Foundation Board Chair  Pilot  
Grandad  Alumni President  
Ski Instructor  Attorney  
Church Elder
What I’ve Learned

Tom Hall
Thomas J. Hall ‘65 (finance)

My dad was a flight instructor and my mom was a dance instructor, so I have always been in love with education through the culture of my family. I was valedictorian of my high school and, in 1961, the University of Nevada invited northern Nevada high school leaders to attend a leadership conference. I met many of my future classmates, fraternity brothers and student leaders, including Paul Bible ‘62 (economics), who co-chaired the event.

At Nevada, I studied real estate and finance, and I took classes that taught the social graces—dance, bowling, tennis and golf. I took a public speaking course in which I was asked to prepare a speech as the final examination, to be delivered in competition with my classmates. I was lost for any good ideas and went to the old Clark Library to consider my fate. I picked up a volume of poems and turned to one entitled “Where There Is A Will, There Is A Way” by Eliza Howe. I incorporated that poem into my speech, won my class competition, and placed second in the department-wide contest. That gave me confidence and a life philosophy that has stuck with me through many years.

Beyond academics, I enjoyed the social aspects of college. I joined Sigma Alpha Epsilon Fraternity in the fall of 1963 and learned about the fellowship and fraternal relationships of good people striving to make progress in their lives.

After graduating from Nevada, I spent a couple of years digging ditches for my dad’s water company at Lake Tahoe and operating a floor covering business. Neither fulfilled me, and a friend suggested I attend law school. I reviewed law school catalogs and everything jumped out at me. It was like going from black and white to Technicolor. I took the LSAT and was accepted at Northwestern Law School in Chicago, Ill. It was a good start to my legal career in Nevada where I eventually opened my own firm in 1985. I laugh today thinking I went to Northwestern as a ditch digger and returned working for the Nevada Supreme Court.

My involvement with the Nevada Alumni Association began shortly after I finished law school in 1971 when I worked in the Nevada Attorney General’s office for the summer. There I met Jack Swobe ‘56, who invited me to an alumni meeting. After attending several meetings, I served on a committee, became an officer, and eventually became president.

I became a pilot in 1966 and found a way to marry my passions for education and aviation through the Reno Air Racing Foundation. As its chair, I co-founded Pathways to Aviation, an educational outreach program designed to inspire local youth through aviation education and air racing history preservation. Through this program, we bring public aviation speakers to campus and provide free airplane rides to local kids. I also co-founded the University’s Aero Club.

I really believe that where there’s a will, there’s a way. With a good education, nothing can stop you, so long as you set your goals and persevere in achieving them. I also recommend finding a mentor for guidance, something I did not take advantage of while a student at Nevada, but did so at Northwestern, which helped me tremendously. I consider all of my experiences at Nevada as gifts and greatly value the opportunity to give back—not only to my alma mater—but to my church and community.

While at Nevada, I learned that the opportunities for personal growth and learning were limitless. The University environment created a circle of instructors, mentors, friends and acquaintances who have remained with me my entire life. Nevada gave me an opportunity for growth, the tools for learning, and the will to proceed and excel.

From a conversation in February with Crystal Parish, director of foundation operations, Tom, a 1965 Nevada finance graduate, is the 2012 Foundation Board Chair. He received his juris doctorate from Northwestern Law School in 1971 and runs his own law firm in Reno, specializing in real estate and water law. Tom served as Nevada Alumni Association president for three terms, receiving the association’s Service Award in 1980. He received the University’s President’s Medal in 2000. Tom was Heavenly Valley Ski Resort’s attorney for 19 years and became a ski instructor at Sky Tavern. Hall has served on and chaired many local boards and associations.

Photo by Theresa Danna-Douglas

A senior in high school, Tom Hall (back row, fifth from left) and other northern Nevada high school leaders pose in front of the statue of John Mackay during a 1961 leadership conference sponsored by the University.

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For the full version of the interview visit: www.unr.edu/silverandblue