On a rainy January night, Gilbert B. McMaster pulls up his white station wagon to the activity center entrance to let his wife out under the covered walkway. Once inside, Margaret McBride McMaster doesn’t have to wait long before her escort of 54 years appears, a bit damp, but at ease in his tie and tweed sports coat.

They walk back to table 42 in the dining room. Some evenings, they eat alone; other nights, they’re joined by old friends or new acquaintances at Sherwood Oaks, a retirement community in Pittsburgh’s North Hills. On this night, over lamb chops and collard greens, the McMasters travel back to a time when Pittsburgh’s steel mills were gearing up for World War II, and Gilbert was embarking on his medical career.

In 1939, McMaster graduated from the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. Now 87, he still recalls the trek from his parents’ Mt. Lebanon home into Oakland for class. He would pack his mother’s car full of other Pitt and Carnegie Tech students, all happy for the ride.

McMaster didn’t really come to medicine; medicine came to him. Growing up in the home of a physician, he simply assumed he too would be a doctor. His father, Gilbert C. McMaster, earned an MD from Pitt in 1903. His diploma bore the stamp of John Brashear, acting chancellor of the Western University of Pennsylvania (as Pitt was then known). The elder McMaster practiced general medicine.

What started out for McMaster as a calm assumption turned into true professional zeal. Trained as an anesthesiologist, he approached wartime and peacetime assignments alike with the same quiet determination. McMaster served as a battalion surgeon during World War II in Hawaii, Okinawa, and the Philippines. During the Korean War, he was called to duty at a military hospital in Virginia to care for long-term casualties. In more peaceful times, he practiced throughout the Pittsburgh area.

He has a wish: that future MDs will always answer the phone as he did in the middle of the night, saying, “Yes, I’ll be there,” no matter where needed. To give a boost to Pitt students starting out their careers, the McMasters recently made a planned gift commitment to establish the Gilbert C. McMaster (1903) and Gilbert B. McMaster (1939) Scholarship Fund.

“We gave because we think Pitt is an important part of the community,” notes McMaster. “We felt a scholarship fund was most appropriate, considering the debts these students rack up.”

It’s time to bid good-night in the dining room, so McMaster fetches the station wagon, then guides it around the curves and dips leading back to their apartment. Sherwood Oaks lacks the intensity of the operating suites in which McMaster spent so much of his life. And the North Hills is far removed from Okinawa. It has been nearly 20 years since this doctor’s hands administered relief to a patient. On this dark and slippery night however, his touch at the wheel still is swift—and sure.