A program of research into Parkinson’s disease and related movement disorders will be created at Nevada, thanks to generous lifetime and estate gifts from the late Lillian Gilbert.

Parkinson’s disease currently affects an estimated 1 million people in the United States and as many as 10 million individuals worldwide. Though many medications and treatments have been developed to manage the symptoms of the disease, there is currently no known cure. Lillian’s generosity will create an endowed fund to support movement disorder research at the basic science and clinical levels. Her gifts will also create the Harry and Lillian Gilbert Movement Disorders Chair Endowment to support a faculty position within the School of Medicine that will focus on translational clinical research in movement disorders.

“Parkinson’s disease and other neurodegenerative disorders are frustrating and challenging for patients and their families; part of the frustration is that there is so much about these diseases that we just don’t know,” said Dr. Thomas L. Schwenk, dean of the University of Nevada, Reno School of Medicine and vice president of the Division of Health Sciences. “Support for an endowed chair will allow us to recruit an outstanding physician scientist who can focus on clinical research that will actually change the way we care for these diseases. The research endowment will enhance this work by supporting both clinical and basic science research on the fundamental causes of movement disorders, hopefully to one day provide relief for patients grappling with these diseases and the families who support them. We are immensely grateful that Mrs. Gilbert decided to commit her resources to help patients and family members who will experience what she and her husband once experienced.”

Lillian was known as a woman who got things done. When she and her husband, Harry, settled in Reno in the early 1940s, she took a position in jewelry sales for the high-end women’s department store Joseph Magnin Co., then located on Virginia Street. With tenacity, a tough work ethic and a belief that she was just as capable as any man, she worked her way up to become the store’s general manager, a role she held for parts of four decades.

In the early 1970s, however, Lillian met a challenge that no one is prepared to tackle: Harry was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease. She cared for Harry throughout the disease’s progression until his passing in 1977. After Harry’s death, Lillian’s personal experience with degenerative illness led her to become a strong supporter of the University of Nevada, Reno School of Medicine. When she passed away in late 2015 at the age of 101, she left behind a generous gift from her estate in addition to the gifts she made during her lifetime, with the goal of fostering research and clinical treatments for Parkinson’s disease and other movement disorders.

“Lillian was a remarkable person, and in her passing she has given a remarkable gift to the University and the individuals who are affected by Parkinson’s and related diseases,” said Vice President of Development and Alumni Relations John Carothers. “I believe she would be happy to know that her generosity will provide hope for those who need it.”

 Gifts from the late Lillian Gilbert, pictured here in 2015, will establish a program of research into Parkinson’s disease and related movement disorders at the University, and will create a faculty position to study movement disorders at the School of Medicine. Lillian’s husband, Harry, passed away in 1977 after a battle with Parkinson’s disease.