hey began with a desire to celebrate life. In 1957, 18 friends gathered to knit booties for newborns at Cedars of Lebanon Hospital. In time, their nurturing impulse grew into a passion for supporting scientific brilliance.

Women’s Guild has evolved from an intimate knitting circle to a group 1,500 strong that has partnered with Cedars Sinai Medical Center to fight lung disease, women’s heart disease, breast cancer, HIV/AIDS, and more. Many Guild members have remained active in the group for decades. They share a powerful drive to help make Cedars-Sinai a leading hospital for the Los Angeles community and a world-class institution.

Medical Center leadership has approached Women’s Guild many times over the course of the 50-year relationship to present and discuss specific areas where their support would be instrumental in advancing the medical, clinical, and research priorities of the institution. Guild members listen and learn, then roll up their sleeves and get to work.

There’s no better illustration of determination to make a difference than what the Guild has done in the field of lung disease. The group marked its 50th anniversary by pledging an unprecedented $20 million to create the Women’s Guild Lung Institute, where renowned pulmonary disease specialists are combining forces to combat everything from chronic illnesses such as asthma and emphysema to lung cancer.
The enduring strength of Women’s Guild is rooted in its capacity for reinvention. In the early years, the Guild raised funds through movie premieres chaired by some of Hollywood’s biggest stars, including Rosalind Russell, Elizabeth Taylor, and Joan Crawford. These glamorous events brought in more than a half-million dollars over five years to provide free beds and nursing care for needy patients at Cedars of Lebanon.

The era of film premieres was followed by a decade of successful antique shows with opening-night galas that also drew star-studded crowds. Proceeds from these galas enabled the Guild to take on increasingly significant projects at Cedars-Sinai. A major step during this period was the gift of $1 million to support the Saul and Joyce Brandman Breast Center — A Project of Women’s Guild at the Samuel Oschin Comprehensive Cancer Institute.

As the economic climate changed, the Guild adapted. Events shifted from galas to programs with a more educational bent. A highlight of the year is the annual luncheon which has recognized “Women of the 21st Century,” with such esteemed honorees as Helen Gurley Brown and Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Today, the commitment to giving is stronger than ever. Women’s Guild Board members take the lead in supporting major projects, and encourage others to do the same. Guild members have raised a grand total of more than $40 million for Cedars-Sinai, inspiring innovation that has improved quality of life for patients everywhere.
Progress often occurs step by step. But the Women’s Guild Lung Institute got its start because the Guild was ready to take a leap. Establishing a world-class research and treatment center for diseases of the lungs at Cedars-Sinai required resources far beyond any fundraising goal Guild members had ever set for themselves.

That didn’t deter them. They knew that Cedars-Sinai was already recognized nationally for its pioneering work in treating lung cancer and emphysema. They saw that, with enough financial support, the Medical Center could assume a preeminent position in the field of pulmonary disease.

Women’s Guild recognized the importance of achieving what Zab Mosenifar, MD, referred to as “a grand vision whose time has come.” But there still had to be a leap. Former Women’s Guild President Vera Guerin and her husband, Paul, made it possible. They gave $5 million in 2007 toward a $20 million pledge to create the Women’s Guild Lung Institute. This was the largest pledge from a support group in Cedars-Sinai’s history.

The Women’s Guild Lung Institute is led by nationally recognized specialists in three areas: medicine, surgery, and research. Each is deeply committed to fulfilling the grand vision for the Institute. Their determination gives new hope to all those who suffer from asthma, pneumonia, emphysema, cystic fibrosis, lung cancer, and other debilitating diseases.

“I was fascinated by my father because he was an athlete and he smoked but did not develop emphysema as a lot of his friends did. I wanted to know why.”

—Zab Mosenifar, MD
AN UNSOLVED MYSTERY

Zab Mosenifar, MD, started dreaming of becoming a doctor when he was a young boy growing up in a small village in Azerbaijan. His family’s physician made house calls, and young Zab loved to watch him work. “I was mesmerized by what he did. I knew that’s what I wanted to be.”

Years later, after graduating at the top of his class in the University of Tehran School of Medicine, it came time to choose a specialty. Dr. Mosenifar still knew what he wanted: to solve the mystery of his father’s good health.

This led to a career that would earn him international recognition as a lung specialist and expert on emphysema. A member of Cedars-Sinai’s medical staff for more than 30 years, he is medical director of the Women’s Guild Lung Institute.

His father, an avid bicyclist, smoked for 75 years but remained active until the day he died at age 87. He never suffered from emphysema or other related health problems.

“I tried to get him to quit, but he never could,” Dr. Mosenifar says. “I’ve always wanted to find out why people like my father are less susceptible to lung disease than others.”

He knows genetics is part of the answer, but the mystery is yet to be solved.

Dr. Mosenifar’s fascination with how the lungs function has influenced his personal as well as his professional pursuits. He runs about 60 miles a week and has completed 78 marathons.

In this way, he takes after his athletic father. But unlike his father, Dr. Mosenifar has never smoked. When asked what he’d most like to contribute to the world in his lifetime, he says, “If I could find a therapy that would enable smokers to quit, that would be the best thing I could do for mankind.”

“I was fascinated by my father because he was an athlete and he smoked but did not develop emphysema as a lot of his friends did. I wanted to know why.”

—Zab Mosenifar, MD
He didn’t set out to become a guru, but surgeons come from around the world to learn from Robert McKenna Jr., MD. He teaches them how to perform a minimally invasive procedure for lung cancer surgery that he developed. It’s a rare skill that also brings patients from distant places to Cedars-Sinai.

For Dr. McKenna, surgical director of the Women’s Guild Lung Institute, teaching is a way to help more patients. It also energizes his creative process. “I am always looking at what we do to develop new treatments and trying to think of ways to do it better,” he says.

He pioneered a procedure called video-assisted thoracoscopic surgery (VATS) two decades ago by doing what comes naturally—using his “3-D sense of things” to imagine the best angles for performing lung surgery through small incisions, with a small TV camera lens in the patient’s chest serving as his guide.

Dr. McKenna’s procedure produces the same results as traditional, rib-spreading surgery—with quicker recovery, less pain, and fewer complications. Some of his patients have even been able to get back to strenuous activities such as tennis and skiing less than a week after surgery.

For many surgeons, the VATS technique is challenging. “It is not easy to perform major surgery while looking at a video screen,” says Dr. McKenna.

The minimally invasive procedure is used in 95 percent of the operations Dr. McKenna’s team performs while, across the nation, only 5 percent of major lung resections are done this way. He hopes to change this. In addition to training surgeons at Cedars-Sinai, he travels around the world to share his knowledge. And his 3-D mind keeps moving—always seeking a new angle for the next revolution in lung surgery.

“I’m proud of the people I’ve trained who are scattered around the world, using what they’ve learned to help patients. And I love it when they discover something they can teach me.”

—Robert McKenna Jr., MD

“Targeted therapies have already made it possible to manage some breast cancers as a chronic disease. We will do the same for lung cancer. We have the understanding. It can be done.”

—Mark I. Greene, MD, PhD
“Losses are a driving force in life,” says Mark I. Greene, MD, PhD, reflecting on how his career came to focus on a single purpose—beating cancer. The disease limited both of his parents’ lives before he finished his medical training. Later, it cut short his sister’s life.

His current work builds on many years of basic research on the biology of cancer. His top priority: transferring basic science to the clinic with a new medication that will help patients survive lung cancer, the disease that led to his father’s demise. “We are on the verge of developing a drug that could go the next step,” he says.

Dr. Greene is research director of the Women’s Guild Lung Institute at Cedars-Sinai. His finding 25 years ago led to the development of Herceptin®, which makes it possible to treat some forms of breast cancer like a chronic disease. His work at Harvard University became the basis of a new approach to cancer treatment known as targeted therapy.

It’s all about outsmarting cancer cells and targeting the process that makes cells malignant. Dr. Greene discovered years ago that a specific protein and affiliated gene that causes breast cancer could be turned off by targeting it with an antibody. Turning off that protein’s “cancer-causing properties” made malignant cells behave more like normal cells and become more responsive to chemotherapy, radiation, or the body’s own immune system.

This approach can be used to develop targeted therapies that could make many, if not all cancers manageable. Dr. Greene’s laboratory is within two years of beginning clinical trials on a drug that could make many types of lung cancer treatable.

A powerful influence behind his decision to bring this work to the Lung Institute was Women’s Guild’s commitment to research: “What excites me about Cedars-Sinai is that the community is actively engaged in changing the direction of science.”

—I’m proud of the people I’ve trained who are scattered around the world, using what they’ve learned to help patients. And I love it when they discover something they can teach me.”

—Robert McKenna Jr., MD

“Targeted therapies have already made it possible to manage some breast cancers as a chronic disease. We will do the same for lung cancer. We have the understanding. It can be done.”

—Mark I. Greene, MD, PhD
She cried. She got angry. And then she got busy.

Learning she had breast cancer at 36 was a transforming experience for actress Christina Applegate. It led her to a new role— that of an advocate for prevention and early detection of breast cancer in young women.

“It feels like my purpose in life is finally being realized,” she says.

Christina was diagnosed and treated at Cedars-Sinai’s Saul and Joyce Brandman Breast Center—A Project of Women’s Guild at the Samuel Oschin Comprehensive Cancer Institute. The Center offers patients the latest risk-assessment and treatment methods, and, with Women’s Guild support, conducts research on new methods of cancer detection and treatment.

Center director Edward H. Phillips, MD, led Christina’s healthcare team. Because her mother was treated for breast cancer at 38, she was advised to get an MRI as an extra precaution. Early-stage cancer was found in her right breast. After a genetic test showed a high risk that it would develop further, she decided to have a double mastectomy and reconstructive surgery. “I underwent four surgeries in 2008, and every single person I encountered during my time at Cedars-Sinai was incredible,” she says.

That includes the patient relations representative who mentioned to Christina that many high-risk young women go without MRIs because they can’t afford the test or their insurance company

“I come from a high-risk family, and I didn’t think breast cancer would happen to me. I have a lot of fire in my belly to go out and do everything I can to help educate young women.”

—Christina Applegate
won’t pay for it. She tucked this information away until she had the
strength to do something about it. After she emerged from her ordeal
cancer-free, she formed Right Action for Women, a foundation that
encourages other young women to get the type of screening that
saved her own life.

“IM A MIRACLE OF HEALTH”

Christina Applegate has been in the public eye all her life. She was
three months old when she made her debut on Days of Our Lives. As a
teenager, she landed the role of Kelly Bundy, which she would play for
10 years on the popular sitcom, Married…with Children. She was starring
in the ABC sitcom Samantha Who? when she was diagnosed with cancer.

Christina says she is grateful that her successful TV, film, and stage
career has put her in a position to call attention to the importance
of early detection of breast cancer. “Being candid is crucial to getting
the message across,” she says, so she talks openly about her treatment
as well as the sense of loss she struggled with after her mastectomy,
her moments of anger and self-pity—and the laughter that helped
her through it all.

There are days when the magnitude of what she’s been through
catches up to her. “It’s easy to slip back into feeling sorry for
yourself,” she shares, adding that she’s too busy with her career and
foundation work to dwell on negative thoughts. She has a quick
way to pick herself up. She looks in the bathroom mirror where she
has written affirmations in red lipstick: “I’m a miracle of health;
I’m a miracle of joy.”

Christina also draws inspiration from the young women who
thank her for encouraging them to get MRIs. “Most women who have
the test are fine, but I’ve had many tell me that they were diagnosed
with cancer. I feel so blessed that I’ve been able to help them.”

“I come from a high-risk family, and I didn’t think breast
cancer would happen to me. I have a lot of
fire in my belly to go out and do
everything I can to help educate
young women.”

—Christina Applegate
A Women’s Guild Timeline

1961 Women’s Guild was the first organization credited with hosting glamorous movie premieres as fundraisers. Guests at the premiere of West Side Story included (from left) Harniet Deutsch, Anita May, Rita Moreno, and George Chakiris.

1962 The Gala Committee planning the premiere of Lawrence of Arabia. Suzanne Cummings, Beverly Mitchell (standing), Evelyn Clayburgh, Eden Marx (Mrs. Groucho, standing), Mildred Allenberg, and Andrea May Stein.

1963 Barbra Streisand at the premiere of The Way We Were. Four Streisand films premiered at Guild galas.

1962 Doris Vidor and Cary Grant at the Lawrence of Arabia premiere gala at the Beverly Hilton Hotel. The event raised money for free bed care at what was then Cedars of Lebanon Hospital.

1965 Premiere chairs Rosalind Russell and Elizabeth Taylor. The 1965 galas featured Doctor Zhivago. Throughout the 1960s, the Guild funded refurbished rooms, and provided over 240,000 days of free hospital care to the needy. Total fund raising passed $1 million.

1973 Women’s Guild helped establish a Pulmonary Endoscopy Room at the Medical Center. To celebrate their 25th anniversary, Women’s Guild held a jubilee in 1982. Johnny Carson and Women’s Guild member Joanna Carson were among the guests.

1981 A doctor demonstrates new equipment donated by Women’s Guild. In the 1980s, the Guild financed the purchase of state-of-the-art equipment throughout the Medical Center, from pediatric intensive care units to microscopes and lasers, as well as research funding, including the Mildred Allenberg Research & Education Endowment Fund.


1983 Women’s Guild raises $230,000 to the Cedars-Sinai Department of Physical Medicine to implement the Women’s Guild “Easy Street” rehabilitation project—a facility to help disabled patients adjust and return to an active community life. In 1994, Pet Assisted Therapy begins with the support of Women’s Guild.

1990 The Guild gives $200,000 to the Cedars-Sinai Women’s Health to C. Noel Barney Marz, MD, (center) to help her continue her study of the differences in heart health between men and women.

1976 Guild members Patty Rucker and Joanne Kasberg visit construction of the new Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. In 1976, Guild funds created the 8th Floor Women’s Guild Pavilion.

1985 The Duchess of Kent visiting a patient in the hospice program.

2003 Judy Briskin (left) and Vera Guerin (right) present the Women’s Guild Endowed Chair in Women’s Health to C. Noel Barney Marz, MD, (center) to help her continue her study of the differences in heart health between men and women.

2007 The members of the 2007 Women’s Guild Board; their fundraising activities currently underwrite nine programs and projects at the Medical Center. They have contributed more than $40 million to research, education, and clinical care at Cedars Sinai.

The Duchess of Kent visiting a patient in the hospice program. The members of the 2007 Women’s Guild Board; their fundraising activities currently underwrite nine programs and projects at the Medical Center. They have contributed more than $40 million to research, education, and clinical care at Cedars Sinai.
Lori Kupetz was in her late 30s when she made a lifesaving decision to schedule an appointment with C. Noel Bairey Merz, MD. Lori had been suffering from severe chest pain for a year. An active mother of two, she had seen several other heart specialists elsewhere and been through a number of tests. None revealed what was wrong. When she was ultimately referred to a psychiatrist, her instincts told her not to give up.

Then she heard about the state-of-the-art screening and diagnostic testing that was being done at the Cedars-Sinai Heart Institute’s Women’s Heart Center. Within days of seeing Dr. Bairey Merz, she had the diagnosis every other doctor and every other test had missed: fatty plaque build-up in the arteries of her heart. Emergency triple bypass surgery gave Lori her life back—and reaffirmed the importance of Bairey Merz’s trailblazing work.

Patients like Lori are the impetus behind the career of this international authority on preventive cardiology and women’s heart health. “What happened to Lori exemplifies our cultural misunderstanding that young women are not at risk for heart disease, despite the fact that this disease kills more young women than breast cancer,” she says.
LOOKING OUT FOR WOMEN’S HEALTH

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for women in the U.S., yet only 12 percent of the nation’s cardiologists are women. Early in her career, Dr. Bairey Merz saw something that had eluded many other doctors: heart disease is different in women than in men. Researchers had the same blind spot. As a result, the most common methods of diagnosing and treating heart disease are based on what works for men.

Women’s Guild recognized a need and stepped in. The group gave Dr. Bairey Merz a crucial asset: an endowed chair to provide ongoing support for her research. As Women’s Guild Endowed Chair in Women’s Health and director of the Women’s Heart Center, she is doing everything in her power to close what she sees as a 50-year gap in knowledge about heart disease in women vs. men. She is a national leader in this effort, serving as chair of the Women’s Ischemic Syndrome Evaluation (WISE) study, a landmark National Institutes of Health project that is increasing understanding of heart disease in women like Lori Kupetz.

And in her broader work as director of the Preventive and Rehabilitative Cardiac Center at the Heart Institute, she does research on the impact of stress and exercise on heart disease risk. Encouraged by the decline in heart attacks and in the need for cardiac intensive care over the past 25 years, she says, “Our focus on screening and prevention seems to be making a difference. Hopefully, in the next 25 years, we’ll see a lot more progress as a result of better prevention strategies.”

“There are far too many stories of young women who die of heart attacks because their symptoms go undiagnosed. It’s tragic. But we’re making progress in diagnosing and treating heart disease in women.”

—Noel Bairey Merz, MD
Andy Martin will always be grateful for the visits he received from a gentle 117-pound golden retriever named Chase during his month-long stay in the HIV/AIDS unit at Cedars-Sinai.

While his mother, Gloria, was at his side every day, he had few visitors. The first time Chase came to his bedside with owner Barbara Berkowitz, Andy was amazed. He couldn’t believe a dog—particularly one so large—would be allowed in the hospital. But Barbara explained that she and Chase were volunteers with the hospital’s pet visitation program. POOCH (Pets Offer Ongoing Care and Healing) was brought to the HIV/AIDS unit by Women’s Guild as part of its support for the HIV/AIDS and Immune Disorders Center at Cedars-Sinai.

“I was so sick at that time,” Andy recalls. “Every time someone came to the door, it was with a needle. Every single movement hurt, and every day was hard to get through. Chase was the good part. He’d get halfway on the bed and put his head on my arm and just be there for me. He brought happiness and gave me something to look forward to.”

When Andy left Cedars-Sinai in 2005, he thought the end was near. His mother arranged for hospice care at her North Hollywood apartment. He held onto his memories of Chase’s visits, but never imagined a time would come when he would see his canine friend again.

“My Good Constant”

“I was in such pain, and suddenly this beautiful dog was in front of me, and I didn’t think about where I was anymore.”

—Andy Martin
ADVANCING HIV/AIDS TREATMENT

Women’s Guild has been supporting the HIV/AIDS and Immune Disorders Center at Cedars-Sinai for nearly two decades, over a period that has seen great strides in prolonging the lives of HIV-positive individuals and improving their quality of life. The center provides specialized inpatient and outpatient care for people with HIV/AIDS.

Cedars-Sinai’s strengths in this field include offering the most accurate testing procedures and advanced therapies available and conducting research that could result in a new wave of more effective treatments.

“Women’s Guild has funded much-needed research that is bringing us closer to finding a vaccine to prevent this disease and to developing promising new medications,” says W. David Hardy, MD, director of Infectious Diseases and medical director of the HIV/AIDS Patient Care and Research Program.

Andy Martin is grateful for the care he received in the HIV/AIDS and Immune Disorders Center at Cedars-Sinai. “The medical staff did everything they could, and everyone was very good to me,” he says. Being there as long as he was, Andy got to know every nurse on the floor. “They were all excellent,” he says. “They even looked after my mom. One day, a nurse bundled up two blankets and ran down the hall to put them in her arms while they were still warm. That was really special.”

“I was in such pain, and suddenly this beautiful dog was in front of me, and I didn’t think about where I was anymore.”

—Andy Martin
POOCH, the volunteer program that brought Andy and Chase together, was launched in 1992 and now involves more than 40 well-trained pets and their owners who visit patients around the hospital on a regular basis.

Dogs must have the right temperament—calm, comfortable with strangers, and not easily distracted—to be admitted to the POOCH program. Chase was a natural. “He’s a lovely dog, kind and sweet. He has a soothing presence that’s very healing,” says Barbara Berkowitz.

Chase went through his own health crisis in Fall 2009, when he was diagnosed with cancer. “Patients find him even more inspiring when they hear about his experience as a cancer survivor,” Barbara says.

Andy Martin spent six months in hospice care after leaving Cedars-Sinai in 2005. He stopped looking in the mirror “because I didn’t look like me anymore.” But as he was preparing to die, he suddenly started to improve. He noticed the normal color coming back to his skin. Eventually, he told the hospice team it was time for them to leave so he could prepare to live.

He was bedridden for two years and had to learn to walk again but gradually gained strength and began rebuilding his life. A high point in his recovery was a reunion with Chase at Barbara’s home. Andy’s eyes welled up as he embraced Chase. “It was nice to see him looking so good.” Andy looks forward to the day when he will be well enough to follow in Chase’s footsteps and become a volunteer who offers support to AIDS patients. “I know there are a lot of people in my situation who don’t have anyone. Chase was my good constant. Everyone needs that.”

“Chase gives patients hope that things will get back to normal.”
—Barbara Berkowitz

CHASE’S SOOTHING PRESENCE

Women’s Guild and Cedars-Sinai
Discoveries that open new frontiers in medicine happen when the right forces converge in the right place at the right time. Among these forces at Cedars-Sinai is the leadership of remarkable individuals like Vera Guerin.

Ralph Waldo Emerson could have been talking about the impact of her philanthropy when he said, “The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn.”

The former Women’s Guild president and longtime Board member—who also serves on Cedars-Sinai’s Board of Directors—has been active in the Guild for more than two decades. Along with husband Paul, she took the lead in the campaign to raise $50 million for the Women’s Guild Lung Institute by making a historic $5 million gift.

Vera has asthma, and she has seen friends who had never smoked die of lung cancer. But her gift reflects a concern that goes far beyond the personal. “More than 35 million people in this country suffer from pulmonary diseases. People of all ages are affected,” she explains. “This project is an opportunity for Women’s Guild to have a greater impact than ever before.”

She says she feels at home with Women’s Guild because it’s the kind of group that gets things done. “Everyone works as a team, and we can see accomplishments at Cedars-Sinai that might not have been possible without our support. Women’s Guild has always had momentum, and it’s exciting to be part of that.”
Judy Briskin, a longtime member who succeeded Vera as Women’s Guild president, says of her friend, “Vera epitomizes the qualities that characterize our membership—she’s brilliant, dynamic, and deeply committed to Cedars-Sinai.”

Like many Guild members—from young mothers to grandmothers—Vera’s commitment grows out of a close connection to the Medical Center, where her children and grandchildren were born and other family members have received care she calls “superb.”

“I’m extremely proud of Cedars-Sinai, and I’m proud to be working with so many thoughtful, compassionate, dedicated women who give freely and generously to support Guild projects that truly make a difference in patients’ lives,” she says.

She points out that many talents are represented among the members of Women’s Guild. “We have lawyers, accountants, interior designers, editors, marketing experts, entrepreneurs—you name it. Everyone contributes special skills to help us succeed as a group.”

She doesn’t know what the next big step will be for Women’s Guild, but she’s confident the group will still be going strong when it’s time to mark its 100th anniversary. And from the gifts the Guild inspires, she hopes to see a thousand forests grow.
Women’s Guild members tend to stay involved for the long term. It’s a joy to work with so many high-energy, multi-talented women who love Cedars-Sinai as much as I do.”

—Vera Guerin