

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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GATHA BURNETT BEQUEATHES \$1 MILLION FOR ARTHRITIS RESEARCH

DALLAS — December 4, 1998 — Several years before she died, Gatha Burnett said she intended to leave money to UT Southwestern for research into arthritis, an inflammatory disease from which she suffered. Keeping her word, her bequest of \$1 million is being used to establish the Fund for Arthritis Research and the William M. and Gay Burnett Professorship for Arthritis Research.

William Burnett was a rancher in central Texas who served for many years as the county judge of Hays County. He inherited part of a ranch just west of Wimberly near San Marcos, the county seat. Gatha “Gay” Burnett spent her married life there. After her husband died in 1965, she sold most of the ranch and lived in Austin until her death at age 89 in 1996.

“We knew that she wanted to help find a cure for arthritis, and she told us she was giving money for the research efforts,” said Mary Nabors, Gay’s niece by marriage. Nabors’ father, Walter, was William Burnett’s twin. “I’m very excited about the research that UT Southwestern is doing because I have arthritis, too.”

Mary Nabors and her brother, former Hays County Judge Walter “Bud” Burnett, spent time with Gay and William Burnett growing up. Bud Burnett lives in the family’s original stone house in Wimberly that was built about 1912.

“Aunt Gay did woodworking and sewed, and she was a very strong, forthright character,” said Mary Nabors.

William Burnett was a third cousin of UT Southwestern President Dr. Kern Wildenthal. “I’m extremely grateful that Gay Burnett had the foresight to put aside money for this very important research. And I’m very proud of the Burnett family tradition of doing good for others,” Wildenthal said.

“Gay and her husband were early settlers in the San Marcos and the Wimberly area. She was a true Texas original and a successful businesswoman in her own right. She grew up on the land and

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BURNETT GIFT – 2

was part of the state's history, and she wanted to leave something that would help future generations of Texans.”

Two daughters, Gay Symmes of Asheville, N.C., and Ester Speer of Destin, Fla., survive William and Gay Burnett.

Dr. Joel Taurog, professor of internal medicine, will hold the William M. and Gay Burnett Professorship for Arthritis Research. He studies the molecular basis for the rheumatic disease ankylosing spondylitis, an arthritis of the spine, and several related diseases, all of which share a strong inherited tendency.

“I am very grateful to Gatha Burnett for making this generous gift with the hope of helping future generations of people who suffer from these life-altering conditions,” said Taurog, who is an investigator in the Harold C. Simmons Arthritis Research Center. “I thank the UT Southwestern administration for showing their confidence in my work through this professorship, which will facilitate the pursuit of my research.”

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