

News Release
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**Estate of Eleanor Karam Gives \$2.7 Million to Support
UAMS Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging**

LITTLE ROCK — The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) has received a \$2.7 million gift from the estate of Eleanor Karam to support the highest priorities of the Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging.

“Ms. Eleanor was a true visionary with a huge heart,” said Jeanne Wei, M.D., Ph.D., director of the institute. “Her love of seniors will help our clinicians better understand the aging process and delay or reverse age-associated memory loss and Alzheimer’s dementia. UAMS and all mature Arkansans are most fortunate indeed. We are deeply grateful to her and her siblings John and Jean for their generosity.”

Eleanor Blakney Karam was born in Helena, Arkansas, in 1929. She was a graduate of Little Rock High School (now Little Rock Central High School), Little Rock Junior College (now the University of Arkansas at Little Rock), and Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas. Her husband, Jimmy Karam, led the Little Rock Junior College Trojans football team to a 1949 national championship before becoming a successful businessperson. The couple were married nearly 50 years before Jimmy’s death in 2000. Eleanor Karam died in 2019 due to complications from Alzheimer’s disease.

“This gift is to help families in the future – patients and families – to make it easier to understand older people,” said Jean Maier Dean, her sister. “I think there’s a lot that the younger generations don’t understand about the aging process, and there needs to be a lot of education on how to care for the elderly.”

Early detection of Alzheimer’s disease is a critical part of that education, said John Blakney, her brother. “Recognizing the signs early on is important,” he said. “It was almost too late for us to legally have anything to help her with once we recognized she had Alzheimer’s. That’s a part of the aging process too.”

Founded in 2000, the Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging’s world-class geriatricians care for thousands of patients each year. It maintains a statewide network of seven regional Centers on Aging, including the innovative Schmieding Home Caregiver Training Program, and focuses on research in memory loss, neurodegenerative disease,

cardiovascular health and nutrition. The institute is also nationally recognized for educating and training geriatricians at the Department of Geriatrics in the College of Medicine.

Karam became familiar with UAMS when she and her husband sought care closer to home. She reached out to her good friend Ginger Wilson, wife of former UAMS Chancellor I. Dodd Wilson, M.D., then dean of the College of Medicine. Wilson referred them to the Institute on Aging. From that point on, they started receiving all of their routine care at UAMS, and they relied on UAMS when her husband became seriously ill. Even after Jimmy's passing, she stayed in touch with many of his nurses.

When Karam was later diagnosed with Alzheimer's, she received care at the institute, with Wei as her personal doctor.

"We love Dr. Wei for the caregiving and the guidance that she gave, information on what to expect, and just leading me on the path," Blakney said. "That was invaluable in taking care of her. She was able to live out her life in her house and was just as comfortable as you could imagine. UAMS was very good to us, in that sense. We were able to get through it together with no regrets."

Karam was a longtime supporter of UAMS and the Institute on Aging dating back to its founding and was a member of multiple giving societies, including the Chancellor's Circle, Society of the Double Helix and the 1879 Society. She supported the new hospital for UAMS Medical Center during its construction in 2008 and later named a patient room in memory of her late husband.

"She was a very beautiful lady, she was beautiful inside and out," said Dean. "She was a very devoted and faithful wife and daughter, and sister to us. She was just very special."

UAMS is the state's only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute and Institute for Digital Health & Innovation. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS' clinical enterprise including its hospital, regional clinics and clinics it operates or staffs in cooperation with other providers. UAMS is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. *U.S. News & World Report* named UAMS Medical Center the state's Best Hospital; ranked its ear, nose and throat program among the top 50 nationwide; and named six areas as high performing — COPD, colon cancer surgery, heart failure, hip replacement, knee replacement and lung cancer surgery. UAMS has 2,876 students, 898 medical residents and four dental residents. It is the state's largest public employer with more than 10,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children's Hospital, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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