated through the ongoing support of Mary Ann Arnold,” said Scott Mensing, department chair.

“Their recent gift is particularly



Photo by Theresa Danna-Douglas

*Graduate students in the Department of Geography are able to conduct tree research with the support of the Marie Crowley Foundation of Reno.*

important in providing support for undergraduate and graduate student research as the department expanded its programs by adding a Ph.D. program last fall. In 2007 we supported more than 40 students in attending both our regional and

national conference. The current gift will endow a fund that allows us to continue this level of support in the future. Providing students research opportunities is key to recruitment and retention of our best and brightest students. This gift will ensure that geography students are guaranteed opportunities to present their work at professional conferences around the country,” Mensing said.

The Marie Crowley Foundation has supported the University of Nevada, Reno and its geography programs for more than a decade, contributing to the national prominence of the program and its outstanding faculty and students. In addition to the recently created student research endowment, the Foundation has provided substantial gifts for student lab equipment, a guest lecture series, faculty research and numerous student scholarships for both geography and humanities students.

For more information on supporting students in the College of Science, please contact Char Sutton at (775) 682-8791 or email [csutton@unr.edu](mailto:csutton@unr.edu).

# Robert and Barbara Thimot

*support Nevada through scholarships*

Robert and Barbara Thimot realized their ongoing commitment to community and education first in their original home, Boston, and now in their adopted home, Reno. In 1997, the Thimots created a scholarship to support the children of active or retired members of the Reno Police Department, Reno Fire Department, Washoe County Sheriff’s Department, or University Police Department attending the University of Nevada, Reno.

“Bob and I wanted to express our appreciation to the people who provide our basic protection,” Barbara says.

In 2005, the couple established their second endowed scholarship at Nevada for the College of Education Dean’s Future Scholars Program, which is designed to help young

people attend college and become teachers.

Most recently, the Thimots created an additional scholarship endowment directed specifically to engineering students, which they funded through the IRA charitable rollover provision available in 2007. The criteria for the preferences of this scholarship illustrate the Thimots’ love of country, higher education in all its forms and the importance of engineering education.

“We both believe that the best way to provide for and improve the future is to see



Photo by John Riles

*Barbara and Robert Thimot stand in front of the Honor Court pillar where their names were engraved in 2002.*

that opportunities in education are available to as many deserving young people as possible,” Bob said.

To learn more about the planned giving, please contact the Foundation’s Planned Giving Office at (775) 784-1352 or [plannedgiving@unr.edu](mailto:plannedgiving@unr.edu); or visit <http://giving.unr.edu/planning.aspx>.