Much of what I have learned is attributed to my education and career as an attorney. I grew up in Portland, Ore., earned my undergraduate degree from the University of Notre Dame and my law degree from the University of California, Berkeley. I immediately entered private practice in Oakland, Calif., where I continue to practice today. My education and my practice of nearly 50 years have prepared me to work with people and to address issues in a business environment. That experience also provided me with the skills needed to manage the Nell J. Redfield Foundation where I serve as foundation manager. In that position, I have participated with my fellow directors in the delivery of significant benefits to the Northern Nevada community.

I began visiting Reno on a regular basis in the late 1960s, when I was retained by LaVere and Nell Redfield to assist them with tax-related matters. Later, I assisted Mrs. Redfield in managing and developing her property holdings. After Mr. Redfield died, I assisted Mrs. Redfield with the formation of her foundation and have served as a director and its manager since inception. Mrs. Redfield very thoughtfully crafted the mission statement for her foundation to reflect her personal philanthropic interests, which have been faithfully adhered to by the foundation directors since her death. One of Mrs. Redfield’s special interests was education and the University of Nevada, Reno was high on her list of priorities. Historically, education receives about 50 percent of the Redfield Foundation’s annual funding and the University has been a significant beneficiary through the years.

Over the past four decades, I have watched the University grow into a nationally ranked, top-tier university; one that has found a way to thrive, even in a challenging economy. I have worked closely with four University presidents, each with distinct strengths that have helped the University reach its current position of prominence and each with his own dream for campus growth. For example, the development of the satellite Redfield Campus under the guidance of President Joe Crowley was a collaborative effort between the University, Truckee Meadows Community College, the Redfield Foundation and local businesses. President Milton Glick strove to recruit and retain Nevada’s National Merit Scholars and the Redfield Foundation worked closely with him to underwrite a scholarship program that supports a cohort of 20 National Merit Scholars.

In addition to my involvement with the University through the Redfield Foundation, I have learned an enormous amount about the institution by serving six years on the University’s Foundation Board. That provided me with a unique opportunity to observe the inner workings of the University and to meet some incredibly dedicated people who are passionate about the University and committed to its success.

The University is the engine that drives our local economy, provides an educated workforce and attracts outside businesses. Due to a concerted, focused effort by President Marc Johnson and University administration, the community more fully recognizes the special relationship that exists between campus and community and the value of being recognized as a university town. Outsiders want to know what type of educated work pool is in our area, and what the University is doing to generate graduates who are technically qualified. That pool is now growing by leaps and bounds. The University is moving in the right direction, and the people guiding it have the vision to keep our community growing. If we continue to enhance that vision, our ability to attract businesses and people to our community will improve, and the University will more effectively compete with other universities for talented students.

Coming from a private university background, I was quickly indoctrinated with the need to give back to my university. A private institution cannot survive without the very robust support of its alumni. That particular quality has been more difficult to develop at public institutions as the commonly held view is that they are funded by the state. I have learned over the years through working with the University and other public institutions that this is a myth. State support is diminishing and it is important that alumni develop a spirit of participation. It is an important message to give to students and alumni alike. To that end, the Redfield Foundation meets with the recipients of the Nell J. Redfield Foundation Scholarship Program for National Merit Scholars at the University of Nevada, Reno annually to celebrate their achievements, but also to remind them of the importance of supporting the University after graduation. We all need to do a better job of educating our alumni of the need to “give back.”

Though not a native, I have had a unique opportunity to become familiar with the community and to gain an understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. Today, I feel very attached to the community and the University. I see a community filled with wonderful, caring people who give freely of their time to support a cause. I am humbled when I see the time and energy that others have invested to improve our community. They are the ones who make a difference.

From a conversation in February with Crystal Parrish, director, corporate and foundation relations. Jerry Smith is a partner and member of Fitzgerald Abbott & Beardsley LLP’s Business and Corporate Transactions Group. He served as a trustee on the University of Nevada, Reno Foundation’s Board from 2008-13, chaired its governance committee and served on the executive committee and other board committees. As a director and manager of the Nell J. Redfield Foundation, Smith has helped guide the organization to support numerous programs on campus in athletics, education, engineering, health sciences, renewable energy, science, theater and the Redfield Campus. Smith and his wife, Sharon, support Wolf Pack Athletics and are members of the Silver and Blue Society. Smith earned his bachelor’s at the University of Notre Dame in 1961 and his law degree at the University of California, Berkeley’s Boalt Hall School of Law in 1964. He received an honorary degree from the University of Nevada, Reno in 2003, an honor he holds most dear.
Trustee Emeritus  Foundation Manager  Philanthropist  Attorney