Friends

Thank you University friends for your generous support. Our friends have a special appreciation of and affinity for the University and its missions of education, research and outreach. Our friends give to new and existing endowments, often gifting in honor of, or in memory of, a special person (see New Foundation Endowments starting on page 22, or existing Foundation Endowments starting on page 24). We are grateful to these Nevada friends who made a gift during 2011.
Ghanem legacy paves the way for a new generation of doctors

At age 16, Mike Ulrich left high school and went to work as a dish washer to support himself and his single mother. He never imagined he would be finishing his first year of medical school just 10 years later.

“I never thought that someone like me could go to medical school,” says Ulrich, Class of 2015. “The pressures were high for us to make ends meet. My mom didn’t make a lot of money. The minute I turned 16, the idea was that I could get a job right away and help support my family.”

Guided by mentors and sheer determination, Ulrich later passed the GED, attended the College of Southern Nevada, transferred to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and graduated with a bachelor’s degree in biology. His gumption paid off: Just months before entering the University of Nevada School of Medicine, he was awarded the Dr. Elias F. Ghanem Medical Scholarship, the only scholarship 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.

“I was overwhelmed; there’s no other way to say it,” Ulrich says of the scholarship. “I didn’t realize there were people out there interested in this type of philanthropy.”

Unbeknownst to Ulrich at the time, he had much in common with the late Dr. Elias Ghanem, a prominent Las Vegas physician. Ghanem was born in 1939 to a poor Lebanese family in Haifa, Israel, arriving in the United States in 1963 with $90 in his pocket and a dream of becoming a doctor. Ghanem went on to earn a scholarship for Duke University, but the path was difficult. He lived in his car while trying to make ends meet.

Years later, Ghanem would be known as the “physician to the stars,” treating Elvis Presley, Liberace, Michael Jackson and President Bill Clinton’s mother, Virginia Kelly. Ghanem’s widow, Jody, says he was actually a “doctor to all walks of life,” known for treating famous entertainers as well as extending free medical care to casino employees during a six-year worker strike.

When Ghanem was diagnosed with cancer, he established the Dr. Elias and Jody Ghanem Charitable Foundation as a way to continue to serve the residents of his community and the entire state. After Ghanem died in 2001, his close friend Mike Sloan, now an executive at Fertitta Entertainment, suggested that the foundation establish a scholarship to honor his late friend. Donations poured in from family, friends and several of the casino properties.

The scholarship has been awarded each year since 2002, providing more than $300,000 to assist four students in the School of Medicine. Recipient Dr. Ryan Adams ’07 (criminal justice), ’06MD is an anesthesiologist in Fort Collins, Colo.; Dr. Jarrod Mosier ’07MD practices emergency medicine in Tucson, Ariz.; Dr. Betsy Huang ’08MD is a pediatric resident at UCLA; Dr. Taylor Klein ’11MD is a family medicine resident at the University of New Mexico.

“Elias wanted to give back to the community that was so wonderful to him and our children,” Jody Ghanem says. “Medicine was who he was, so if we can help someone reach their dreams, that is what he would want out of his hard work.”

To others facing similar challenges, Ulrich offers this advice: “Do not give up on yourself. Know that you are worth it. The best investment you can make is in yourself.”

—Roseann Keegan

University of Nevada School of Medicine student Mike Ulrich, Class of 2015, (right) studies a human brain with professor and neuroscience course director Christopher von Bartheld. Ulrich is the recipient of the Dr. Elias F. Ghanem Medical Scholarship.

To learn more about supporting the School of Medicine, please contact Stefanie Scoppettone, director of development, (775) 682-9143 or scops@unr.edu.
Family of engineering alumnus continues legacy

A family with a growing Nevada legacy has endowed a scholarship in honor of the family patriarch, Joe “Breezy” Howard ’61 (civil engineering). The Joe W. Howard Memorial Scholarship for engineering majors was established through memorial contributions by friends and family following his death in January 2010. Last year, the family made additional donations to bring the scholarship to the endowment level and create an enduring memorial for Howard’s good works in the community.

“Paying for college is difficult for students right now,” says Diane Lancaster ’86 (chemical engineering), Howard’s daughter. “We’re hoping this scholarship helps engineering students get through their education and do great things with their degree. They’re the future of our state.”

Family members who helped create the endowment include Howard’s wife of 48 years, Janice ’61 (medical technology); daughter and son-in-law Diane and Ted Lancaster ’86 (electrical engineering); son David Howard ’91 (biochemistry), ’98Ph.D. (environmental science and health), ’04MD; and daughter and son-in-law Susan ’92 (physical sciences), ’93 (mathematics), ’96M.Ed. (educational leadership) and Lee Roberts ’94 (mechanical engineering).

Howard served in Korea from 1952-54 as a sergeant first class and commander of his platoon. Following honorable discharge, he joined the Army Reserve and began his engineering studies at Nevada. After graduation, Howard and four other principals purchased SE&A Engineers and Associates. His projects included Top Gun improvements at the Naval Air Station in Fallon and the Greg Street expansion in Sparks, and he was awarded Engineer of the Year from the Reno Chapter of the Nevada Society of Professional Engineers. He was active in numerous professional and community organizations, including the Airport Authority of Northern Nevada, for which he served as member and chairman. He was president of the Truckee Meadows Branch of the American Society of Civil Engineers and the Nevada Chapter of American Public Works Association. He was also a volunteer for the Sky Tavern Junior Ski Program.

“He was such a good man and cared so deeply for his family and the community,” Lancaster says. “We loved him for his sense of humor, his integrity and his wisdom. We will always remember him as a moral and humble man who was a wonderful father and husband and who was our role model.”

Lancaster’s eldest son, Stephen, is a freshman at Nevada studying—of course—engineering. “And the legacy continues,” Lancaster says.

—Roseann Keegan

To learn more about supporting the College of Engineering, please contact Maryanne Cameron, director of development, (775) 682-9503 or mcameron@unr.edu.
Current students benefit from legacy of Nevada’s first black female graduate

At a time when segregation still governed American life, Stella Mason Parson ’52 (English) became the first black woman to graduate from the University. The daughter of a sharecropper, Mason molded a life that included a 33-year teaching career in Clark County, three children who earned their own degrees, an elementary school named for her and her late husband, Claude, and a 2002 University of Nevada, Reno President’s Medal for her accomplishments.

Parson arrived on campus in 1948 with the help of a scholarship from the Las Vegas chapter of the American Association of University Women. In 2002, she paid tribute to the scholarship support that made her education possible by creating the Stella Mason Parson Scholarship Endowment for women of African-American descent.

The life she created for herself in Nevada is far from her early life in Louisiana, where her parents were sharecroppers on a plantation. The plantation owner would let her parents work on the property, in theory giving them a share of the profits in return. But the dishonesty of the plantation owner kept them perpetually indebted to him, and eventually, the family was forced to flee.

Parson migrated West with her father as a young girl, eventually settling in Las Vegas and becoming the first in her family to graduate from high school. After graduation, Parson took a job as a maid. Her employer was so impressed with Parson’s tireless work ethic that she arranged for the AAUW to offer Parson a scholarship to Nevada. She became the first black woman to attend a university in the state.

With racial segregation still in play, Parson was not allowed to have a roommate or eat in restaurants with her peers. There had never been a black student-teacher in the area either, so special arrangements had to be made when it was time for her to complete her student teaching.

Since she was poor, Parson spent the northern Nevada winters without a coat or a bedspread. She worked at the campus cafeteria steam tables and as a domestic on weekends to cover her living expenses.

Despite these challenges, Parson graduated and excelled personally and professionally, with the Claude and Stella Parson Elementary School named in her honor. After retirement, Parson enrolled in the marriage and family therapy master’s program at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. In 1986, she earned her master’s degree in counseling at age 59.

Parson also began a legacy of higher education for black women in her own family, which includes her daughters, Jacqueline Parson-Barker ’77 (elementary education) and Naida Parson ’89Ph.D. (psychology), and her granddaughter, Latoysia Parson-Brass ’02 (psychology).

Her legacy also continues with the many Nevada students she’s helped over the past decade. Tia Brass, Class of 2015, says receiving the scholarship was divine timing since her family was struggling financially.

“I was so shocked I couldn’t believe my eyes,” says Brass, a community health sciences freshman and member of Sisters on a Move, a campus group focused on volunteerism and sisterhood. “I immediately began thanking God and proceeded to call my mom. She was so happy and explained that the scholarship couldn’t have come at a better time.”

Like Parson in 1948, Brass is now able to attend the University with her tuition covered.

“I can focus more on my school work, rather than worrying about how my parents are going to pay for tuition and other things I need for school,” Brass says. “I’m very thankful to have received this scholarship. I can’t express my gratitude enough.”

—Roseann Keegan

Student Tia Brass, Class of 2015, is a recipient of the Stella Mason Parson Scholarship Endowment, a scholarship for black women established by the University’s first black female graduate.