I graduated from the University of Nevada, Reno in 1977 with a degree in social services corrections. The program, which no longer exists at Nevada, focused on social services and governmental welfare programs, including corrections and prisons. My family owned Ross Burke and Knobel Mortuary, but, upon graduation, I was not interested in getting involved in the mortuary business. My mother suggested I pursue estate law and I found that field would allow me to help people while being able to practice professionally in the Reno community.

My community ties and those made with people at Nevada helped propel me into the law profession. I am not sure I would have attended law school without the influences of professors, friends and professionals I met at or through this University. In fact, my business law class at Nevada was a pinnacle in turning me to go to law school. I met professionals, mainly attorneys, who were either my professors or who offered internships. Those same people presented opportunities for me to return to Reno to practice law, and I still see them today.

Through my profession I have become involved as a trustee for various foundations and charitable trusts within the community. These opportunities put me in a position where I can help provide grants to local charities, including the University of Nevada, Reno, and this has been very fulfilling work for me. I commend the local charities and the University for how they use these funds to better our community and, especially, this wonderful institution. When I attended more than 30 years ago, I never dreamed that Nevada would become the type of school it is today.

I am amazed by the campus growth and technological advancements that, to me, put Nevada ahead of many other schools. The Mathewson-IGT Knowledge Center is a fantastic place to learn and for students to take advantage of state-of-the-art technology. I especially appreciate seeing the tremendous advancements in video and digital resources on our campus. Every student I’ve talked with has a special place at the Knowledge Center where they get cozy to study—they’ve found a home there.

What I’ve learned is that hard work allows you to get to where you want to go and that education is one of the greatest opportunities we have in this country. I would advise students to be very involved with their community and school. Take advantage of every educational opportunity because education is an asset that can never be taken away once achieved. Work hard, put in your time and have some fun. If you have a passion or dream, follow through with it. If you are interested in a law career, learn to be a good writer—solid writing skills are the foundation for law school. Also, you must have an open mind to be able to resolve problems and analyze issues.

To me, education is a key to success in life and I keep emphasizing that to my sons, John, a freshman at the University of Colorado at Boulder, and Clark, a freshman at Reno High School. My parents did not have college degrees, and I do not want to discount entrepreneurial spirits like them who do well in this country. However, education helps get your foot in the door and there is no doubt you can go a long way with it.

From a conversation in November with Crystal Parrish, director of foundation operations. Knobel, the 2011 University of Nevada, Reno Foundation board chair, graduated from Nevada in 1977 with a degree in social services corrections. He received his law degree from McGeorge School of Law in 1982, and his master’s in tax law from the University of Miami in 1988. He is a partner in the Reno law firm Avansino, Melarkey, Knobel, Mulligan & McKenzie, where he specializes in estate planning, business and corporate law, federal and tax law, and charitable planning. In addition to his involvement with many community charities and organizations, Knobel is a trustee of the Thelma B. and Thomas P. Hart Foundation and the Jack Van Sickle Foundation. Through his stewardship, these foundations and other clients have supported numerous programs on campus, including Nevada Athletics, the Davidson Mathematics and Science Center, the Fleischmann Planetarium and Science Center, the Latino Research Center, the Mathewson-IGT Knowledge Center, the William N. Pennington Health Sciences Building, the E.L. Cord Foundation Academic and Athletic Performance Complex, and The Pride of the Sierra Marching Band, to name a few. He is married to Mary K. Knobel, a 1988 journalism graduate. They have two sons, John and Clark, who enjoy attending Wolf Pack basketball and football games.