Alzheimer’s

UCI MIND, the University of California-Irvine’s Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center, raised $370,000 at its 9th annual gala held at Balboa Bay Resort in Newport Beach last month, a record for the organization. Proceeds will be used to support Alzheimer’s research.

The center is one of 32 Alzheimer’s disease research centers funded by the National Institute on Aging, a department under the National Institute of Health, and one of 10 funded by the California Department of Public Health.

It’s spearheading a study on the correlation between Down syndrome and Alzheimer’s disease, with the intent to improve understanding of brain aging and dementia in Down syndrome.

Dr. Ira Lott, leading the study, said the connection between the two diseases goes back to the 1940s.

People with Down syndrome are born with an extra copy of chromosome 21, which carries the APP gene.

This gene produces a protein called amyloid precursor protein; too much of that protein leads to a buildup of protein clumps called beta-amyloid plaques that cause problems on how brain cells function and increases the risk of developing Alzheimer’s dementia.

Almost all people with Down syndrome develop these plaques by age 40, according to NIH.

“They [Down syndrome patients] don’t always develop dementia, there’s an incremental increase [of the risk] with age, but the prevalence of dementia [among this group] is much higher than the typical population,” he said.

Lott, professor and chair of pediatrics at UCI’s school of medicine, said the study is in its third year.

The university also recruited Dr. Liz Head from the University of Kentucky in November to be part of Lott’s study.

More information on UCI MIND’s research projects are available via UCI C2C Registry’s website.