Any look at the history of the University of Nevada, Reno will identify the progress and growth of the campus with the generosity of our benefactors. Since the institution’s modest beginning in 1874, successful individuals have shared their gains with the Nevada campus—among them Mackay, Fleischmann, Orvis, Clark and Manville—and their crucial gifts enabled the University to prosper.

Fast forward to today, and donors are still strengthening the University through their largesse, and at record levels. Philanthropist George W. Gillemot ’00 (Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters) will be counted among these notable University patrons. These new benefactors are funding progress on campus, including support of capital projects totaling more than one-million square-feet of new facilities built since 2003, with another almost half-million square-feet to be built in the next several years. This necessary growth will help educate the growing enrollment of the next generation of students, which is projected to increase from 18,776 to 22,000 by 2021.

The unassuming Gillemot and his wife, Marie, make their home on the Sunset Ranch in west Washoe Valley, Nev. The sprawling 650-acre working Angus cattle ranch near Franktown may be 25 miles from Reno and the Nevada campus, but Gillemot chose early on to adopt the community and the University. Of his arrival in the area, Gillemot says, “When I first came to Nevada, the pace was much slower, so we became acquainted with the people at the University. It was clear that
the state population and the University were going to grow and now we know just how much. In those early days, the University opened its arms and treated me as a friend and I was compelled to grasp the friendship offered. I made it a point that some of my gains should also be the gains of the University.”

And so, years ago Gillemot set aside an inspiring $10 million donation as part of his charitable trust to benefit the arts on campus. To help fulfill the planned donation, he recently donated to the University’s foundation a home in the desirable Glenbrook, Nev., community at Lake Tahoe. Proceeds from the sale of the 5,300 square-foot home will go toward fulfilling the generous pledged commitment to the University’s arts program.

President Marc Johnson praised the gift. “This very generous current gift, as well as George’s future committed gift, will transform the arts on campus and in the community. This continues our upward trajectory, growing the next generation of creative and cultural leaders and positively contributing to the area’s quality of life. We are indebted to George for his friendship and kindness.”

For his part, Gillemot owes his success to hard work and an entrepreneurial nature. He was born in Southern California and grew up in Santa Monica, attending UCLA before and after his three-year wartime duty in the U.S. Navy where he trained and served in electronics and communications. Upon graduating from UCLA with a bachelor’s degree in engineering and master of business administration degree, he began a 16-year career with Associated Telephone Company (later General Telephone and Electronics), rising to methods engineer designing outside telephone equipment. In 1967, after raising his family, Gillemot began the first of many entrepreneurial ventures, founding Communications Technology Corp., which developed and manufactured products for telephone companies worldwide. He developed more than 300 U.S. and foreign patents for products unique to the communications industry, and his company flourished, with operations in the U.S., Germany, Puerto Rico, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The successful company was sold in 1984, and so began Gillemot’s subsequent and fruitful ventures including partnership in the famous Schramsberg Vineyards and ownership, and later sale, of Alderbrook Winery in Healdsburg, Calif. Nowadays Gillemot stays busy tending his bustling Angus cattle ranch in the heart of Washoe Valley and keeping up with his family. He travels extensively, having just returned from an extended trip to South America and Antarctica with Marie, but it is hard work and giving back that are the hallmarks of this modern day philanthropist.

—Keiko Weil ’87, is the director of donor relations in the Division of Development and Alumni Relations

For more information about supporting programs at Nevada, or about planned giving opportunities, please contact John Carothers, vice president for Development and Alumni Relations, (775) 784-1352 or jcarothers@unr.edu.