

# ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE SOCIETY

## NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2026

### LOVE MADE REAL

**By Samuel Rudd, President & CEO,  
United Way of Southern Nevada**

Love is often described as a feeling, something deeply personal and quietly held. At United Way of Southern Nevada, we see love as something more. We see it as action. We see it as responsibility. We see it as a commitment to build systems of care that endure long after a single moment has passed.

This past year, our community demonstrated what happens when compassion is paired with leadership. Through strategic investments and collective generosity, thousands of Southern Nevadans accessed education, workforce pathways, and health resources, often at moments when stability mattered most. These outcomes are not abstract. They represent children prepared to learn, families regaining footing, and individuals moving forward with dignity.

Love made real requires structure. It requires foresight. And it requires leaders willing to invest not only with their hearts, but with intention. At United Way of Southern Nevada, we are guided by the belief that caring deeply also means acting boldly and measuring impact so that love reaches as many lives as possible.

When love is made real through leadership, communities do more than respond to challenges. They rise. Together, we continue to shape a Southern Nevada that is stronger, more resilient, and more connected, now and for generations to come.



### LOVE IN ACTION

**By Laura Henkel, Major Gifts Officer  
Alexis de Tocqueville Society + Planned Giving**

Love in action is not accidental. It is chosen. It is sustained.  
And at its highest level, it is led.

Every day, I have the privilege of working with individuals and families who understand that philanthropy is not simply generosity. It is stewardship. Tocqueville Society members and legacy donors step forward with a shared belief that Southern Nevada's future is worth protecting, strengthening, and shaping with care.

Love in action shows up when leaders align their values with long term impact. It means supporting education, workforce

development, and health as interconnected systems that shape opportunity. It also means thinking beyond the present through planned gifts, endowed support, and legacy commitments that ensure care continues well into the future.

Leadership level giving creates change that is structural, not incremental. When donors combine resources, experience, and vision, communities stabilize, opportunity expands, and futures are rewritten. Love in action becomes a force that moves beyond any single individual and into something enduring.

At United Way of Southern Nevada, love does not stand still. It builds. It lasts. And because of our donors' leadership, it continues to shape a community where every individual has the opportunity to thrive.



# LOVE YOUR COMMUNITY

By Rev. Dr. Marta Poling Schmitt  
Tocqueville Chair

February is often associated with the theme of love. A walk through any grocery or drug store reveals Valentine cards, heart-shaped boxes of candy, and reminders that February 14th is a day set aside to celebrate affection and connection. During this season, the theme of love in all its colors, stories, and expressions is everywhere.

Love is also very much alive at UWSN. Throughout February, there are many opportunities to turn care into action through volunteerism, generosity, and intentional engagement with our neighbors. Women United, a giving group affiliated with UWSN, is hosting its 18th annual women's work clothing drive. A thoughtful look through your closet may yield blouses, skirts, jackets, suits, scrubs, jewelry, and accessories that can help women reentering the workforce with confidence and dignity. The volunteer webpage on the UWSN website also highlights opportunities to participate in kit builds and other meaningful service projects. When the world feels heavy, helping someone else is often one of the most powerful ways to regain perspective and hope.

These acts of service invite us to consider a deeper understanding of love. In ancient Greek, the language includes several words for love, each reflecting a different expression. Phileo describes friendship and camaraderie. Eros speaks to romantic love. Agape, however, refers to selfless, sacrificial love that seeks the highest good for others. This is the kind of love that UWSN demonstrates not only in February, but throughout the year.



Members of the Alexis de Tocqueville Society recognize that their generosity helps extend this spirit of agape across Southern Nevada. Whether through an individual gift or through one's organization, Tocqueville members invest at leadership levels of \$10,000 or more annually to help unite, heal, and strengthen our community. Some also choose to extend that commitment through planned giving, ensuring that their care for others continues well into the future. Writing UWSN into a trust or estate, as Robert E. Donahue did, is one meaningful way to leave a lasting imprint for good.

If you hope to see the love that fills this season continue throughout the year and beyond, we invite you to join us in agape giving. Together, through intentional generosity and shared responsibility, we can help ensure that love is not only felt, but made real.

# LEGACY SPOTLIGHT: ROBERT E. DONAHUE

## Preserving a Life of Quiet Generosity



Robert E. Donahue was not someone who sought attention. He lived thoughtfully, deliberately, and with deep conviction. Those who knew him best describe him as private and introspective, someone who kept his emotions close and expressed himself sparingly. Yet beneath that reserve lived a large heart, shaped by gratitude, resilience, and a profound sense of responsibility to others.

Robert was an only child, deeply devoted to his parents. His mother, born in Mexico City, took great pride in becoming an American citizen and in raising her son in a country filled with opportunity. His father, Frank, served honorably in the Air Cavalry as a combat helicopter serviceman in Vietnam. From them, Robert learned the meaning of sacrifice, service, and honoring those who paved the way. He grew up acutely aware that his life was built on the courage and choices of others, and that awareness stayed with him always.

Reserved by nature, Robert carried a steady resolve to help others. He believed in contributing consistently and without fanfare. He often found words difficult in moments of grief or struggle, both his own and others'. When faced with hardship, his steady refrain was simple. "Did the world stop turning?" For Robert, the answer was always no. Life continued, and so must care for one another.

Robert found joy in stories of endurance and moral clarity. Since childhood, he was drawn to the lore of the Old West and to films like *Rio Bravo*, *The Searchers*, and *Tombstone*, his favorite. Though a California native, he was mesmerized by Las Vegas. He loved its history, its improbable rise from desert to city, and the stories behind its earliest days. To Robert, Las Vegas represented possibility, grit, and reinvention.

Robert also knew hardship intimately. He lost his father to cancer while still in high school, a loss that deeply affected him. In the years that followed, he faced challenges of his own and was supported at times by community-based programs. He understood the power of help not only as a giver, but as someone who had received it. Helping others became a way to steady himself, to find meaning, and to honor those who had lifted him when he needed it most.

From the time he held his first job at the Rancho Bernardo Inn in Poway, California, Robert contributed to United Way through payroll giving. He continued that practice throughout his working life and was often the first to give

when workplace campaigns were launched. Giving was never performative for him. It was simply what one did.

Nearly thirty years ago, Robert put his estate plans in place. At the time, he likely did not think in terms of legacy. He had hoped for a family of his own, plans that never came to fruition. Yet in choosing United Way of Southern Nevada as the steward of his final gift, Robert ensured that his values would live on in a way that mattered deeply to him. His legacy gift now supports youth empowerment, education, and community initiatives that reflect his enduring concern for children and their futures.

Carrying out Robert's wishes fell to those who knew him best. His lifelong friend David Pesta, who had been by his side since high school, served as Executor alongside Deborah Pesta, his sister-in-law. Deborah, a CPA, approached the responsibility with both professional rigor and heartfelt care. To her, money was never the goal. It was a tool. The true purpose of Robert's gift was freedom, opportunity, and the chance for others to aspire to their full potential.

In fulfilling Robert's wishes, David and Deborah also honored his devotion to family. One of the most poignant moments of stewardship came when they laid Robert's mother to rest alongside her husband. For decades, Robert had kept her ashes close, unable to part from her. While sorting through her belongings, they discovered the tiara she had worn at her quinceañera, which she had preserved for sixty-eight years. They placed it with her in her final resting place, a tender symbol of love, memory, and reunion. In that moment, Robert's care for his parents, and now theirs for him, came full circle.

Robert E. Donahue was not a public figure or a titan of industry. He was an everyday person who chose intention over attention. His story reminds us that lasting impact does not require wealth or acclaim. It requires foresight, love, and the courage to make one's intentions known. Through UWSN, Robert's legacy continues to support community-based programs that uplift youth, strengthen families, and create opportunities where it is needed most.



# PASSPORT TO THE CITY

Curated Experiences. Meaningful Connection.

Passport to the City is the Alexis de Tocqueville Society's signature experience series, designed to bring members together through culture, community, and shared purpose across Southern Nevada.

Our inaugural Passport gathering at The Doberman in the Arts District offered an intimate evening of connection, conversation, live music, and libations. Members and guests gathered in a space that reflects the creative spirit of our city, and we are truly grateful to Ryan Doherty and Corner Bar Management for their continued partnership and commitment to lifting our community through their venues and events.

Looking ahead, we are excited to partner with the Las Vegas Philharmonic for an exclusive behind-the-scenes experience at The Smith Center, offering Tocqueville members a rare look at the artistry and preparation behind The Music of John

Williams. From Star Wars to Indiana Jones, Williams' iconic film scores have shaped modern popular culture, and this evening promises to be both inspiring and unforgettable.

From January through October, Passport to the City experiences are thoughtfully curated to create opportunities to meet fellow members, introduce prospective community champions to Tocqueville, and enjoy meaningful moments together. Some gatherings are member-exclusive, others welcome guests and family, and all are designed to celebrate the people and places that make Southern Nevada extraordinary.

Members are encouraged to participate, bring a guest, and help shape the future of this growing program. Event details and new experiences will continue to be announced throughout the year.



(L - R, clockwise):

- » Lori Johnson, UNLV Professor of Law-William S. Boyd School of Law, Marianne Johnson, Board Member-Boyd Gaming and Tocqueville Member, and Mercedes McGill, Manager of Corporate Partnerships-UWSN
- » Jeff Suddeth, Project Coordinator-Grand Canyon Development Partners, and Denette Suddeth, Regional President and Head of Commercial Banking-PNC Bank and Tocqueville Member
- » Ginger Land-Van Buurn, Executive Director-Vegas City Opera, Daz Weller, CEO-Third Street and Executive Artistic Director-Vegas Theatre Company, Alice Sauro, Executive Director-Las Vegas Philharmonic, and Lucy Formato, Director of Special Events and Public Programming-Rita Deanin Abbey Museum
- » Sam Rudd, President & CEO-UWSN, Dulcinea Rongavilla, Executive Vice Present/Shareholder-Cragin & Pike, Tocqueville Member

# UNITED READERS: BUILDING LITERACY, ONE STUDENT AT A TIME

UWSN is proud to launch United Readers, an exciting new literacy initiative designed to strengthen reading skills for students in kindergarten through fifth grade—when early intervention matters most. Through one-on-one and small-group mentoring, United Readers provides targeted, literacy-based instruction to students who are underperforming, while also offering consistent, positive role models in their lives.

In its first semester alone, the program has already demonstrated powerful results. Educators have responded with overwhelmingly positive feedback, noting both academic gains and increased student confidence. Here's what your support makes possible:



## PERSONALIZED MENTORING

125 students will receive one-on-one or small group instruction in the first year of this program.



## EVIDENCE-BASED INSTRUCTION

90% of participants have already shown improvement in their academic performance.



## CONFIDENCE & A LOVE FOR LEARNING

At one school, students increased their MAP testing scores by an average of 11 points.

One of our mentors shared a moment that shows how powerful the program can be:

“ I could see the frustration in her body language when she struggled to blend the words. I encouraged her to try again and sound them out. This time, she was calmer, and she got every word right. I loved knowing I could help her succeed just by supporting her and giving her words of affirmation.”

That single moment of patience, encouragement, and belief is where confidence begins.

As we look ahead, UWSN has committed to raising \$50,000 by the end of June to sustain and expand this program. Continued investment will allow United Readers to reach more students, reduce waitlists, and ensure literacy intervention remains accessible where it is needed most. There are different ways you can contribute and impact some of our youngest learners' lives.

<b>\$25,000</b>	Supports all <b>110 students</b> in the program and all <b>4 mentors</b> for <b>10 weeks</b> .
<b>\$15,000</b>	Supports all <b>110 students</b> in the program and all <b>4 mentors</b> for <b>6 weeks</b> .
<b>\$10,000</b>	Supports all <b>110 students</b> in the program and all <b>4 mentors</b> for <b>4 weeks</b> .
<b>\$5,000</b>	Supports <b>55 students</b> , half of the students in the program, and <b>2 mentors</b> for <b>4 weeks</b> .
<b>\$400</b>	Supports <b>1 student</b> and <b>1 mentor</b> for the entire semester.

If you are interested in contributing—or know someone who may wish to support the success of United Readers—please visit [UWSN.org/UnitedReaders](https://UWSN.org/UnitedReaders) to learn more. Together, we can help ensure every child has the foundation they need to learn, grow, and thrive.

## CONNECT & INSPIRE

To explore the Alexis de Tocqueville Society or to nominate individuals who embody the spirit of leadership and generosity, please contact [Laura Henkel](mailto:Laura.Henkel@uwsn.org) or visit [UWSN.org/TocquevilleMembershipForm](https://UWSN.org/TocquevilleMembershipForm)

### Laura Henkel

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