“One of the most wonderful jobs in the world is to take young minds and be part of helping them grow ...”
Milton D. Glick loved higher education. “I went to college at 18 and never left,” he joked to a television interviewer just nine months after he began his first term as the 15th president of the University of Nevada, Reno in August 2006.

In his distinctive, slightly raspy voice, Milt—the name by which most of us at Nevada knew the amiable, down-to-earth man who wore a trademark Panama hat—told Bob Fisher on KRXI FOX11 that he’d planned to go into his father’s jewelry business, but his father told him that he could do better, and thus his journey deep into the world of higher education began.

Growing up in Rock Island, Ill., along the Illinois-Iowa border, he graduated with a bachelor’s degree in chemistry from Augustana College in Rock Island in 1959, then earned his doctorate in chemistry from the University of Wisconsin in Madison, Wis., in 1965. Following two years of post-doctoral studies at Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y., Milt joined the chemistry faculty at Wayne State University in Detroit. He remained at Wayne State for 17 years, serving as a leader in the Faculty Senate, and as chair of the Department of Chemistry.

Milt’s first senior administrative position was dean of the College of Arts and Science at the University of Missouri in Columbia, Mo., from 1983-88. He then spent three years, 1988-91, as provost at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa, serving as interim president of Iowa State for the final eight months. Before coming to Nevada, Milt served 15 years as executive vice president and provost at Arizona State University in Tempe, Ariz.

It didn’t take much for Fisher to draw Milt out on his love of his new job and his devotion to students and faculty. Milt said: “One of the most wonderful jobs in the world is to take young minds and be part of helping them grow … to be able to teach things that you think are important. I always tell people that being a dean or a provost is the true liberal arts education because you are surrounded by really smart people who are really committed to helping improve the world. There are a lot of people at the University who are a lot smarter than I am.”

Modest as always, Milt didn’t fool anyone. Reno Gazette-Journal executive editor Beryl Love wrote that when Milt walked in, “his intellect could suck the oxygen out of the room.”

Indeed, in the initial phase of his academic career, Milt was a noted researcher in the field of X-ray crystallography. His work was funded for 15 consecutive years by the National Science Foundation, and he published 99 research articles during this time.

Despite Milt’s superior academic credentials and imposing intellect, Love noted: “He was able to relate to those of us with lesser IQs. He was a master with words, a skill that came not from oratorical gimmicks, but from the fact he spoke from the heart.”

No matter the situation, no matter the people in the room, he was always at home, and he helped others feel at ease.

Eli Reilly, ASUN president from 2008-10, summed up Milt’s impact on the students well during an interview in 2010: “I don’t know how to compliment Milt Glick more than to say that he’s always, truly been the friend of every student we’ve ever had on campus. He understands better than anyone I’ve ever met, that this University is the connective tissue to a better life.”

Students loved him, not just for his words, but for his listening. Ditto faculty and staff.

His calm, understated words and actions were always as cool and composed, fluid and graceful, as two waterfowl landing on a lake.

He could quote the noted futurist Richard Florida and the “Rise of the Creative Class” as readily as he could quote the actor Richard Benjamin from the film, “Goodbye, Columbus.” He could mix words and ideas in ways that remained memorable long after he spoke.

When asked once why he thought it was a good idea to recruit National Merit Scholars to campus and why special attention should be paid to such “smart” kids, Milt smiled and said, “We pay a lot of special attention to 6-foot-9 kids with soft hands and soft touch … why shouldn’t we pay equally special attention to talented kids whose hands were made by Stradivarius?”

James Dean Leavitt, former Board of Regents chair, said of Milt: “He had a beautiful mind and a gigantic heart. No one loved life or UNR more than Milt.”

Nevada athletic director Cary Groth always remembered the first President’s Council she ever attended in Phillips Conference Room on the second floor of Clark Administration, with President Milt Glick in charge.

The first thing the chief executive officer of the state of Nevada’s oldest and most prestigious institution of higher learning did was … not sit at the head of the table.

“Milt always chose to sit in the middle of the table,” Groth said. “That, I think, is a message in and of itself.”

The Glick presidency was never an arm’s-length type of presidency. During his Commencement addresses, the theme might change, but he was adamant about one thing: acknowledgement of teachers and families had
to be made. “You’ve got to thank the teachers and you’ve got to hug the families,” he said once. “Without either one, what else is there in the world?”

During his five-year tenure as president, Milt led the campus to historic institutional and reputational milestones in areas ranging from student success to campus expansion to research capacity. Under his direction, the University increased its number of National Merit Scholars from a handful to 38 during the 2010-11 academic year—a record for the state of Nevada. For these efforts, the University was named a prestigious National Merit Scholarship Sponsor School.

In 2010-11, the University set all-time records for enrollment and graduation. In addition, freshman retention rates reached 80 percent, also an institutional record. In fall 2010, for the first time in the University’s history, the institution was named a Tier I school in U.S. News & World Report’s annual rankings.

Milt stressed the value of creating a “sticky campus”—a dynamic campus setting where both the student body and the community are engaged and excited—and with the opening of key buildings such as the Joe Crowley Student Union, Mathewson-IGT Knowledge Center, the Center for Molecular Medicine and the Davidson Mathematics and Science Building, he was able to markedly strengthen the connection between the campus and the community it serves.

Said Nevada System of Higher Education Chancellor Dan Klaich: “Milt was an

outstanding leader and has left an indelible mark on the University of Nevada, Reno and the state. Milt had a wonderful sense of humor and an engaging, enthusiastic style. He poured his energy and his love of life and education into the University and our state, and that commitment should long be a source of pride and gratitude for all Nevadans.”

Added U.S. Sen. Harry Reid: “(Dr. Glick) was a breath of fresh air on campus with his trademark hat and great sense of humor. He was loved by faculty and students alike. Milt fostered a culture of excellence at the University by increasing graduation rates, growing the school’s capacity as a research university and building a more diverse student body by opening the doors to a college education for more Nevada students. Dr. Glick was a renowned scientist, teacher and leader, and Nevada will miss him dearly.”

Milt passed away in Reno on April 16, 2011. He was 73. He leaves his beloved wife, Peggy; sons David (Jennifer) and Sandy (Laura); and grandchildren, Toby, Elijah and Nina. Of all the accomplishments in his life, Milt was most proud of his family. N

—By John Trent ’85/’87, ’00M.A. and Melanie Robbins ’06M.A.

Dr. Glick’s family requests that donations be made to the Dr. Milton D. Glick Memorial, University of Nevada, Reno Foundation, Mail Stop 0162, Reno, NV 89557. Condolences to the family may be mailed to this address, or to post remembrances and condolences, visit: www.unr.edu/in-memoriam/