

# SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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## **LARRY AND SUZY GEKIERE FUND FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM AT UT SOUTHWESTERN FOR PATIENTS WITH BRAIN TUMORS**

DALLAS – Nov. 5, 2001 – While reading an article on neuro-oncology in UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas' annual magazine, Suzy Gekiere was deeply moved by the stories of the families who struggled to cope with a loved one's brain tumor. It propelled her and her husband, Larry, to pledge \$261,000 to Southwestern Medical Foundation to fund a five-year family support program in the Annette G. Strauss Center for Neuro-Oncology at the medical center.

The Gekiere Family Program for Neuro-Oncology Support will offer resources and counseling to patients with malignant brain tumors and their families.

Larry Gekiere and his three sons have personally experienced the difficulties families face when they are forced to deal with a loved one's illness. His first wife died as a result of a brain tumor.

"Suzy and I feel that it is equally important for patients and families to have emotional, as well as physical, resources available to them when they are dealing with a life-threatening illness," said Larry Gekiere. "We are pleased to help provide a place where people dealing with brain cancer can come to get information, support and empathy."

The goals of the psychoeducational program during the first two years will be to implement six-week-long sessions on stress reduction, coping skills and ways of dealing with anger, uncertainty and grief. The ongoing sessions will then be evaluated to discern which topics are most helpful, and a manual will be developed so the program can serve as a model throughout the United States.

"This is a tremendously exciting program on many, many levels," said Dr. Ann Matt-Maddrey, director of the family support program in the Annette G. Strauss Center for Neuro-Oncology and assistant professor of psychiatry. "Not only does the group offer psychological support; we also are able to teach patients and caregivers how to begin to cope with the

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overwhelming variety of emotions with which they are facing. The Gekieres have given our patients and their families a wonderful gift – one that will allow them to communicate and share with one another while learning how to live more fully with the diagnosis of a brain tumor.”

Larry Gekiere is the president of Allmerica Financial, Western Region, and the founder of Gekiere & Associates, which became Allmerica. He is a chartered life underwriter, a chartered financial consultant, a certified fund specialist and a registered principal for Allmerica Investments. He has presided over the Dallas General Agents and Managers Association and is past president of the Allmerica Managers Association. He is active in a number of civic organizations including the Children’s Cancer Fund and the National Kidney Foundation and continues to speak at management conferences worldwide.

Now retired from a 20-year teaching career in the Dallas and Richardson school districts, Suzy Gekiere remains active with the Kidney Texas Advisory Board and serves on the boards of the Dallas Women’s Foundation and Senior Citizens of Greater Dallas. She has served on the boards of the Tejas Girl Scout Council, the Leadership Dallas Alumni Association and The Family Place.

“We are enormously grateful for the Gekieres’ heartfelt decision to fund such an important program,” said Dr. Kern Wildenthal, president of UT Southwestern. “Education and emotional support are vital to the well-being of patients and their families, and this significant gift will enable a first-rate program to be designed and tested in an effort to provide better care.”

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