University of Nevada Cooperative Extension celebrates 100th anniversary

Since the Smith-Lever Act established the nationwide Cooperative Extension system in 1914, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension has been a part of Nevada life, presenting research-based knowledge and programs to address critical community needs. This county-state-federal partnership provides practical education to people, businesses and communities in all 17 Nevada counties. Anyone who has ever been involved in a 4-H youth activity or had a question answered by a Master Gardener, has been touched by one of Cooperative Extension’s more than 130 educational programs in areas including children, youth and families; horticulture; health and nutrition; agriculture; natural resources and community development.

During both World Wars, Cooperative Extension’s contributions increased as it trained Nevadans to meet the high demands of food production, preservation and ingenuity, and later fire safety to protect food supplies. The 4-H Youth Leadership Development Program rapidly expanded as it taught boys and girls home economics, gardening, animal husbandry, canning and more. Today, 4-H continues to teach leadership, citizenship and life skills to nearly 50,000 Nevada youth ages 5 to 19 each year through activities such as practicing robotics and raising animals, with an emphasis on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) education. In fact, Nevada Governor Brian Sandoval ’86 (foreign affairs) is also a Nevada 4-H alum.

After the wars and moving into the 60s and 70s, Cooperative Extension continued to grow and adapted its programs to meet the needs of an increasingly urbanized Nevada. In 1972, its Master Gardener Program began providing free, research-based horticulture information specific to Nevada’s challenging soils and climate to home gardeners across the state. Today, Nevada’s more than 615 active Master Gardeners, who receive intense training in plant-science skills, volunteer in more than 30 community gardens, teach workshops, educate at farmers markets and schools, and provide information to about 87,000 gardeners annually.

As Cooperative Extension approached the turn of the century, it helped the state cope with new challenges. Cooperative Extension Natural Resource Specialist Ed Smith ’78 (renewable natural resources), ’84M.S. (renewable natural resources), created the Living With Fire Program to collaborate with firefighting agencies and others to teach homeowners how to live more safely in Nevada’s increasingly high wildfire-hazard environments. Since the program’s inception in 1997, 19 other states have adapted Living With Fire educational materials to use in their own states.

KUNR listeners Michael and Barbara Heffner give back through time, talent and treasure

When Michael Heffner and his wife, Barbara, spent a decade living overseas, listening to National Public Radio was at the top of the list of the experiences they missed. Now back home just as long, Michael Heffner says he has a “driveway moment” about once a week while listening to KUNR, the University’s NPR affiliate.

“NPR keeps us thoughtfully informed of the world around us, but also entertains and often makes us laugh out loud,” Heffner says. “KUNR is much more than just the vehicle for delivering NPR programs; it is also the best source of news about our community, local businesses and our university. It seems like I have a ‘driveway moment’ every week, where I can’t get out of the car until the story ends.”

The Heffners are a valuable resource for the station, providing feedback, fundraising suggestions and helping with event planning. Most recently this has included KUNR’s 50th anniversary celebration. They are also members of KUNR’s Signal Circle, a select but growing list of contributors who give $1,000 or more annually to the station. The couple have also established a major planned gift for KUNR—a first for the station.

“It was an easy decision to give back to KUNR by joining the Signal Circle and to later enthusiastically accept the invitation to join the Community Council,” Heffner says. “These feel like modest gestures to say thank you to KUNR for enriching each and every day.”

Station Manager David Stipech ’85 (journalism) has tapped Heffner to help formalize an advisory board for the station.

“Mike has been involved with the station in many ways, including hosting donor events at his home,” Stipech says. “He loves the University and especially the notion of Reno becoming a college town. We are tremendously fortunate to count the Heffners among our most enthusiastic supporters.”

For more information about giving to KUNR, please call Stefanie Givens, KUNR director of development, at 775-682-6056 or email sgivens@kunr.org.

—Roseann Keegan

University of Nevada Cooperative Extension: Setting the National Standard

University of Nevada Cooperative Extension is the only Extension to have garnered the National Excellence in Extension Award from the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities twice since the award’s inception in 2006. Recipients include Nevada’s Youth Development Specialist Marilyn Smith ’74M.S. (home economics), whose program efforts such as Project MAGIC assist at-risk and rural youth and families; and Nevada’s Natural Resources Specialist Ed Smith, whose internationally known program, “Living With Fire,” helps homeowners live more safely with the threat of wildfire. The Extension also garnered the APLU’s 2011 National Extension Diversity Award for Loretta Singletary and Staci Emm’s ’96 (journalism) “People of the Land” program, which trains agricultural producers to help Native Americans strengthen sustainable agriculture and natural resources management on reservations.

—Tiffany Kozsan, ’12 and Claudene Wharton ’86, ’99A.M.