Phil and Jennifer Satre ’80M.Ed. remember what it’s like to need help paying for college. Both hail from small, rural California towns, with families who didn’t have the means to pay for a university education.

They both graduated from Stanford University in 1971, Phil with the help of a football scholarship—he played middle linebacker—while Jennifer relied on an academic scholarship and student loans. They both went on to experience tremendous personal and professional success, but the college sweethearts have never forgotten the significance of the financial support that made their education possible. Through the years they have gone to great lengths to repay that kindness—with interest.

The Satres have been longtime supporters of the University of Nevada, Reno, where Jennifer received her master’s degree in education in 1980. Their philanthropy has reached almost every corner of campus, including the School of the Arts and the College of Business. Their latest gift, $5 million from the Satre Family Fund at the Community Foundation of Western Nevada, benefits the University of Nevada School of Medicine, the University of Nevada, Reno College of Education and Wolf Pack Athletics. Through this gift, the Satres endeavor to address some of the most pressing issues in the state, including health care and education.

Of the $5 million, $3 million will help with translational research efforts at the University of Nevada School of Medicine, $1.6 million will assist the College of Education with community outreach programs and $400,000 will benefit Wolf Pack Athletics.

A veteran teacher, Jennifer grew up in Madera, Calif., graduated from Stanford and received her teaching credential from UC...
Berkeley. Phil is from Martinez, Calif., graduated from Stanford and earned a law degree from UC Davis.

After moving to Reno in 1975, the Satres immersed themselves in their adopted hometown. Their four children—Malena, Allison, Jessica and Peter—were born here and attended local schools. Jennifer was a teacher at Peavine Elementary School. Phil worked at a local law firm before joining Harrah’s Entertainment, Inc. in 1980, where he was chairman and CEO until his retirement in 2005.

Proud of her status as a Nevada alumna, Jennifer served three terms on the University of Nevada, Reno Foundation Board of Trustees from 2001 – 2006, was board chair in 2006, and became a trustee emerita in 2007. She was named University of Nevada Alumni Association Alumna of the Year in 2006.

Jennifer is a trustee and immediate past chair of the Community Foundation of Western Nevada, serves on the Reno and Las Vegas communities. Today, he is chairman of the board of directors for International Game Technology and NV Energy, and serves on the Nordstrom, Inc., board of directors.

Nevada Silver & Blue magazine sat down with the Satres at Phil’s Reno office to discuss life in northern Nevada, the future of the state and the importance of giving back to your community.

Q: Phil and Jennifer, you have made philanthropy a core part of your life and philosophy. What motivates your generosity?

Jennifer: I grew up watching my family give of their time and talent to the community. I remember my dad serving on a few municipal boards. My mother was very involved in philanthropic organizations, including the hospital fundraising board. Neither one of our families had great wealth, so they never made large monetary gifts, but both families certainly

Phil has served on the board of trustees at Stanford, where the couple is also involved in various boards and fundraising committees. In 1989, Phil was named a Distinguished Nevada by the Nevada System of Higher Education Board of Regents. In 1995, he was selected best chief executive in the casino and hotel industries by The Wall Street Journal. The Philip G. Satre Chair in Gaming Studies at the University of Nevada, Reno was established in Phil’s honor in 2005, when he retired from Harrah’s. Monetary gifts were made by the company, its executives and members of the Reno and Las Vegas communities. Today, he is chairman of the board of directors for International Game Technology and NV Energy, and serves on the Nordstrom, Inc., board of directors.

“Education is the key to a strong community and a vibrant state—economically, socially, culturally, in all aspects of life.”

—Jennifer Satre ’80
believed in giving back to your community in one form or another.

Phil: My mother was very involved with my school and volunteering, and my dad was in public service because he worked for the City of Martinez. He was also involved in the Rotary Club and the Sons of Norway.

Jennifer and I both received scholarships as undergrads. Stanford would have been very inaccessible for me, and I think for Jennifer, without scholarships. I’ve always been grateful.

I’ve also been very influenced by the fact that the companies I’ve been associated with—whether it’s Harrah’s, IGT or NV Energy—also recognize the importance of supporting higher education. Sometimes it goes both ways: An executive makes a gift and the company follows his or her lead by also contributing to that organization; or, an executive is inspired to make a gift because the company has invested in a particular cause. Even though it wasn’t our gift, I’m very proud of the named chair in gaming studies. It’s important to me. It’s how I made my livelihood. Those things are influential when you’re making decisions on your own personal philanthropy.

Other motivating factors in our giving include the confidence we have in the leadership at the institution. Jennifer and I have known Dan Klaich (Nevada System of Higher Education chancellor) for 40 years. When you’re making an investment in the future of the University, the leadership of the University is important. The future of the University is still a concern of ours, and that’s why we’re making the gift. But we know Dan Klaich as chancellor will provide the kind of leadership that the Nevada System of Higher Education needs.

Q: Your latest gift encompasses the School of Medicine, the College of Education and Wolf Pack Athletics. What factors led you to direct your gift to these three distinct areas?

Phil: When the University was being cut back in terms of state funding, and (late University President) Milt Glick, Jennifer and I started visiting, we asked Milt where the University needed help the most, so we could look at whether our interests coalesced. Milt named the areas that are included in our most recent gift, and after his passing, President Marc Johnson worked with us. Jennifer had a great influence on designing the education portion.

Q: Jennifer, as a veteran teacher, you have been involved with Nevada’s youth and an active advocate for education. What is your greatest hope for your gift to the College of Education?

Jennifer: Because of my background, I’m always very interested in education. When I spoke with the new College of Education dean, Christine Cheney, she told me about preliminary discussions with the school district about working in partnership with the University on best practices for teacher training and student learning. Long-term, we want the result to be that K-12 education in our community would have the advantage of the best minds at the University is an important catalyst to the recovery of our state’s economy and the key to its long-term stability.” —Phil Satre
University and the best practices for any child. It’s easy to say, but we truly do believe that education is the key to a strong community and a vibrant state—economically, socially, culturally, in all aspects of life. Without a strong, effective educational system that is accessible to all students, our future is much more precarious.

Q: How does your gift to the School of Medicine endeavor to improve medical care in Nevada?

Phil: We were influenced by the need to make the medical school bigger and stronger. We were very impressed by (School of Medicine) Dean Thomas Schwenk, and the opportunity to see what his plans were on a statewide basis. The medical school serves both the north and the south, and it’s very important to me that he brought a broad view to that role. We desperately need more doctors in this state, and we need to be competitive in training doctors who can serve the unique requirements of Nevadans.

Jennifer: The gift is going to allow the School of Medicine to have that one final piece: They have the teaching, they have the practice, and this will really help the clinical research. The school will have the ability to retain the best researchers and students.

Q: Phil, as chairman of the board of directors for IGT and NV Energy, and former chairman and CEO for Harrah’s, you stand at the forefront of Nevada’s most prominent industries and have an insider’s perspective on the state’s economy. What role does higher education play in the economic development and recovery of the state?

Phil: The University is very important to the future of this city and the state, particularly as we deal with the impact of the Great Recession. I think the University is an important catalyst to the recovery of our state’s economy and the key to its long-term stability.

The University is important in developing the talented people who are going to populate not only the jobs that currently exist, but also the jobs that will exist as this state changes—and it’s going to change. We’re going to have a different kind of economic engine in this state—we have to, we know that. Some of these students will be the people who start their own businesses. We need to nurture them and help them grow their businesses into the type of businesses that will allow us to have a sustainable economic environment. The other part of the University’s impact is that, to some extent, it affects the quality of life for everyone in the community, whether it’s through college athletics or cultural activities. Ultimately, people love college athletics. This is one of the reasons why we made this gift to Wolf Pack Athletics; we see how important it is to the experience of the community.

Jennifer: “If neither one of us had gone to the University, we would still be interested in supporting this institution. We think of our gift as an investment in the future of the state we love to call home, and we don’t think there’s another institution in the north that can have such a wide-reaching effect on our community or across the state. We see our investment as one that is being leveraged for an even larger impact, because it is the graduates of the University of Nevada, Reno who will be the future leaders and problem solvers in Nevada. The stronger the University is, the stronger the state is.”

—From an interview in March with Roseann Keegan, Nevada Silver & Blue associate editor.