

The Gift of a Lifetime

BY ROBIN HEFFLER

It's clear that Ellen Brandt is a woman of deep passions. Upon entering her home in Beverly Hills, a colorful array of handblown glass clowns greets visitors. The former actress and theater producer also has a collection of 5,000 theater, opera, concert, and ballet programs, a few dating back to her childhood in Germany before her family escaped the Holocaust. And, she is an avid fan of Cedars-Sinai, who recently demonstrated her appreciation for the care she and her family have received at the Medical Center.

"My mother was in and out of the hospital from the age of 85 to 100," says Ellen, displaying energy and sharpness at 86 as she graciously serves tea and cookies to guests. "My cardiovascular surgeon, Dr. David Cossman, has performed complicated surgeries on me, and he is the best. And nurse Lana Espejo, who handles the difficult cardiac cases, is a combination of knowledge and selflessness that is incredible. She doesn't look at the clock when she's caring for you."

In gratitude, Ellen made a donation that will benefit other patients at Cedars-Sinai in years to come. She has established a charitable gift annuity that will go toward the purchase of new, updated patient beds. With this type of gift, the Medical Center invests the money in a pool of funds, which earns interest that is paid to the donor annually. Upon the donor's passing, the funds are used for their designated purpose.

"It is a way to have an income at a good interest rate and still be able to be charitable," says Ellen, who orchestrated annual theater productions that benefited a



PHOTO BY JULIANE BACKMANN

neighborhood organization when she lived in New York. "It's the perfect solution for older people who are in no position to earn more and have to be careful about their spending."

She first learned about the necessity of financial planning when her husband, theater producer George Brandt, died at a young age, and she had to support a son and daughter using her talent and financial acumen. "I was born with a built-in calculator," says Ellen, who graduated from the University of Toledo, majoring in chemistry and math and minoring in theater.

Today, her family includes two grandchildren. Her 14-year-old granddaughter also appreciates Cedars-Sinai when she visits Ellen in the hospital. "She wants to come and eat my lunch because she thinks the food is so good!" ■