University named sponsor in National Merit Scholarship Program

The University of Nevada, Reno was officially notified of its approval for sponsorship status by the National Merit Scholarship Corporation this spring. Scholarships awarded through National Merit programs are regarded as some of the highest academic honors attainable by U.S. high school students. All National Merit Scholarship Finalists have academic test scores in the top 1.5 percent in the nation.

The University’s student body currently includes 18 National Merit Scholars, the largest number ever enrolled at Nevada. The University plans to welcome about 10 more National Merit Scholarship Finalists from Nevada this fall. The National Merit Scholarship Corporation requires each sponsoring school to award at least three National Merit Scholarships each year.

“Really bright students lift the level of the educational experience for everyone,” said University President Milton Glick. “As you achieve a critical mass of these students, teachers begin to teach differently. They have higher expectations and students respond accordingly.”

When Glick joined Nevada in 2006, he issued a challenge to recruit more National Merit Scholars. Following a two-year effort to recruit these highly qualified and academically well-prepared students, Nevada now joins the sponsor schools included as part of recruitment materials sent to students across the country who are contending for National Merit Scholarships. Currently, nearly 300 corporations, company foundations and businesses and about 200 colleges and universities provide National Merit Scholarships.

This spring, the University held its first-ever “Nevada Scholars Signing Days” at area high schools—reminiscent of top high school athletes’ “signing days”—to recognize National Merit Scholarship Finalists and Presidential Scholars and celebrate their choice to attend the University.

Signing Day events were held at Davidson Academy of Nevada, Reno High School, Edward C. Reed High School and Damonte Ranch High School.

One of the National Merit Scholarship Finalists, Christopher Salls of Reed High School, said he chose Nevada because “it has a great math program and some really good physics too. Best of all, it’s close to home.”

It probably didn’t hurt that Salls’ parents, Mitchell and Jennifer, are also Nevada alumni.

For more information, visit the National Merit Scholarship Program Web site at www.nationalmerit.org or the University’s Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships Web site at www.finaid.unr.edu.

—Natalie Savidge ’04
Spring Commencement—a celebration of 1,800-plus graduates

The University’s 2009 Spring Commencement, May 15-16, celebrated the accomplishments of more than 1,800 candidates for bachelor’s and advanced degrees at Nevada.

The University awarded 1,402 bachelor’s degree candidates and 441 advanced degree candidates (for the master’s and doctoral degrees, as well as the education specialist certificate) during its 119th commencement exercises on the University Quad.

The 2009 Herz Gold Medalist, Ashish Francis ’09 (biochemistry), will attend the University of Nevada School of Medicine. The medal, the University’s oldest and most prestigious student award, has been presented since 1910 to the graduating senior with the highest grade-point average.

During this year’s undergraduate degree ceremony, 17 teachers representing Nevada’s school districts received the President’s Medal on behalf of all teachers, along with Washoe County School District Superintendent Paul Dugan and Wilton Herz of the Herz Gold Medal family. The medallion, cast in Nevada-mined silver, honors individuals who have contributed substantially to the advancement of the campus. Nevada introduced the President’s Medal, designed by emeritus art professor Jim McCormick, at the inauguration of President Joseph Crowley in 1979.

This year also marked the Golden Reunion for the Class of 1959. More than 45 graduates celebrated the 50 years since their undergraduate commencement. Included in this year’s Golden reunion class were Jim Santini, a former U.S. congressman from Nevada, and Richard Bryan, former Nevada attorney general, governor and state and U.S. senator.

—Natalie Savidge ’04

David Tomac Memorial BBQ

September 11 means different things to different people. September 11 was the birth of our friend, David Tomac, who met with an untimely death when he was killed as the result of the Maaco Auto Painting and Body Works explosion 10 years ago. For those of you who knew David, you probably knew him as a great son and brother, a loyal friend and a fun-time guy who was a Grateful Dead fan, bartender and a hard worker.

If you were one of the many people who was touched by David and you would like to share the good times, please come join family and friends at the 10th Annual and final David Tomac Memorial BBQ on Saturday, Sept. 12 at the Sigma Nu Fraternity, 1075 Ralston, at 4 p.m. Proceeds from this event go to scholarships at the University of Nevada, Reno David Tomac Endowed Scholarship. Just like David would like it, this is a family event with games for kids, a live auction and a wonderful dinner that includes beverages and dessert. The cost is $40 per person, $75 per couple, children 10 and under free.

To RSVP, contact the organizing committee: Chairman Buzz Harris ’90, Pat Martinez ’95, Dario Risson ’89, Kelly Bland ’91, Stacey Risson Tiley, Jeff Tomac ’93 MA, Christi Nachtsheim Gough ’87, Mary Games ’83, Mike Steedman ’86 and Arjun Dhingra ’02 by email to jptwrestle@charter.net or call (775) 690-3573.
Straw-bale house survives violent shaking at earthquake lab

In 2006, Darcey Donovan ’06M.S. finished her thesis presentation for her master’s degree in civil engineering at the University of Nevada, Reno and two hours later was on a plane to Pakistan to build straw-bale houses. This past March she built another straw-bale house, just as she has done in Pakistan, but this time in the University’s world-renowned Large Structures Laboratory with its 82-ton-force shake tables.

The full-scale, 14-by-14-foot house, complete with gravel foundation and clay plaster walls, was the subject of seismic experiments to see how it would fare in large earthquakes. Donovan, a practicing engineer since 1986, was inspired to design and build the structures after hearing about the devastating, magnitude 7.6 Kashmir earthquake in 2005 that killed 75,000 people and left 3 million people homeless or living in tents.

“Our goal is to get the largest number of poor people into earthquake-safe homes,” said the Truckee, Calif., resident who earned a master of science in civil engineering from the University in 2006. “We want to make it as affordable as possible so they build a safe home. We want to save lives.”

University scientists in the lab carefully and painstakingly placed the simple house, with only its hay bales and some fishnet for structural support, atop one of the four shake tables. The lab technicians dialed up the pressure and subjected it to twice the acceleration and shaking as recorded at the 1994 Northridge, Calif. Earthquake—at 6.7 magnitude deemed one of the largest, measured ground accelerations in the world. After a series of seven increasingly forceful tests, in the final powerful simulation the house shook and swayed violently, cracked at the seams and sent out a small cloud of dust and straw … and remained standing.

“We’re very pleased with the results,” said Donovan, founder/CEO of the nonprofit Pakistan Straw Bale and Appropriate Building organization. “The house performed exceptionally well and survived 0.82g (0.82 times the acceleration of gravity). The Geological Survey of Pakistan estimates the 2005 Kashmir earthquake to have had peak-ground accelerations in the range of 0.3 to 0.6g.

Donovan’s straw-bale homes in Pakistan’s northwest provinces are made of materials readily available in the region and do not require skilled labor for construction.

The energy-efficient buildings are half the cost of conventional earthquake-safe construction. The Pakistan group also trains local residents to build the homes.

—Mike Wolterbeek ’02

More Information: The non-profit PAKSBAB relies on donations and grants to continue its work. For details, visit www.paksbab.org.
Half of Davidson Academy graduating class to continue studies at University

The Davidson Academy of Nevada—a free, public school for profoundly gifted young students on the University of Nevada, Reno campus—celebrated its first graduating class of eight students May 5 at the Jot Travis Building. Four of the high school-level graduates at Davidson, which this year has a student body ranging in age from 9 to 17, will attend Nevada for their undergraduate studies.

Graduates Andrew George, Cody Nolan, Kestrel Schmidt and Andy Wei will continue their academic careers at Nevada. Of the eight graduates, six have attended the academy since its opening in 2006.

“I’m really excited to graduate and move on to the University of Nevada full time, but I’ll miss the Davidson Academy a lot,” said Wei, also a National Merit Scholarship Finalist. “I’ve had a great time at the academy and made friends that I know I’ll have for the rest of my life.”

One of the first public schools of its kind in the nation, the academy opened with a class of 35 students. Approximately half of the current 69 students are from northern Nevada and the others moved with their families to Reno to attend the academy. Officials have accepted 20 new students for the 2009-10 school year.

“A lot of the newer, younger faculty really like the idea of studying all the intersections of race, class and gender, and the constructions of identity. It’s very creative work.”

“We offer faculty a place to make some very important connections, and the students are very happy to see minor [program] areas come under a larger umbrella so they have a chance to develop,” Stewart said.

“Majors have been growing in women’s studies, and the number of minors in ethnic studies is quite large,” Stewart said. “The new program will expand upon the relationships between those areas.

“We would like to expand the peace studies component to include classes on conflict and dispute mediation,” she said. “That would be very helpful in today’s environment.”

For more about the Gender, Race and Identity program, visit http://www.unr.edu/cla/womenstudies.

—Skyler Dillon
Sports medicine program to expand with building purchase

A generous donation has made it possible for the University of Nevada, Reno to acquire the Reno Orthopaedic Clinic sports medicine building, located at the south end of the Mackay Stadium complex on campus. The purchase positions the University to develop an expanded and enhanced sports medicine program.

The bargain purchase price for the building, owned by University Investors, was $737,500. Based on an appraisal that valued the facility at $2.9 million, University Investors’ donation to the University is valued at $2.1 million.

The 8,700-square-foot building opened in 1992, when seven of the clinic’s doctors formed University Investors and paved the way for construction of the facility, which is leased to the ROC. Over the years, student-athletes have been among the patients receiving medical and orthopedic care in the building. The ROC physicians also taught clinics and served as team physicians for Wolf Pack games.

“The Reno Orthopaedic Clinic physicians have generously contributed their time and expertise and supported a myriad of University programs,” Dan Klaich, chancellor of the Nevada System of Higher Education, said. “Not only were they generous, they were innovative. They developed a model program that has served the community and countless student-athletes, and it now provides the basis for the next iteration of sports medicine at the University.”

—Jane Tors ’82

Individuals involved in securing the agreement include: Dan Klaich ’72, chancellor, Nevada System of Higher Education; Drs. James Greenwald, Richard Blakey and Lex Simpson with Reno Orthopaedic Clinic/University Investors; Deane Albright ’71, certified public accountant for Reno Orthopaedic Clinic/University Investors; and Milton Glick, University president.

University of Nevada, Reno Performing Arts Series | 2009-10

The Performing Arts Series brings some of the world’s finest performers to the University’s Nightingale Concert Hall. Season Ticket discounts available — call (775) 784-4ART.

Pablo Ziegler Trio
Thursday, September 17

Carducci String Quartet
Thursday, October 22

Esperanza Spalding
Wednesday, November 4

Spanish Brass
Thursday, February 4

Ön Ensemble
Thursday, March 4

www.unr.edu/pas
Athletic Academic Center achieves LEED

The Marguerite Wattis Petersen Athletic Academic Center is the first University building to receive Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Silver certification by the U.S. Green Building Council. The center is one of just three LEED-certified projects in Reno.

“The University’s intention is to incorporate sustainable design elements in all construction projects,” said Jim Mickey ’85AA, WorthGroup’s principal architect for the project. “It is a philosophy that we share and we are proud of the accomplishments of this project.”

The LEED is a rating system that is the national standard for design, construction and operation of high-performance, ‘green’ buildings. As an example of green design, natural daylight is the primary light source in 75 percent of the Petersen Center.

“Each building we open sets a legacy for the future,” University President Milt Glick said. “This center signals our commitment to student success as well as to the environment. Green building practices are important for many reasons, and our students have told us these legacy practices are particularly meaningful to them.”

The $6.6 million, privately funded facility features tutorial rooms for Nevada student-athletes’ private and group study, a 38-workstation computer lab and 2,000-square-foot study center. Its exterior design significantly contributes to improved handicapped accessibility in and around the athletic complex.

The Petersen Center is part of the E.L. Cord Foundation Athletic and Academic Performance Complex, which includes the Roger B. Primm Sports Medicine and Strength Center. WorthGroup Architects designed the facility and the PENTA Building Group led its construction. The University has a second LEED-registered building, a two-story cabin at the 4-H Camp in Stateline.

—Chad Hartley ’03

Silver & Blue Society

Bound by their shared commitment to the University of Nevada, Reno, members of the Silver & Blue Society assist the institution in addressing a broad range of needs—including future needs that often cannot be anticipated at the time gifts are made.

To recognize these individuals, the Silver & Blue Society was formed to honor those who give an annual unrestricted gift of $1,874 or more. Members of the Silver & Blue Society provide for scholarships, new academic programs, innovative learning opportunities, faculty recruitment and development, and enhancements to campus, among a host of other areas.

The Silver & Blue Society owes its name to a time when a circle of dedicated men and women helped create the University of Nevada. Established as a land grant institution in 1874, the school depended in part on the vision and support provided by advocates. Many of them knew the value of gifts beyond the government programs that were meant to create a thriving economy for a new western state.

The generosity of individuals makes all the difference in the future of Nevada. Unrestricted funding is a critical resource that supports the University’s most pressing needs.

To learn more about the Silver & Blue Society contact Crystal Parrish at (775) 784-1352 or cparrish@unr.edu.