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**CEDARS-SINAI'S FIRST HEART TRANSPLANT RECIPIENT, 82,
RETURNS FOR 20TH ANNIVERSARY REUNION**

*Dec. 10 event marks 20 years of Cedars-Sinai Medical Center's
Heart and Lung Transplant programs.*

LOS ANGELES (Dec. 9, 2008) – After two other transplant centers turned her down, Simi Valley resident Laurel C. Labash became the first patient to benefit from the new Heart Transplant Program at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. The date was Dec. 22, 1988, and on Dec. 10, 2008 Labash, now 82, will be among a host of transplant recipients returning to Cedars-Sinai as the hospital celebrates the 20th anniversary of its Heart and Lung Transplant programs.

Now one of the top heart and lung transplant centers in the country, Cedars-Sinai is on pace this calendar year to transplant 40 hearts and 20 lungs, and implant 40 ventricular assist devices (VADs) Ventricular assist devices can assume most of the pumping function of a weak heart, either until a donor organ becomes available for transplantation or indefinitely.

The 20th anniversary celebration will be held in Cedars-Sinai's Harvey Morse Conference Room from 4 to 6:30 p.m., Wednesday, Dec. 10. Among those expected to speak at the reunion are Alfredo Trento, M.D., director of the Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery at the Cedars-Sinai Heart Institute; Sinan Simsir, M.D., surgical director of the Heart Transplant Program; Lawrence S.C. Czer, M.D., medical director of the Heart Transplant Program; Ernst R. Schwarz, M.D., Ph.D., medical co-director of the Heart Transplant Program; and George E. Chaux, M.D., medical director of the Lung Transplant Program.

About 300 of the approximately 350 living heart transplant patients and 100 living lung transplant patients are expected to attend the reunion. Also in attendance will be guests of the patients plus physicians, surgeons and other personnel from the transplant programs.

When Labash's symptoms of heart failure began, she initially thought she was having an asthma attack. She went to a hospital and underwent tests, but an allergic reaction to a medication caused her to go into cardiac arrest. With the help of family and friends, Labash got an appointment with cardiologist William Mandel, M.D., and transferred to Cedars-Sinai.

"It was Dr. Mandel who said they were going to start a transplant program (at Cedars-Sinai) and he thought I was a candidate for it. I can't even tell you the shock I was in," Labash said.

Cardiothoracic surgeon Alfredo Trento had recently been recruited to Cedars-Sinai to help launch the heart and lung transplant programs, and immediately upon his arrival Mandel presented Labash's case. "He

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(Trento) came up to the room and said, 'I've read your records and I see no reason we can't do this,'" Labash recalled.

Two other transplant programs had already decided against putting her on their transplant waiting lists because her age and medical condition made her a high-risk candidate, she said. The mother of seven children – now with 12 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren – Labash spent nearly three months at Cedars-Sinai, living with an implanted defibrillator that monitored her heart and shocked it into normal rhythm when needed.

The device kept her alive, but it was less sophisticated than those in use today and delivered frequent, jarring jolts.

"In the very beginning, when they said 'heart transplant' to me, it was a shock. But as the days and weeks went by, believe me, it was like, when and how fast, and let's do it," said Labash, whose family spent many hours with her in the hospital and became well acquainted with the nurses, coordinators and other members of the transplant team. Several of the original team members – Linda Piponniau, R.N., who now serves as lead transplant coordinator – will be on hand to greet Labash when she returns for the reunion.

Long-time residents of Simi Valley, Labash and her husband moved to Arizona in the late 1990s. After his death two years ago, she returned to Simi Valley, where she has family and old friends. Although her asthma has slowed her down, nothing prevents her from enjoying her favorite things in life, such as sampling the fare of new restaurants.

"I don't get around as well as I used to without a wheelchair. In the apartment, I'm fine. But if I go shopping with the girls or my family, we take a wheelchair with us. I can get into restaurants just fine, though. If we park in front, I can find my way in beautifully, no problem at all," she said, laughing.

"I've had 20 years more than I expected," she said, recalling a conversation she had in 1988 when Trento discussed her options and suggested the transplant could give her five more years. "That's what he promised me – five. And I said at the time, 'You know what? I'll promise you 20,' so I've made it."

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