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Johnson legacy is nearly 50 years of giving



While Kathy and Roger Johnson have lived in Florida for more than 33 years, the couple shares a great fondness for a state nearly 1,500 miles away.

Born and raised in Nebraska, the Johnsons remain connected to their native state and to the state’s university where they both earned degrees. Over the years Kathleen and Roger have made numerous charitable gifts benefiting communities in Nebraska and their alma mater.

“Having been affiliated with the University of Nebraska for more than 47 years, it has been an honor to give back,” said Roger, who received a degree in pharmacy in 1960. “We feel so blessed, and this has been a way for us to say thank you.”

Roger also volunteers his time as a member of the College of Pharmacy Alumni Association board of directors.

Kathy, who grew up near Page, Neb., where her family first homesteaded in 1883, earned her bachelor of science degree in nursing from UNMC in 1963. She went on to receive a master’s degree in geriatric nursing and to “work in practically every field of nursing,” she quipped.

Later in her career Kathy served as director of the memory disorder clinic at the University of South Florida before retiring. She now volunteers as an ombudsman for the elderly.

Roger is a native of Nebraska City. Shortly after graduation from UNMC, he began working for Walgreens, where he remained for the duration of his career. He worked in Lincoln, Omaha, Fort Dodge, Iowa, and Sioux City, Iowa. In 1974, the Johnsons were transferred to Tampa, Fla. There, Roger worked as a district manager supervising store operations for the entire west coast of Florida until his retirement in 1995.

As UNMC alumni and donors, the Johnsons said they are pleased to be part of the medical center’s progress, growth and pride. Through their charitable giving and philanthropic plans, they have designated support for faculty in the College of Nursing and student scholarships in the College of Pharmacy.

Kathy, for example, has directed funds through her estate to create the Kathleen Walker Johnson Chair in Gerontological Nursing at UNMC. Virginia Tilden, D.N.Sc., dean of the UNMC College of Nursing, said the college is deeply grateful for the Johnson’s support and that endowed faculty positions, such as the Johnson Chair, “do many things.”

“They allow us to attract to UNMC the best minds nationally in nursing education, and they allow us to protect faculty time for research in a focused area such as gerontological nursing, which ultimately helps patients and inspires students.,” Dr. Tilden said.

“Kathy Johnson has devoted her career to helping older adults. This endowed chair in her name helps ensure that the UNMC College of Nursing will shine in gerontological nursing education.”

For the past several years the Johnsons also have funded scholarships for UNMC pharmacy students interested in retail or community pharmacy. These scholarships, combined with the Roger G. Johnson Walgreen’s Retail Pharmacy Scholarship, provide more than \$69,000 in student support each year.

For Nazifa Obaidi, a second-year pharmacy student, financial assistance is just one of the benefits the scholarship offers.

“I am so grateful for the assistance the Johnsons give to students at UNMC,” she said. “And the relationship that Roger builds with us also is greatly appreciated. He is down to earth and relates to students well. And despite his busy schedule, he always takes the time each semester to meet with us.”