

focus on patient care, vision research, and service:

## *Our Champion Support Team Making a Difference*

• DMEI •  
**inVIsion**

A PUBLICATION OF THE DEAN MCGEE EYE INSTITUTE

patient care  
education  
vision research  
leadership  
service

# DMEI clinical directory

## Oklahoma Health Center

DMEI Acers and Parke Pavilions  
608 Stanton L. Young Blvd. ■ Oklahoma City, OK 73104  
405.271.6060

### Comprehensive Ophthalmology/ Cataract and Ophthalmic Surgery/ Premium Cataract Surgery

405.271.1090 ■ 800.787.9012

John M. Bell, MD\*  
Cynthia A. Bradford, MD\*  
Victoria A. Bugg, MD\*  
Layne E. Goetzinger, MD\*  
David W. Jackson, MD\*  
Carolyn E. Kloek, MD\*  
Andrew T. Melson, MD\*  
Deana S. Watts, MD

### Contact Lenses

405.271.6084 ■ 800.787.9012

Rachel M. Caywood, OD, FAAO  
Scott Samples, NCLE-AC, CPOT

### Cornea (Surgical) and External Disease/ Corneal Cross-Linking

405.271.1095 ■ 800.787.9017

Aman Mittal, MD\*  
Kamran M. Riaz, MD\*  
Rhea L. Siatkowski, MD\*

### Cornea (Medical) and External Disease

405.271.1095 ■ 800.787.9017

Thomas C. Wolf, MD

### Glaucoma

405.271.1093 ■ 800.787.9015

Andrew K. Bailey, MD\*  
Ben J. Harvey, MD\*  
Mahmoud A. Khaimi, MD\*  
Gregory L. Skuta, MD

### LASIK and Refractive Surgery

405.271.2500 ■ 877.406.4193

David W. Jackson, MD\*  
Aman Mittal, MD\*  
Kamran M. Riaz, MD\*

580.250.5855

Jean R. Hausheer, MD, FACS\*

### Low Vision Rehabilitation

405.271.1793 ■ 800.787.9012

Rebecca K. Morgan, MD

### Neuro-Ophthalmology/Adult Strabismus

405.271.1091 ■ 800.787.9013

Andrew T. Melson, MD\*  
James C. O'Brien, MD  
Anil D. Patel, MD, FRCSC, FACS

405.271.1094 ■ 800.787.9016

R. Michael Siatkowski, MD, MBA

### Ocular Oncology/Ophthalmic Pathology

405.271.7825 ■ 800.787.9012

Brian K. Firestone, MD\*

### Ocular Prosthetics

405.271.3391 ■ 800.787.9012

Nancy A. Lambert, BCO

### Ophthalmic Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery

405.271.1096 ■ 800.787.9018

Thai Do, MD (Fall 2022)  
Annie Moreau, MD, FACS  
Scott C. Sigler, MD  
Jeremy F. Tan, MD

### Optical Services

405.271.6174 ■ 800.787.9012

### Optometry

405.271.1090 ■ 800.787.9012

Rachel M. Caywood, OD, FAAO  
Dana M. Garber, OD, FAAO  
Brandalyn D. Loyko, OD  
Jessica L. Lucas, OD, FAAO

### Pediatric Ophthalmology/Strabismus

405.271.1094 ■ 800.787.9016

Maria E. Lim, MD\*\*  
R. Michael Siatkowski, MD, MBA  
Tammy L. Yanovitch, MD, MHSc  
Emily M. Zepeda, MD\*\*

Laurie A. Hahn-Parrott, CO, COT, MBA  
(orthoptist)

### Retina/Vitreous

405.271.1092 ■ 800.787.9014

Reagan H. Bradford Jr., MD  
Razek G. Coussa, MD (Fall 2022)  
Stephen R. Fransen, MD  
Ronald M. Kingsley, MD  
Jila Noori, MD  
Vinay A. Shah, MD

### Stephenson Refractive Surgery/Laser Center

405.271.2500 ■ 877.406.4193

### Trauma/Emergency

405.271.6060 ■ 800.787.9012

### Uveitis

405.271.1092 ■ 800.787.9014

Jila Noori, MD  
Thomas C. Wolf, MD

## Dean McGee Eye Institute Satellite Locations

### NORTHWEST OKC

3500 N.W. 56th, #101, Oklahoma City, OK 73112  
405.271.9500

### Comprehensive Ophthalmology/Cataract and Ophthalmic Surgery/Premium Cataract Surgery

Ralph B. Hester III, MD\*

### Ophthalmic Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery

Annie Moreau, MD, FACS

### Optometry

Tasha J. Schellenberg, OD

### Optical Services

405.271.9506

### EDMOND

1005 Medical Park Blvd., Edmond, OK 73013  
405.271.0913

### Comprehensive Ophthalmology/Cataract and Ophthalmic Surgery

John M. Bell, MD\*

### Glaucoma/Comprehensive Ophthalmology/ Cataract and Ophthalmic Surgery/Premium Cataract Surgery

Andrew K. Bailey, MD\*

### Neuro-Ophthalmology/Comprehensive Ophthalmology

Anil D. Patel, MD, FRCSC, FACS

### Ophthalmic Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery

Jeremy F. Tan, MD

### Optometry

Angela M. Plant, OD, FAAO  
Jessica L. Lucas, OD, FAAO

### Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus

Maria E. Lim, MD\*\*

### Optical Services

405.271.0909

### LAWTON

3201 W. Gore Blvd., #200, Lawton, OK 73505  
580.250.5855

### Comprehensive Ophthalmology/Cataract and Ophthalmic Surgery/Premium Cataract Surgery

Ann Acers-Warn, MD, MBA\*  
Jean R. Hausheer, MD, FACS\*

### Ophthalmic Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery

Jeremy F. Tan, MD

### Retina/Vitreous

Vinay A. Shah, MD

### Optical Services

580.585.5425

## McGee Eye Surgery Center

Harold Hamm Diabetes Center  
1000 N. Lincoln Blvd., Suite 150  
Oklahoma City, OK 73104

405.271.3363

Medical Director:

Robert J. Christensen, MD

\*DMEI Ophthalmologist Performing Cataract Surgery in Adults

\*\*DMEI Ophthalmologist Performing Cataract Surgery in Children

## Dean McGee Eye Institute

Home to the Department  
of Ophthalmology of the  
University of Oklahoma  
College of Medicine

**R. Michael Siatkowski, MD, MBA**  
DMEI Chief Executive Officer  
Edward L. Gaylord Professor and Chair  
David Ross Boyd Professor  
Department of Ophthalmology  
University of Oklahoma

**Gregory L. Skuta, MD**  
DMEI Past President  
David W. Parke II, MD Professor and Vice Chair  
Regents' Professor and Past Chair  
Department of Ophthalmology  
University of Oklahoma

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and Chief Financial Officer

**Mark A. Wyckoff**  
DMEI Vice President for Medical Informatics  
and Technology  
Chief Information Officer

**Jim Durbin**  
DMEI Executive Director of Development

Co-Editors  
Nicole M. Glenn  
R. Michael Siatkowski, MD, MBA  
Gregory L. Skuta, MD

Contributors  
Jim Durbin  
Melody A. Marcum, MHR

Feature Writer  
Staci Elder Hensley

Design and Layout  
Christi Cooper, Cooper & Heart Creative

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Dean McGee Eye Institute  
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405.271.1611

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The Dean McGee Eye Institute is dedicated  
to serving all Oklahomans and the global  
community through excellence and leadership in  
patient care, education, and vision research.



# • DMEI • *In*vision

WINTER 2022

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PICTURED ON FRONT COVER:

(left to right) Patrick Bishop, Nan Perkins, Jerod Warren, Cristal Phares, Rita Ward, RN, Roger Astley, and Sandra Cooper.

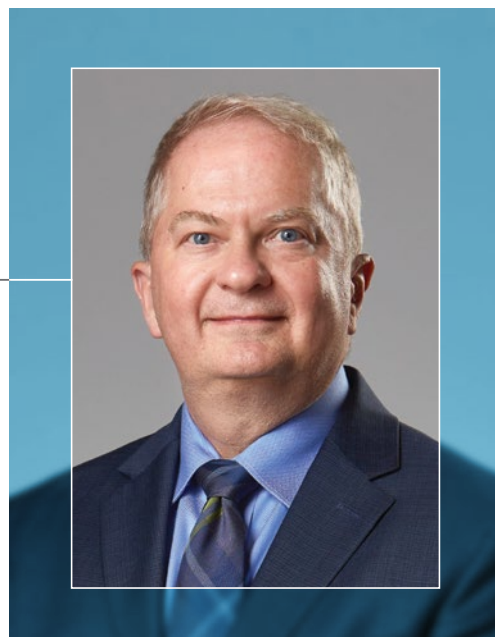


The Preferred Eye Care Provider of the OKC Thunder

## RECOGNIZING THE PEOPLE “Behind the Scenes”

**WHEN MY KIDS (AND I) WERE YOUNG,** one thing we really enjoyed were the books by Richard Scarry. “Cars and Trucks and Things that Go” and “What Do People Do All Day?” were two of our favorites. It is fascinating for children to see how things work together, for example, all the different pieces involved in driving a car, building a house, or running a store. Before I started this position, I thought I knew a reasonable amount about teamwork, systems function, and organizational behavior. But in this endeavor I have learned more than I thought possible. After a year at the helm, I am even more impressed—and humbled—by the incredible work performed by the Dean McGee Eye Institute’s (DMEI’s) most treasured asset—our people.

You are aware of many of these people from your own DMEI experiences: our doctors, our schedulers, our clinic and operating room staff, and our billing office, to name a few. There are, however, many more people behind the scenes who are just as crucial to making and keeping DMEI great. The feature article in this issue (see



*R. Michael Siatkowski, MD, MBA*

pages 49-56) highlights some of our amazing colleagues in areas such as information technology, purchasing, maintenance, and others. We so appreciate their enthusiasm, their dedication to DMEI and our patients, and their desire for excellence in what they do. They quietly and humbly give their time, energy, and resources to DMEI. It is an honor to pay tribute to them in this issue.

In addition, we are blessed by those who, behind the scenes, also quietly and humbly, share their financial resources with DMEI. As an example, there is a couple from southern Oklahoma who have faithfully donated \$100 per month in support of the Eye Institute for over three years. We are also grateful for our many employees who make annual contributions to our Patient Financial Assistance Program, vision research, or general operations.

Jim Tolbert is a man well known to all Oklahomans. As a prominent civic leader, he has championed the arts and the beautification and rejuvenation of the Bricktown and downtown areas. To us bibliophiles, he is the owner of the marvelous Full Circle Bookstore. Jim has served as a DMEI board member since the early 1970s and is also the longest-serving chair of DMEI's Board of Directors, from 1992 to 2013. Much of his work on our behalf was behind the scenes, from recruiting to fundraising to advocating tirelessly for DMEI. Recently I received a call from a friend and associate of Jim, who also wished to remain "behind the scenes." This person expressed a desire to honor Jim, and after consideration of various options, made a substantial lead gift for an endowed chair in honor of the Tolbert family (see page 27). No one could be more worthy of such an honor, and we are delighted to establish the new Tolbert Family Chair.

Elizabeth Zoernig Milam also kept a low profile, but as senior executive assistant to Dean A. McGee for many decades, she was well acquainted with the Institute's creation and journey to excellence. She was a faithful patient and donor. In fact, the parking structure that was built with our expansion in 2011 is named in her honor. But she quietly chose to honor DMEI in an even greater way. Upon her passing at age 100 in September 2019, the DMEI Foundation

became the recipient of the bulk of her \$5 million estate (see pages 28-29), the second largest personal gift in our 46-year history.

**“We are also blessed by those who, behind the scenes, also quietly and humbly, share their financial resources with DMEI.”**

The DMEI family is really a microcosm of our world. Some of us do big things in a public manner; some of us are more reserved and serve in a quieter fashion. But what we all have in common is that together we are making an impact for good. However we each support DMEI ultimately results in a better patient experience, more access to medical and surgical

care, new treatments to preserve and improve vision, and development of the next generation of outstanding doctors. In short, a better and a healthier Oklahoma.

Regardless of the manner or the magnitude, for all those who contribute to the DMEI mission—doctors, staff, alumni, patients, donors, board members—I am incredibly grateful for your support. We literally cannot do it without you.



R. Michael Siatkowski, MD, MBA  
Chief Executive Officer  
Dean McGee Eye Institute  
Edward L. Gaylord Professor and Chair  
David Ross Boyd Professor  
Department of Ophthalmology  
University of Oklahoma College of Medicine

# DR. HAUSHEER HONORED BY THE OKLAHOMA ACADEMY OF OPHTHALMOLOGY AND

**JEAN R. HAUSHEER, MD, FACS, CLINICAL PROFESSOR AT THE DEAN MCGEE EYE INSTITUTE (DMEI)** and in the University of Oklahoma (OU) Department of Ophthalmology, received the 2021 Distinguished Service Award from the Oklahoma Academy of Ophthalmology (OAO) during the OAO's 2021 annual meeting, which was held in conjunction with the Table Rock Regional Roundup in Ridgedale, Missouri, in September. The Distinguished Service Award is the OAO's highest honor and is a peer recognition award given to ophthalmologists who have exhibited a lifelong dedication to the OAO and/or to the profession.

In addition, Dr. Hausheer was honored at the *The Journal Record's* "50 Making a Difference" event held in October at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. She also received this honor in 2019. *The Journal Record's* "Woman of the Year" program, now celebrating its 41st year, recognizes Oklahoma's prominent women who epitomize leadership in both their professional endeavors and in the communities where they live. The 2021 "Woman of the Year" was Tammy Powell, president of SSM Health St. Anthony Hospital - Oklahoma City.

A native of Missouri, Dr. Hausheer attended the combined BA/MD program at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and completed her ophthalmology residency training at the



*Jean R. Hausheer, MD, FACS  
Clinical Professor*

Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. She joined DMEI/OU in January 2012, working predominantly in DMEI's Lawton clinic as a comprehensive ophthalmologist.

Dr. Hausheer has assembled a remarkable record of leadership and service. She has received the LeRoy Saunders Award from the Oklahoma Council of the Blind and the Ed Calhoun, MD Leadership in Medicine Award from the Oklahoma State Medical Association (OSMA).

She has served as president of both the OAO and OSMA, and is currently vice president of the Christian Ophthalmology Society. Dr. Hausheer also serves on the Healthier Oklahoma

# THE JOURNAL RECORD

Coalition and was appointed by the Oklahoma Attorney General to serve on the Oklahoma Opioid Overdose Fatality Review Board.

Dr. Hausheer chaired the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) Committee on Resident Education for a number of years and has served as an oral examiner for the American Board of Ophthalmology since 1994. In 2019, she served as executive editor of the third edition of the AAO's *Basic Techniques in Ophthalmic Surgery* textbook. Dr. Hausheer has participated in DMEI's global eye care program, traveling to Africa to serve patients in need, and has also volunteered with Samaritan's Purse and Mercy Ship Africa. ■



*Pictured (left to right) at The Journal Record's 2021 "50 Making A Difference" event on October 14: Jennifer Sharpe, special projects editor for The Journal Record; Dr. Jean R. Hausheer, DMEI - Lawton; and Sarah Barrow, associate publisher for The Journal Record. Photo credit: Mark Hancock.*

## Senator Lankford Visits Institute



*Pictured (left to right): Jim Durbin, DMEI executive director of development; R. Michael Siatkowski, MD, MBA, DMEI CEO and department chair; Senator James P. Lankford; and Garyl G. Geist, DMEI executive vice president and chief operating officer.*

**ON SEPTEMBER 9, 2021**, the Dean McGee Eye Institute (DMEI) had the honor of hosting United States (U.S.) Senator James P. Lankford (R-OK). Lankford's visit to the Institute included a tour and meeting with DMEI leadership. He spoke at the dedication ceremony for DMEI's facility expansion and new pavilion 10 years earlier on September 30, 2011, while a freshman U.S. Congressman.

DMEI is grateful for Senator Lankford's time, interest, and leadership in better understanding the Institute's mission and commitment to the state of Oklahoma. The Institute provides eye care for Oklahomans from all 77 of the state's counties. ■

## Two New Members Join Institute's Board of Directors

**ANDRIA STARK HEAFY AND DR. JUDY GOFORTH PARKER WERE ELECTED** to the Dean McGee Eye Institute (DMEI's) Board of Directors in 2021. The Board has been chaired by David E. Rainbolt, executive chairman of BancFirst, since 2013.



**Andria Stark Heafy** is an attorney and the co-founder of Wilshire Charitable Foundation. A native of Miami, Florida, Stark Heafy attended the Miami Police Academy and worked as a public service aide for the Miami Police Department

before moving to Oklahoma to earn her undergraduate degree in political science from the University of Oklahoma (OU). She received her law degree from Oklahoma City University, served as a legal intern during law school for the City of Oklahoma City's criminal division, and was named to the National Order of Barristers. After working as an assistant district attorney for Oklahoma County, Stark Heafy began a private law practice (1982 to 2006) with a focus on criminal defense.

The Walter J. Stark Memorial Lectureship at DMEI is named in memory of the father of Stark Heafy's late husband, Stephen Stark. Walter Stark served as administrator of DMEI from 1978 until 1991. Under his stewardship, the Institute grew dramatically from three floors with five ophthalmologists to six floors of physicians and basic scientists.

Stark Heafy and her husband, Paul Heafy, reside in Nichols Hills, Oklahoma, and Captiva Island, Florida, and have enjoyed world travel, visiting 70 countries. Together they have four adult children and three grandchildren.



**Judy Goforth Parker, PhD, APRN-CNP, FACHE**, is the Commissioner of Health Policy for the Chickasaw Nation and has worked for many years to increase the quality of health care for First Americans. She has a doctorate in nursing from

Texas Woman's University (Denton, Texas), completed her master's degree and nurse practitioner training at the OU Health Sciences Center, and earned her bachelor's degree in nursing at East Central University (Ada, Oklahoma), where she served on the faculty from 1985 to 2009.

Dr. Parker served as a Chickasaw Nation tribal legislator for five terms beginning in 1994 and stepped down in 2009 to take the role of administrator for the Chickasaw Nation Department of Health (CNDH). She subsequently served as Secretary of Health for the CNDH from 2014 to 2018.

Dr. Parker serves or has served as vice chair for the Board of Directors of Chickasaw Community Bank; on the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Blood Institute; on the Board of Trustees of the Chickasaw Foundation, Oklahoma Hospital Association, and East Central University Foundation; on the Board of Advisors for the Harold Hamm Diabetes Center; and as the Tribal Technical Advisory Group's Oklahoma City area representative to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Dr. Parker has published *Dynamic Chickasaw Women*, was an Oklahoma Book Awards finalist, and received the Gold Medal for Independent Publisher Award. She leads the development of the Chickasaw Nation's AYA Walk App, which incorporates Chickasaw history and culture with technology to motivate Chickasaw citizens and others to improve their health.

Dr. Parker resides in Ada, Oklahoma, and has two adult children and seven grandchildren. ■



# Bradley K. Farris, MD, Receives 2021 AAO Outstanding Humanitarian Service Award



*Bradley K. Farris, MD (center), receives his 2021 AAO Outstanding Humanitarian Service Award from Tamara R. Fountain, MD (left), president of the Academy, and David W. Parke II, MD (right), the AAO's chief executive officer, at the Opening Session of AAO2021 in New Orleans in November.*

**FIRST AWARDED IN 1992, THE OUTSTANDING HUMANITARIAN SERVICE AWARD** recognizes American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) members for contributions in charitable activities, care of the economically disadvantaged, and community service performed above and beyond the typical duties of an ophthalmologist. It is awarded annually to two deserving ophthalmologists.

As a 2021 recipient of this prestigious award, the Dean McGee Eye Institute's (DMEI's) Bradley K. Farris, MD, was honored during the Opening Session of the AAO's 2021 Annual Meeting on November 12 in New Orleans, Louisiana. He also was recognized at the AAO President's Reception that evening and at the DMEI and University of Oklahoma (OU) Department of Ophthalmology Alumni Reception on November 14.

Dr. Farris is currently professor emeritus in the OU College of Medicine, where he graduated from medical school, trained in neurology, and completed his ophthalmology residency. After a neuro-ophthalmology fellowship at the University of Miami's Bascom Palmer Eye Institute, Dr. Farris returned to Oklahoma City and served on the DMEI/OU faculty for 33 years. He was named a Presbyterian Health Foundation Presidential Professor in 2016.

Also an award-winning educator and compassionate neuro-ophthalmologist, Dr. Farris has been very active in caring for the underprivileged and underserved in the Oklahoma City area. However, his greatest impact relates to his and DMEI's initiatives in global eye care in China and Eswatini. DMEI's international program was named the Bradley K. Farris, MD Global Eye Care Program in his honor in 2019.

To learn more about Dr. Farris and his AAO Outstanding Humanitarian Service Award, please see DMEI *InVision*, issue 23, summer 2021, pages 8-9. To donate to the Bradley K. Farris, MD Global Eye Care Program, please go to [dmei.org/donate-now](https://dmei.org/donate-now). ■



*Among the attendees who enjoyed the DMEI and OU Department of Ophthalmology Alumni Reception on November 14 at the Sheraton New Orleans Hotel were (left to right) Susan Dewey, Dr. Steven Dewey (DMEI/OU resident alumnus – 1991), Dr. Bradley K. Farris, and Diane Farris.*

# David W. Parke II, MD, Retires as American Academy of Ophthalmology CEO After 13 Years

SERVED AS CEO OF DEAN MCGEE EYE INSTITUTE FROM 1992 TO 2009

**DAVID W. PARKE II, MD, RETIRED AS CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER (CEO)** of the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) effective February 1, 2022. Prior to assuming this role, which is the world's most prominent leadership position in organized ophthalmology, Dr. Parke served for 17 years (1992 to 2009) as president and CEO of the Dean McGee Eye Institute (DMEI) and chair of the University of Oklahoma (OU) Department of Ophthalmology.

"Under his leadership, the Academy has enjoyed tremendous success and weathered daunting challenges, growing stronger every year of his tenure," said Tamara R. Fountain, MD, president of the Academy in 2021 and DMEI's 2021 Tullos O. Coston, MD Lecturer. "From the founding of the IRIS Registry and the creation of the new public museum to leading the Academy and its members through COVID-19, he has embodied and vastly expanded the strengths of the organization."

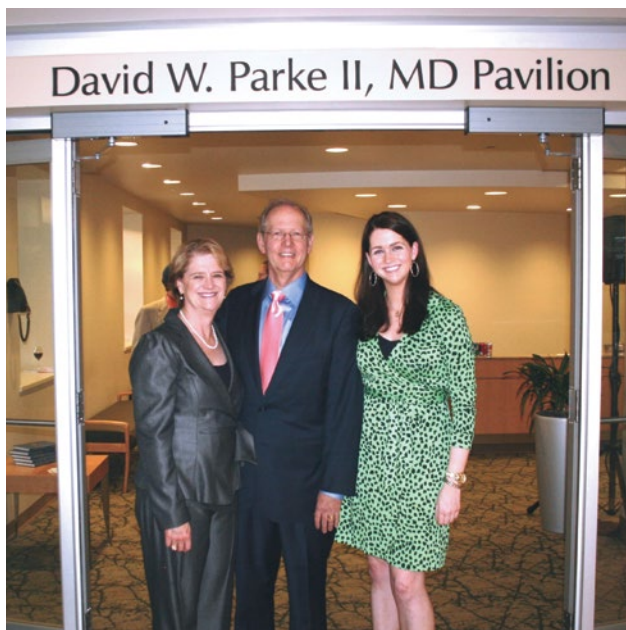
Highlights of Dr. Parke's tenure include:

- Developing the Academy's IRIS Registry (Intelligent Research in Sight), the nation's first—and now the world's largest—comprehensive eye disease registry. To date, it has amassed data on more than 70 million patients and over 400 million patient visits.
- Guiding members through the COVID-19 pandemic by providing a mix of resources for physicians and advocacy for the tools their practices required to survive, ensuring patient access and care.

- Raising an unprecedented amount of funding to support the profession, including the first publicly accessible museum dedicated to vision and eye health, the Truhlsen-Marmor Museum of the Eye. Other notable programs supported by the Academy Foundation include The H. Dunbar Hoskins Jr., MD Center for Quality Eye Care, EyeCare America, and a series of online resource centers to enhance physician education and improve patient care around the globe.
- Launching the Minority Ophthalmology Mentoring program to increase diversity in ophthalmology by helping students underrepresented in medicine learn about ophthalmology and become more competitive ophthalmology residency applicants.
- Expanding the Academy's family of journals.
- Collaborating with the American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery to develop EyeCelerator™, a series of conferences and programs that accelerate innovation in ophthalmology.
- Rebranding the Academy; updating and modernizing its logo and tagline; and engaging the public through EyeSmart to provide the most trusted and medically accurate online information about eye diseases, conditions, and injuries.

Dr. Parke has been succeeded by Stephen D. McLeod, MD, who has served as chair of the Department of Ophthalmology at the University

# American Academy of of Visionary Leadership



*On May 31, 2014, a special ceremony and unveiling was held in DMEI's Inasmuch Foundation Atrium to name its two pavilions for revered past leaders, Thomas E. Acers, MD, and David W. Parke II, MD. Dr. Parke (center) is shown with his wife (left), Dr. Julie Parke, and daughter Lindsey Ridgway (right), one of the Parkes' three children and an attorney with INTEGRIS Health in Oklahoma City. Dr. Parke helped raise \$32 million toward DMEI's expansion project.*

of California, San Francisco, as editor-in-chief of the Academy's flagship journal *Ophthalmology*, and in other leadership roles. "Dr. McLeod will inherit a fiscally-sound, well-staffed, and influential member organization," Dr. Fountain said. "I am confident the new CEO will put his own brand on the office and advance the mission of the Academy – to preserve sight and empower lives."

While expressing his gratitude for the opportunity to help lead the Academy and

serve his colleagues, their patients, and his beloved profession, Dr. Parke also recently reflected on his strong ties to DMEI. "My family and I treasure our 17 years at Dean McGee and consider ourselves Oklahomans. Any successes I've had at the Academy are due in some measure to lessons learned in Oklahoma – lessons about leadership, responsible governance, and considering patients and community first," said Dr. Parke. "At both Dean McGee and at the Academy, I had the honor to work with countless dedicated professionals. I couldn't be prouder of the work they do and its impact. Although the next phase of my career will keep me in California, I look forward to coming back home to Oklahoma City on a regular basis."

Dr. Parke has held leadership positions on multiple professional boards including as president of the Academy, as president of the Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology, and as president of the Council of Medical Specialty Societies. He has authored or co-authored over 100 articles, served on the editorial board of two ophthalmic journals, and received numerous biomedical research grants and professional honors. Dr. Parke has lectured widely on topics in retinal diseases and surgery, academic professional development, medical liability insurance and risk management, healthcare policy, and medical organizational leadership and management. He delivered the 40th Tullos O. Coston, MD Lecture in Oklahoma City in June 2019. ■

# The Oklahoman Readers' Choice Awards

**AT AN EVENT** at the Embassy Suites Downtown/Medical Center in Oklahoma City on August 24, 2021, the Dean McGee Eye Institute's (DMEI's) Optical Shops and the McGee Eye Surgery Center (MESC) were announced as winners of *The Oklahoman* Readers' Choice Awards in their categories. DMEI's Optical Shops have now been Readers' Choice winners in five of the past six years, and MESC has been named a winner for four straight years (winner in 2018, 2020, and 2021 and co-winner in 2019).

We are happy to announce that DMEI also was chosen for Best Optometrist - Dana M. Garber, OD, FAAO, and Best Ophthalmologist - DMEI Overall. Congratulations to all of the awardees! ■



**Dana M. Garber, OD, FAAO**, holds her 2021 Readers' Choice Award for Best Optometrist.



**David W. Jackson, MD**, holds the 2021 Readers' Choice Award for Best Ophthalmologist - DMEI Overall.



**James G. Elledge, RN, BSN**, administrator and director of surgical operations at MESC, holds the 2021 Readers' Choice Award for Best Eye Surgery Center.



**Robert C. Dimick** (center), DMEI's optical shop manager, holds the 2021 Readers' Choice Award for Best Optical Shop. He is joined by Beulah M. Garcia (left), DMEI's Oklahoma Health Center optical shop team lead, and Teresa M. Berry (right), DMEI's optical services manager of satellite offices.

## Innovative Surgery Developed by Mahmoud A. Khaimi, MD, at DMEI Proves Its Effectiveness

**GLAUCOMA IS A LEADING CAUSE OF BLINDNESS WORLDWIDE** and is characterized by an increase of pressure within the eye, known as intraocular pressure (IOP), which can damage the optic nerve and lead to loss of vision. Traditional glaucoma treatments consists of topical medications (eye drops) followed by laser treatment or invasive surgery should the medication regimen prove inadequate.

In 2015, Dr. Mahmoud A. Khaimi, an ophthalmologist and director of the glaucoma fellowship at the Dean McGee Eye Institute (DMEI), pioneered a minimally invasive glaucoma surgery (MIGS) known as ab-interno canaloplasty (ABiC) as a treatment option between topical therapies and more invasive surgery. This procedure uses Nova Eye Medical's iTrack catheter to open up the natural outflow channels of the eye to restore normal aqueous flow and lower IOP, without damaging tissue or leaving behind a stent or shunt.

Now the results of a study recently published in *Therapeutic Advances in Ophthalmology* confirm the long-term effectiveness of the ABiC procedure in reducing dependence on topical antiglaucoma medications and maintaining acceptable IOP in patients with primary open-angle glaucoma. In this study conducted at DMEI, participating patients who underwent the ABiC surgery saw a 61% decrease in the mean number of medications used 36 months after the surgery, with 56% of eyes being medication free, while maintaining a stable IOP at the 12-, 24-, and 36-month follow-up visits.

According to Dr. Khaimi, glaucoma medication use may seem innocuous in the short term,

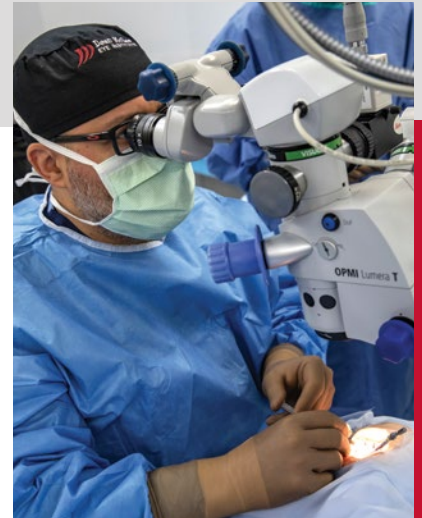
but there are significant challenges associated with long-term, chronic use of medications, including an increased risk of ocular surface disease.

“When you consider the lifestyle and financial burdens of glaucoma medications and their negative impact on a patient’s quality of life, the ability to reduce the number of medications required to control glaucoma, or in some cases eliminate the need for medications altogether, can make a huge difference to a patient,” commented Dr. Khaimi.

“Many patients are intolerant to, or non-adherent with, medications. Decreasing the medication burden while maintaining low and controlled IOP is a glaucoma specialist’s dream come true and greatly contributes to improved patient quality of life.”

Dr. Khaimi continued, “This study validates that shifting the glaucoma treatment paradigm away from long-term use of topical medications towards a restoration of the eye’s natural outflow is a viable option and achieves comparable outcomes. This is a game changer for glaucoma patients.”

DMEI’s chief executive officer, R. Michael Siatkowski, MD, MBA, stated, “All of us at DMEI are both impressed by and proud of the outstanding work Dr. Khaimi has conducted on ab-interno canaloplasty. His efforts have literally changed the face of glaucoma treatment across the world.” ■



Mahmoud A. Khaimi, MD  
James P. Luton, MD Clinical Professor  
Glaucoma Fellowship Director



Addie Jones, Age 3  
DMEI Patient and Cancer Survivor

**WHEN ADDIE JONES WAS TWO**, her parents, Katy and Cooper Jones, noticed a white glow in her left eye. An October 2020 visit to the Dean McGee Eye Institute's (DMEI's) Brian K. Firestone, MD, revealed that Addie had retinoblastoma in her left eye. Intra-arterial and intravitreal chemotherapy injections were tried, but a toxic reaction to the treatments caused Addie to develop sympathetic ophthalmia (rare, bilateral, granulomatous uveitis/inflammation) in her right eye, causing severe pain and light sensitivity.

To save the vision in Addie's right eye, Dr. Firestone surgically removed (enucleated) the cancerous left eye in April 2021. Eight weeks later, DMEI's board-certified ocularist, Nancy A. Lambert, stepped in to work her professional magic, creating a prosthetic eye which allows Addie to appear normal, and, at the same time,

## When Cancer Claim Nancy Lambert Rest

ensures the bones in her face and eye socket grow properly.

Lambert works closely with Dr. Firestone, and attended Addie's surgery and subsequent exams in order to make the needed molds for her prosthesis. During the enucleation process, an implant is put in place, which attaches to the muscles and takes up about two-thirds of the eye socket. Once the healing process is complete, the prosthesis is then custom-created and inserted, almost like a cap, with the mucous membranes preventing physical contact between the prosthetic and the eye muscles, Lambert explained. The muscles and the implant allow the patient's eyes to move in sync, as they do in a person who has both eyes.

Each prosthetic eye is made from medical-grade acrylic, molded to fit the patient's eye socket, then hand-painted in oils to match the iris and scleral colors, vein patterns, and other details of the patient's remaining eye. The four-step process takes several hours and is completed all in one day, which is very convenient for patients. For young patients like Addie, the fitting process is performed under anesthesia, to ensure a better fit and avoid undue stress on the child.

"Prosthetic eyes must be periodically refined and realigned, just like you would with a denture," Lambert noted. "Adult patients will wear a prosthesis for approximately five to seven years. In children, they last about two to three years. Our adult DMEI patients see me semi-annually, and children like Addie see me every two to three months."

# ed This Toddler's Eye, Ocularist ored Her Appearance

BY STACI ELDER HENSLEY

“Addie loved watching Nancy work on her eye, and Nancy has been so patient with her,” Katy Jones said. “When she looked in the mirror for the first time after getting her prosthesis, she was all smiles! It was so special!”

“We have been extremely impressed with the care and help Addie has been given,” she added. “They were all so good at interacting with her and alleviating her fears. Thanks to them, she has adjusted really well.”

Creating artificial eyes is a very unique specialty within the healthcare field, requiring tremendous precision and patience. There are only about 250 ocularists in the entire United States. While she has special expertise in caring for pediatric patients, Lambert has created prosthetic eyes for thousands of individuals over a 44-year career, and they’ve ranged in age from three days to 103 years old.

Whatever their age, she can relate to her patients in a way that few others can, since Lambert herself lost an eye after a traumatic injury, which was what spurred her career choice. “It’s a huge icebreaker with patients, because I can understand how they feel,” she said.

“I love my job,” she added. “Each day a piece of my artwork restores someone’s confidence and allows them to re-enter society with their head held high.”

Addie, meanwhile, continues to thrive. Along with Lambert, she is seen regularly by Dr. Firestone, her ocular oncologist, and Dr. Jila Noori, a uveitis specialist, to monitor her



*Addie Jones (left) looking on as Nancy A. Lambert, BCO (right), creates her prosthetic eye.*

disease and manage her sympathetic ophthalmia symptoms. Currently, she is cancer-free.

Inspired by the support they received from the DMEI team, Addie’s parents have created a nonprofit organization, Project Eye Can Help, to provide support and practical experience for families of children affected by severe eye disease. (Visit [www.projecteyecanhelp.org](http://www.projecteyecanhelp.org) to learn more.)

“Cooper and I are so very thankful for all of Addie’s doctors, for Nancy, and for Dr. Firestone’s assistant, Megan Davidson,” Jones said. “They have all worked for Addie, and we have been extremely impressed by the care that she has been given. Specifically, each person has been so patient with Addie, even when she was really scared or nervous. They have also been patient with our many, many questions and worries. They work together as a team for Addie, and we really appreciate that!” ■

# A Story from Megan Davidson, Assistant to Brian

**IN DECEMBER 2015, DR. BRIAN K. FIRESTONE** received a referral from Dr. Stephen Groves in Tulsa, Oklahoma, regarding a 12-month-old Asian male with bilateral retinoblastoma (RB), the most common eye cancer in children. An appointment was scheduled, and Khup Tuan was seen at the Dean McGee Eye institute (DMEI) within a day or two of the referral.



*The Tuan Family*

Upon arrival, Dr. Firestone's clinic became aware that the father (Mang, 19 years old) and mother (Cing, 18 years old) had recently immigrated to the United States (U.S.) from Myanmar in hopes of providing better medical care for their son. Myanmar (formerly Burma) is a Southeast Asian country with more than 100 ethnic groups. The Tuans are Zomi. They

did not speak nor understand English, and, to make it even more difficult, they used a specific dialect of the Burmese language.

Dr. Firestone explained to the Tuan family that in order to save Khup's life, he would need to remove his left eye, perform extensive treatment to his right eye, and arrange for systemic chemotherapy. The family agreed to the treatment and, over the course of the next year, made numerous trips from Tulsa to DMEI and

Oklahoma Children's Hospital for treatment. During that period, Mang and Cing worked hard to learn English. As Mang had a job that required daily attendance, Dr. Firestone's office would write letters regarding his son's visits in order for him to keep his job.

A year or so into treatment, Dr. Firestone came out of the operating room to speak to the family and saw that the Cing was pregnant with their second baby. Normally this would be a joyous occasion, but Khup carries the RB1 gene, meaning that his retinoblastoma is hereditary. Immediate steps were taken to contact the obstetrician, begin frequent ultrasounds, and schedule their second son, also named Mang, for an exam within one to two weeks of birth. This was all happening alongside the parents still struggling to learn the English language.

The family went on to have a third son, Michael. Treatment continued for Khup, who has remained cancer-free. He is still monitored with pediatric oncology as he has a greater risk of developing other cancers. Dr. Firestone evaluates all three brothers regularly, and all are happy and healthy.

Mang has been employed with the same company since 2015. Both he and Cing achieved citizenship, and they were able to purchase their first home this past year. Dr. Firestone and the DMEI staff are now able to communicate in English with both Mang and Cing.

I feel extremely fortunate to be a part of the Tuan family's experience and to share a



## K. Firestone, MD



Pictured (left to right): Khup, Mang, and Michael Tuan

heartwarming story about their perseverance through such challenging circumstances.

A few words from Dr. Brian K. Firestone...

"I cannot even begin to imagine how difficult it must have been for Mang and Cing to uproot their family, leave their support system and culture, and move halfway across the world as teenagers. I admire them greatly for doing whatever it took for their child to have life-saving treatment and a future. They are definitely heroes in my book!" ■

## Two Appointed to DMEI/OU Clinical Faculty

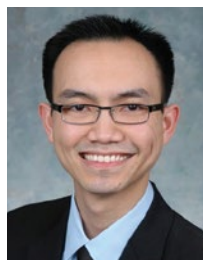


Razek G. Coussa, MD, FRCS

**Razek G. Coussa, MD, FRCS,**

will join the Dean McGee Eye Institute (DMEI)/University of Oklahoma (OU) Department of Ophthalmology in the fall of 2022 as a clinical assistant professor and vitreoretinal surgeon. Dr. Coussa is currently completing a retina fellowship at the University

of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics in Iowa City, Iowa. He previously completed a fellowship in pediatric ophthalmology and strabismus at the Cleveland Clinic's Cole Eye Institute.



Thai Do, MD

**Thai Do, MD,** also will join

the DMEI/OU ophthalmology faculty in the fall of 2022 as a clinical assistant professor. Dr. Do is an ophthalmic plastic and reconstructive surgeon who is currently completing a fellowship in this subspecialty

area at Wayne State University's Kresge Eye Institute in Detroit, Michigan.

More to come on these two new outstanding faculty recruits in the summer 2022 issue of DMEI *InVision*. ■



Dana M. Garber, OD, FAAO  
Clinical Instructor  
Diplomate, American  
Board of Optometry

## Dr. Garber Accepted to American Academy of Optometry Leadership Course

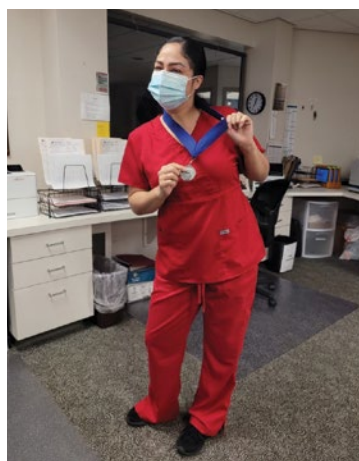
**DANA M. GARBER, OD, FAAO,** has been accepted into the inaugural American Academy of Optometry's Flom Leadership Course. The Flom Leadership Task Force, which oversees the one-year leadership series, will be dedicated to following up with the graduates of the program to assist them in obtaining leadership positions within the American Academy of Optometry. Dr. Garber (see page 10) will undoubtedly represent the profession of optometry and the Dean McGee Eye Institute very well. ■

# Employee Appreciation Day



Rumble the Bison posing at the Oklahoma Health Center location with (left to right) David W. Jackson, MD, J. Christian Berry, MD (Resident), Andrew R. Osborn, MD (Chief Resident), and Scott Samples, NCLE-AC, CPOT.

**THE DEAN MCGEE EYE INSTITUTE (DMEI) CELEBRATED EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION DAY** on September 10, 2021, with an outdoor barbeque lunch and a special appearance from Rumble the Bison, the Oklahoma City Thunder's official mascot. Rumble and the DMEI doctors, researchers, and employees who elected to participate in a basketball shooting competition provided entertainment for the afternoon. Special thanks go to DMEI barbeque master, Mark Wyckoff, who is also the Institute's vice president for medical informatics and technology. Employee Appreciation Day afforded a special opportunity to celebrate the work and mutual achievements of everyone at the Institute, to recognize DMEI's 46 years of service to patients, and to acknowledge the fulfillment of its multiple missions. Together we are making a difference, and having fun along the way! ■



Pictured (left to right) are the Lawton satellite basketball shooting competition winners, Toni DeLeon (first place); Michele Martinez (second place); and Kathy Schemonia (third place).



*Pictured (left to right) are the Oklahoma Health Center competition winners, Robert Dimick (third place); Scott Samples (first place); and Rupin Parikh, MD (second place).*



*Pictured (left to right) are the Northwest Oklahoma City satellite competition winners, Taylor Medcalf (first place); Danielle Stanfill (second place); and Tara Hall (third place).*



*Pictured (left to right) are the Edmond satellite competition winners, Delores Watley (first place); and Angela Spinner (second place).*

## 25 DMEI Ophthalmologists Recognized as Top Doctors of the 405 and/or Castle Connolly Top Doctors

- + Ann Acers-Warn, MD, MBA
- \* Andrew K. Bailey, MD
- + John M. Bell, MD
- + Cynthia A. Bradford, MD
- \*+ Reagan H. Bradford Jr., MD
- \* Brian K. Firestone, MD
- + Layne E. Goetzinger, MD
- \*+ Jean R. Hausheer, MD, FACS
- \* Ralph B. Hester III, MD
- \*+ David W. Jackson, MD
- \*+ Mahmoud A. Khaimi, MD
- \* Maria E. Lim, MD
- \* Andrew T. Melson, MD
- \*+ Annie Moreau, MD, FACS
- + Rebecca K. Morgan, MD
- \* James C. O'Brien, MD
- \*+ Anil D. Patel, MD, FRCSC, FACS
- \* Kamran M. Riaz, MD
- \* Vinay A. Shah, MD
- \*+ R. Michael Siatkowski, MD, MBA
- \*+ Rhea L. Siatkowski, MD
- \*+ Gregory L. Skuta, MD
- \* Jeremy F. Tan, MD
- \*+ Deana S. Watts, MD
- \*+ Tammy L. Yanovitch, MD, MHSc

*\* Top Doctors of the 405 (2022)*

*+ Castle Connolly Top Doctors (2021)*

*\*+ Both*

# 2022 Recipients of the Dean's Awards Medical Service and Distinguished Com

## AS PART OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA (OU) COLLEGE OF MEDICINE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION'S

Evening of Excellence gala event on March 24 at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City, Gregory L. Skuta, MD, will be presented with the 2022 Dean's Award for Distinguished Medical Service. G. Rainey Williams Jr., will receive the Dean's Award for Distinguished Community Service.

The Evening of Excellence honors individuals and organizations making significant contributions to research and the field of medicine in Oklahoma. Proceeds from the event, which was rescheduled from January 27 due to the COVID-19 Omicron variant surge, support medical research at the OU College of Medicine.



Gregory L. Skuta, MD

Dr. Skuta joined the Dean McGee Eye Institute (DMEI) and OU Department of Ophthalmology in 1992 and served as DMEI's president and chief executive officer (CEO) and the Edward L. Gaylord professor and chair

of the Department from 2009 until early 2021 (see pages 30-31). He is currently vice chair

for faculty development and external relations, holds the David W. Parke II, MD Endowed Chair in Ophthalmology, and continues to serve on the DMEI Board of Directors and Executive Committee.



G. Rainey Williams Jr.

Mr. Williams serves on the Board of Directors of both DMEI and the DMEI Foundation and chaired the latter from 2012 to 2020. He is president of Marco Capital Group and also currently serves as chair of the University Hospitals

Authority and Trust and as chair of the OU Health Board of Directors. Williams, who holds a law degree from OU, also is active with the Presbyterian Health Foundation and several other Oklahoma City organizations.

Past recipients of the Dean's Award for Distinguished Medical Service associated with DMEI/OU Department of Ophthalmology include Drs. Tullos O. Coston (1989), G. Rainey Williams (1990, member of Oklahoma Eye Foundation), Thomas E. Acers (1994), John R. Bozalis (1998, member of DMEI Board of Directors), David W. Parke II, MD (2007), M. Dewayne Andrews (2018,

# for Distinguished Community Service

former provost, executive dean, and member of DMEI Board of Directors), and Robert Eugene Anderson, MD, PhD (2020).

Prior recipients of the Dean's Award for Distinguished Community Service closely associated with DMEI (e.g., service on one of DMEI's Boards) include Dean A. McGee (1985), Stanton L. Young (1986, also Lifetime Achievement Award in 2009), Edward L. Gaylord (1990), James R. Tolbert III (1997), Libby and G.T. Blankenship (2004), Polly and Larry Nichols (2009), Michael S. Samis (2010), Martha Ferretti, PT, MPH, and Joseph J. Ferretti, PhD (2012), Jeanne Hoffman Smith (2017), and David E. Rainbolt (2018).

In 2001, the Dean McGee Eye Institute received the Dean's Recognition of a Distinguished Oklahoma Institution.

For more information or to purchase tickets, go online to [medicine.ouhsc.edu/alumni/eoe](http://medicine.ouhsc.edu/alumni/eoe).

Congratulations to all current and past recipients for their distinguished service and contributions! ■

## TWO RETIRE FROM DEAN MCGEE EYE INSTITUTE



**IN OCTOBER 2021, ROSEANNE "ROSE" BELL** retired from the Dean McGee Eye Institute (DMEI) after 10 years of dedicated service to the Edmond satellite optical shop, preceded by two years at the Oklahoma Health Center optical shop. Teresa M. Berry, DMEI's optical

services manager of satellite offices, stated, "Rose had a great patient following and was very good at advising the patients on styles and characteristics of eyewear to best suit their needs."



**IN JANUARY 2022, RUSSELL D. "RUSS" BURRIS** retired from DMEI after 40 years of dedicated service to the diagnostic imaging department (see page 23), which he directed from the 1980s until 2016.

Vicky L. Wolzen, DMEI's current diagnostic imaging manager, stated, "I had the pleasure to work with Russ for ten years. He had a great way with patients and loved to show his photography from different hikes he liked to take. He really paved the way for my success and increased my knowledge beyond my previous retina photography experience."

**We thank and congratulate Rose Bell and Russ Burris for their many years of DMEI service and wish both of them all the best!**

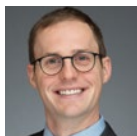
# FACULTY & STAFF AWARDS AND ACTIVITIES



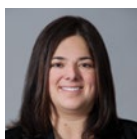
**LEA D. BENNETT, PhD**, recently published: Radojevic B., Conley S., Bennett L.D. “Adherent but Not Suspension-cultured Embryoid Bodies Develop into Laminated Retinal Organoids,” *Journal of Developmental Biology*, Sept. 2021.



**MICHELLE C. CALLEGAN, PhD, FARVO**, was awarded a \$1.81 million R01 grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Aug. 2021 – Aug. 2026 (see pages 36-37), and was awarded, as the principal investigator and director, a \$2.96 million P30 Vision Core grant from the NIH, Sept. 2021 – Aug. 2026 (see pages 38-39). She recently published: Mursalin M.H., Coburn P.S., Miller F.C., Livingston E.T., Astley R., Callegan M.C. “CXC Chemokines Influence Intraocular Inflammation during *Bacillus* Endophthalmitis,” *Investigative Ophthalmology and Visual Science*, Nov. 2021. Her recent invited lecturers include: “EURetina. Update on Research in Endophthalmitis: Targeting Innate Immune Pathways,” Sept. 2021 (virtual); “Innate Immune Targets in Bacterial Endophthalmitis,” Department of Ophthalmology, The State University of New York, Buffalo, Oct. 2021 (virtual); and “Targeting Innate Immune Pathways in Bacterial Endophthalmitis,” Thygeson Lecture, Ocular Microbiology and Immunology Group Meeting, New Orleans, LA, Nov. 2021.



**ANDREW T. MELSON, MD**, was awarded a 2021 M. Dewayne Andrews, MD Excellence in Teaching Award for Graduate Medical Education, Sept. 2021 (see pages 40-41), and was named an associate residency program director (see page 48). His recent publications include: Melson A.T., O’Brien J.C., Kutteh M., Siatkowski R.M. “A Case of Brain Hamartoma in a Child Leading to Compressive Optic Neuropathy Mimicking Amblyopia,” *Journal of American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus*, Sept. 2021; Sharieff J.A., Melson A.T., Algan O. “Treatment of Recurrent Optic Nerve Sheath Meningioma with a Secondary Course of Radiotherapy,” *Cureus Journal of Medical Science*, Sept. 2021; Gudgeon B.M., Melson A.T., Dvorak J., Ding K., Siatkowski R.M. “Correlation of Ophthalmology Residency Application Characteristics with Subsequent Performance in Residency,” *Journal of Academic Ophthalmology*, Nov. 2021. He was an invited lecturer at the Neuro-Ophthalmology Subspecialty Day, “I See Double When I Read;” an Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology Surgical Curriculum for Ophthalmology Residents Program Trainer; and Course Instructor, “Smartphones in Ophthalmology: #TheFutureIsAI,” American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA, Nov. 2021.



**ANNIE MOREAU, MD, FACS**, was an invited grand rounds conference speaker for the Department of Otorhinolaryngology, University of Oklahoma (OU) College of Medicine, Oklahoma City, OK, Oct. 2021; served as a moderator and poster moderator at the Women in Ophthalmology Conference, Amelia Island, FL, Aug. 2021; and presented Bugg V.A., Siegler J., Lippe C.M., Riaz K.M., Moreau A. “Dry Eye Syndrome in the Blepharoplasty Patient: Incidence, Predictive Signs, and Postoperative Outcomes,” American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery Annual Meeting, Las Vegas, NV, July 2021.



**ANIL D. PATEL, MD, FRCS, FACS**, recently published: Melson A.T., Patel A.D. “Subacute Vision Loss in a 37-Year-Old Man with a Rash,” *Journal of the American Medical Association Ophthalmology*, Sept. 2021.



**RAJU V.S. RAJALA, PhD**, recently published: Shang P., Stepicheva N., Teel K., McCauley A., Fitting C.S., Hose S., Grebe R., Yazdankhah M., Ghosh S., Liu H., Strizhakova A., Weiss J., Bhutto I.A., Luty G.A., Jayagopal A., Qian J., Sahel J.A., Zigler J.S. Jr., Handa J.T., Sergeev Y., Rajala R.V.S., Watkins S., Sinha D. “ $\beta$ A3/A1-Crystallin Regulates Apical Polarity and EGFR Endocytosis in Retinal Pigmented Epithelial Cells.” *Nature-Communications Biology*, July 2021.



**KAMRAN M. RIAZ, MD**, recently published: Jamshidi F., Shah V.A., Riaz K.M. “Migration of a Dexamethasone Intravitreal Implant to the Anterior Chamber in a Patient with a Intra-scleral Haptic Fixated Intraocular Lens,” *International Medical Case Reports Journal*, Sept. 2021; Gill M.S., Murphy D.A., Dvorak J.D., Shah S.V., Riaz K.M. “Fill Levels, Cost Comparisons, and Expulsion Force Requirements of Commonly Used Topical Ophthalmic Steroids,” *Journal of Cataract and Refractive Surgery*, Oct. 2021, Epub ahead of print; Karamichos D., Escandon P., Vasini B., Nicholas S.E., Van L., Dang D.H., Cunningham R.L., Riaz K.M. “Anterior Pituitary, Sex Hormones, and Keratoconus: Beyond Traditional Targets,” *Progress in Retinal and Eye Research*, Nov. 2021, Epub ahead of print; Patel R.P., Samples J.S., Riaz K.M. “A Frugal Method of Notch Modification of Scleral Contact Lenses in the Setting of Complex Ocular Surface Anatomy,” *Eye and Contact Lens*, Nov. 2021, Epub ahead of print; Cooke D.L., Waldron R., Savini G., Riaz K.M., Taroni L., Murphy D.A., Guaraldi F. “Immersion Ultrasound Biometry vs Optical Biometry,” *Journal of Cataract and Refractive Surgery*, Nov. 2021, Epub ahead of print; Dang D.H., Riaz K.M., Karamichos D. “Treatment of Non-Infectious Corneal Injury: Review of Diagnostic Agents, Therapeutic Medications, and Future Targets,” *Drugs*, in press; and Riaz K.M. “Balancing Corneal Health and Pressure Control with MIGS Procedures,” *Glaucoma Today*, July/Aug. 2021. His presentations at national meetings include: Berry J.C., Cooke D.L., Riaz K.M. “Accuracy of IOL Formulas for Higher Power ZCB00 IOLs,” 45th Annual American Ophthalmology Society Meeting, Alexandria, VA, Aug. 2021; and Hou A.C., Murphy D.A., Riaz K.M. “Scleral Fixation of Toric Lens to Treat Corneal Astigmatism,” 2021 AAO Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA, Nov. 2021. Dr. Riaz’ recent lectures include: “IOL Calculations in Wonky Eyes,” “Dropless Cataract Surgery,” “An Overview of Currently Available IOLs in the U.S.,” visiting professor grand rounds, Henry Ford Hospital, Detroit, MI, Nov. 2021; “IOL Calculations in Wonky Eyes,” visiting professor grand rounds, Medical College of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI, Nov. 2021; “Pearls for Successful DMEK Surgery,” Dr. G. Mukherjee Memorial Lecture, International Seminar, New Delhi, India, Nov. 2021 (virtual); and “Challenging Cases: Gore-tex Fixation of Modified Envista Toric IOL for Concurrent Aphakia and Astigmatism,” Indian Intraocular Implant and Refractive Surgery Convention, Chennai, India, Dec. 2021 (virtual).



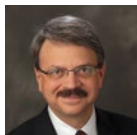
**VINAY A. SHAH, MD**, recently published: LaGrow A., Shah V.A. “The Eye Handbook Mobile Application,” *Ophthalmology Business Minute*, Dec. 2021. He was a speaker and moderator at the Technology Theater: “Smartphone and Mobile Technology Update;” and a course director and instructor for the Skills Transfer Lab: “Smartphones in Ophthalmology: #TheFutureIsAI,” 2021 AAO Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA, Nov. 2021.



**R. MICHAEL SIATKOWSKI, MD, MBA**, now serves on the Board of Directors for the Bethany (OK) Children’s Health Center and has been elected as a trustee-at-large on the Board of Trustees of the Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology, April 2022 – April 2025. His recent invited presentations include: “Diplopia,” Neuro-Ophthalmology Subspecialty Day, Discussion Panel; “What

# FACULTY & STAFF AWARDS AND ACTIVITIES

You Need to Know from the Past Year’s Literature—Neuro-Ophthalmology,” combined American Ophthalmological Society/American Board of Ophthalmology Symposium; and “Evaluation and Management of Acquired, Symptomatic Vertical Strabismus,” American Orthoptic Council/ American Association of Certified Orthoptists/American Academy of Ophthalmology Symposium “Double Trouble: Acquired Diplopia in Adults,” virtual on-demand presentation, 2021 AAO Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA, Nov. 2021. He also presented “Potential Pitfalls in Pediatric Neuro-Ophthalmology” and “The CREW and Character Development,” Christian Ophthalmology Society, Alexandria, VA, Aug. 2021.

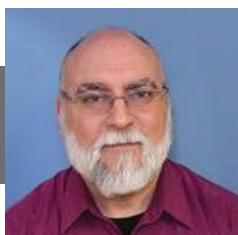


**GREGORY L. SKUTA, MD**, will receive the 2022 Dean’s Award for Distinguished Medical Service from the OU College of Medicine Alumni Association, March 2022 (see pages 18-19). He has been invited to deliver the Mansour F. Armaly, MD Lecture at the 2022 Iowa Eye Meeting, Iowa City, IA, June 2022.

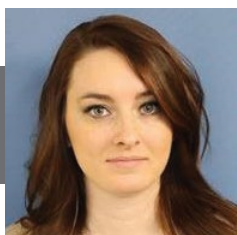


**JEREMY F. TAN, MD**, led the inaugural filler lab with the Dean McGee Eye Institute PGY-2 and PGY-3 residents. He was a co-panelist, Enyedi L.B., Kumar J.B., Rosdahl J.A., Tan J.F., and Go M.S. “Academy Cafe: Wellness,” 2021 AAO Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA, Nov. 2021. Publications include: Moreau A., Tan J.F., Blessing N.W., Ramji H.F. “Do Orbital Implants Differ in Complication Rates: A Retrospective Study of 88 Patients, and an Argument for Cost-effective Practices in the Face of Rising Health Care Costs,” *Facial Plastic Surgery*, in press.

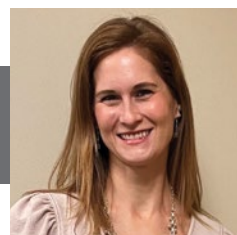
## EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH PROGRAM



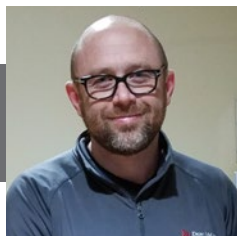
**Stephen J. Jackson**  
*System Administrator  
Information Technology  
Oklahoma Health Center  
October 2021*



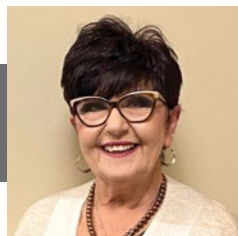
**Kristi D. Lutes**  
*Ophthalmic Technician  
Oklahoma Health Center  
November 2021*



**Nicole M. Glenn**  
*Communications Coordinator  
Oklahoma Health Center  
December 2021*



**Daniel B. Carrel, COA, OSC, OSA**  
*Technician Supervisor  
Oklahoma Health Center  
January 2022*



**Sandra D. Cooper**  
*Purchasing Coordinator  
Oklahoma Health Center  
February 2022*



# 2021 EMPLOYEE SERVICE AWARDS

At the 2021 Dean McGee Eye Institute (DMEI) Holiday Celebration and Employee Recognition Ceremony in the Inasmuch Foundation Atrium on December 10, 49 employees were recognized for their 675 collective years of service to the Institute and University of Oklahoma Department of Ophthalmology. Congratulations to all! ■

### 45 YEARS

Jaime Rodriguez

### 40 YEARS

Russell Burris

### 35 YEARS

Renee Fabian

### 30 YEARS

Shelley Critchfield  
Debbie Fitzsimmons  
Rebecca Morgan, MD

### 25 YEARS

Michelle Callegan, PhD, FARVO  
Lori Canfield  
Ralph Hester III, MD

### 20 YEARS

Roger Astley  
Michael Elliott, PhD, FARVO  
Amanda Hollingshead  
Stephen Jackson

### 15 YEARS

Joan Gebhardt  
Holly Hamilton  
Ikumi King  
Carolyn Little  
Amanda McMahon  
Gayle Seabolt  
Patrizia Yale-Sadberry

### 10 YEARS

Andrea Burlison  
Beulah Garcia  
Nicole Glenn  
Rikkilyn Hibbard

Alysea Johnson  
Jessica Lucas, OD  
Cristal Phares  
Merry Russell Davis  
Vinay Shah, MD  
Tasha Schellenberg, OD  
Debra Thompson  
Tammy Yanovitch, MD, MHSC

### 5 YEARS

Steven Arnold  
Alisha Brewer  
Yolanda Crawford-Berry  
Kadisha Deskins

Ashley Ellis  
Sarah Etsell  
Yolanda Fields  
David Gray  
Jami Gurley, PhD  
Kandice Guy  
Charles Harrington  
Gissel Herrera  
Carla March  
Nan Perkins  
Cara Phillips  
Jerod Warren  
Stephanie Waters



Jaime Rodriguez  
45 Years

*Pictured (left to right): Gary G. Geist (DMEI's executive vice president and chief operating officer), Jaime Rodriguez (ultrasound technician), and R. Michael Siatkowski, MD, MBA (DMEI's chief executive officer and department chair). Rodriguez began his DMEI tenure in 1976, just six months after DMEI's dedication.*



Russell Burris  
40 years



Renee Fabian  
35 years



Shelley Critchfield  
30 years



Debbie Fitzsimmons  
30 years



Rebecca Morgan, MD  
30 years



Michelle Callegan, PhD, FARVO  
25 years



Lori Canfield  
25 years



Ralph Hester III, MD  
25 years

# New DMEI Wall of Honor



**THE DEAN MCGEE EYE INSTITUTE'S WALL OF HONOR** in the Inasmuch Foundation Atrium was installed in September 2021 below the signage on what was the original north façade of the Institute. It recognizes former faculty members who have rendered outstanding service to the institution and to our profession. Honorees have:

- Served as chair of the University of Oklahoma (OU) Department of Ophthalmology and/or chief executive officer of the Dean McGee Eye Institute (DMEI), and/or
- Completed his or her professional career as a member of the DMEI/OU faculty, and/or
- Achieved emeritus faculty status,

while maintaining the highest professional standards throughout his or her career.

Former faculty members currently recognized with their highest academic rank and years of service include Tullos O. Coston, MD (Clinical Professor and Chair, 1962 – 1972); Thomas E. Acers, MD (Professor and Chair, 1972 – 1991); David W. Parke II, MD (Professor and Chair, 1992 – 2009); Robert G. Small, MD (Professor, 1968 – 2002); Robert P. Shaver, MD (Professor, 1973 – 2002); Hal D. Balyeat, MD (Clinical Professor, 1976 – 2003); Bradley K. Farris, MD (Professor, 1986 – 2019); Robert E. Anderson, MD, PhD (Professor, 1995 – 2020); and James F. McGinnis, PhD (Professor, 1997 – 2016). ■



Jim Durbin  
Executive Director of Development

# PHILANTHROPY UPDATE

## Delta Gamma and "Service for Sight"

**THE DEAN MCGEE EYE INSTITUTE (DMEI) IS IN THE SIXTH YEAR OF ITS** partnership with the ladies of Delta Gamma (DG) from the University of Oklahoma (OU)-Norman campus. DG's mission fosters lifetime enrichment for members and promotes "Service for Sight" through required philanthropy and service hours.



*Anchorsplash 2021* was held on Wednesday, September 22 at the Murray Case Sells Swim Complex in Norman. The philanthropic competition, in which fraternities on the OU-Norman campus compete, consists of three events, synchronized swimming, a relay race, and the belly flop. This is one of

the most popular and well-attended student-based events at OU, and DMEI was the recent recipient of half of the funds raised from *Anchorsplash*. With the \$10,105 raised in 2021, DG has now successfully raised over \$67,000 for the DMEI Foundation!

DMEI has been able to help foster service hours to DG members by offering shadowing opportunities in clinic and in surgery at the



Maegan Watson (left), a junior at OU and a member of Delta Gamma, shadowing Mahmoud A. Khaimi, MD (right), in the operating room at the McGee Eye Surgery Center.

McGee Eye Surgery Center with participating DMEI physicians.

Regarding such an experience, DG member Maegan Watson shared, "I knew virtually nothing about eye care before I started shadowing the wonderful doctors at the Dean McGee Eye Institute, but a curiosity quickly emerged as I learned so much from everyone I met. As a prospective medical student, it has been an amazing experience to see how much all the doctors care about their patients and the importance of caring for your eyes. Since shadowing and learning so much at Dean McGee, I now see myself possibly becoming an ophthalmologist in the future! My shadowing experience has confirmed and grown my passion for medicine while providing me with tremendous role models." ■

## SPREADING HOLIDAY CHEER TO MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



R. Michael Siatkowski, MD, MBA (left), DMEI's chief executive officer and department chair, presents donation check of \$1,500 to Mitch Ruzzoli (right), principal of Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School.

**IN DECEMBER, THE DEAN MCGEE EYE INSTITUTE** (DMEI) partnered with Oklahoma City's Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School as a pajama sponsor. Monies raised by DMEI employees purchased pajamas for all of the students enrolled in pre-kindergarten. During the annual DMEI holiday party, held on December 10 in the Inasmuch Foundation Atrium, a check for \$1,500 was presented to Mitch Ruzzoli, principal of Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School. Mr. Ruzzoli stated, "The staff and students of MLK Jr. Elementary would like to express our deepest thanks to Dean McGee Eye Institute for the donation. Your generosity will greatly benefit our students."

We are grateful to all of the DMEI employees who contributed to the success of this impactful effort! ■

## DMEI Foundation Briefs

- **The Chickasaw Nation** made a gift in support of the Dean McGee Eye Institute's (DMEI's) initiative to update the elevator system in the Institute's original building dedicated in 1975 (now known as the Thomas E. Acers, MD Pavilion). In particular, support from The Chickasaw Nation will help extend service for one of the elevators from the second to the fifth floor, including access to The Chickasaw Nation Center of Excellence for Diabetic Retinopathy and Macular Degeneration on the third floor.
- **The McLaughlin Family Foundation** provided a \$100,000 grant to help underwrite DMEI's outreach to economically disadvantaged pediatric patients over the next three years. Through the foundation's generosity, DMEI will have the resources and flexibility to care for those pediatric patients who would not otherwise be able to receive the care they need.
- **The Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation** awarded a \$50,000 grant to DMEI to help acquire equipment used in research for retinal neovascularization. This growth of abnormal blood vessels that leak easily and can negatively affect vision is a characteristic of a multitude of eye diseases in both children and adults. We are grateful to the Noble Foundation for enabling us to acquire this crucial equipment for studying these disease processes.
- Approximately \$420,000 has been raised for the **DMEI Alumni Professorship** towards a goal of \$500,000. This professorship will provide a two-year award to a deserving faculty member to support him or her in fulfilling the academic mission of the Eye Institute. We are almost to our goal! You can help us reach it by donating by check or online at [www.dmei.org/donate-now](http://www.dmei.org/donate-now). Learn more about this initiative in DMEI *InVision*, issue 23, summer 2021, page 33.

# TOLBERT FAMILY ENDOWED CHAIR IN OPHTHALMOLOGY BEING ESTABLISHED

**JAMES R. "JIM" TOLBERT III, CHAIR EMERITUS OF THE DEAN MCGEE EYE INSTITUTE (DMEI) BOARD OF DIRECTORS**, is the longest-serving board chair in the organization's history, having served in that role from 1992 to 2013 with board membership going back to the founding of DMEI in the early 1970s. As a prominent civic leader, Tolbert has advanced the arts and the revitalization of the Bricktown and downtown areas of Oklahoma City. He has a particular passion for the Myriad Gardens, for which he served for many years as chair of its foundation. (The James R. Tolbert III Crystal Orchid Award was established to honor his leadership and service to the Myriad Gardens). Tolbert has also been a major proponent of Oklahoma's vision health and helped guide the growth of DMEI as a board member over the past nearly five decades.

Recently, a longtime friend of Tolbert's approached the Eye Institute leadership, expressing a desire to honor Tolbert and his family in a meaningful way. Ultimately, this friend made a lead gift of \$200,000 toward the establishment of the Tolbert Family Endowed Chair in Ophthalmology at DMEI. When \$1 million has been raised, this chair will be

assigned to a worthy faculty member to support his or her educational, academic, scholarly, and service activities. Efforts are already underway to build on this lead gift.



*James R. "Jim" Tolbert III*

"This is such a deserved honor for Jim," states R. Michael Siatkowski, MD, MBA, DMEI's chief executive officer and the Edward L. Gaylord professor and chair of the University of Oklahoma (OU) Department of Ophthalmology. "During his long tenure on the Board, he has played an integral part in some of the key decisions that shaped what DMEI is today. Jim's commitment to the mission has been tremendous. We are deeply grateful for his service and look forward to awarding this chair in his name once the funds have been raised."

Anyone wishing to contribute to the Tolbert Family Endowed Chair in Ophthalmology may do so by sending a check in the enclosed envelope or by donating online at [www.dmei.org/donate-now](http://www.dmei.org/donate-now). ■

# Endowed Chair and Memorial Fund Estate Gift from Longtime DMEI Be

**THE DEAN MCGEE EYE INSTITUTE (DMEI) RECENTLY RECEIVED A GIFT OF \$5 MILLION** from the estate of Elizabeth Zoernig Milam, one of its most influential and dedicated former supporters and board members.

In an extraordinary life that encompassed literally a century (1919-2019), Zoernig Milam began her career at Kerr-McGee Oil Company, where she was the senior executive assistant to Dean A. McGee, president of the Kerr-

McGee Corporation. Mr. McGee developed a retinal detachment in 1971, which was successfully repaired by Drs. Tullos O. Coston and Thomas E. Acers. Inspired by this experience, Mr. McGee joined the effort to establish an eye institute in Oklahoma City. As his executive assistant, Zoernig Milam played an integral role in the creation of the Institute, and remained one of its strongest supporters until her passing in September 2019.



*Elizabeth Zoernig Milam shown in May 2012 next to the signage for the parking facility named in her honor.*

“Her gift provides a great multi-faceted benefit to DMEI,” said Jim Durbin, DMEI’s executive director of development. “A small portion of her gift is being used for immediate, critical infrastructure needs at DMEI and enables us to move forward with these projects without delay.”

Additional funds will be used to establish a \$1 million endowed chair in Zoernig Milam’s name. “Endowed chairs allow DMEI to attract and retain top research and clinical talent to keep our organization in the upper echelon of eye institutes in the nation,” Durbin said.

Along with these two designations, the bulk of Zoernig Milam’s gift was used to establish the Elizabeth Zoernig Milam Memorial Fund. Proceeds from the fund will be distributed on an annual basis to address needs identified by DMEI’s administration and boards. “This fund provides significant resources and flexibility, and will help us to more easily meet DMEI’s mission,” Durbin said.

“Elizabeth’s giving to DMEI of more than \$6.1 million spanned 42 years,” he added. “She is one of the top two all-time DMEI donors, and one of only three individual donors in our top 10 donor list. Her strong support for the Institute will help us continue to provide our patients with outstanding, cutting-edge care.”

James R. “Jim” Tolbert III, chair emeritus of DMEI’s Board of Directors, began working with Zoernig Milam during her Kerr-McGee days, when the efforts to establish the Institute were just beginning.

# Created Through \$5 Million benefactor Elizabeth Zoernig Milam

BY STACI ELDER HENSLEY

“If you worked with Mr. McGee on civic projects, you worked with Elizabeth,” Tolbert noted. “I admired that she was a loyal, caring person, and she was very, very intelligent. Her judgment and help were very effective at getting things done. In terms of personal dedication and philanthropy, I cannot think of anyone who’s had a greater impact on DMEI who’s not a physician or a health professional.”

Prior to her passing, Zoernig Milam also was a major contributor to DMEI’s capital campaign, donating over \$1 million toward completion of the new pavilion (now the David W. Parke II, MD Pavilion), which was dedicated in 2011. In recognition of that gift, the new two-deck, 386-space parking facility was named in her honor with signage near DMEI’s south entrance.

While a parking facility might seem an unusual choice as a tribute, it’s actually quite fitting, since Zoernig Milam was extremely interested in the ability of DMEI’s patients to have easy access to the building, noted former DMEI President and Chief Executive Officer Dr. Gregory L. Skuta, who worked with her for many years in a variety of professional settings.

“We all loved Elizabeth,” Dr. Skuta said. “Her legacy of a half-century working with and on behalf of Mr. McGee and with DMEI is unmatched. Given how critical patient access and parking were to her, we felt that it was very important to recognize her generosity in a way that had visibility but also meaning for her personally.”

After graduating from the University of Oklahoma, Milam worked at Anderson Pritchard Oil Company, then began a celebrated career at the Kerr-McGee Corporation. She worked at the latter firm from 1946 to 1990 (Mr. McGee passed away in 1989), along the way becoming the first female officer on its Board of Directors. Until 1996, she continued working for Mr. McGee’s family interests, foremost among them being DMEI.

In addition to her involvement with DMEI and service on its Oklahoma Eye Foundation, Zoernig Milam had a huge influence in the broader community. An Oklahoma City native, she was highly devoted to her Catholic faith, Our Lady’s Cathedral, local Catholic charities, and many other organizations.

Zoernig Milam was a founding member of the Women of the Oklahoma School of Science and Mathematics, president and director of Executive Secretaries, Inc., an active member of Kappa Alpha Theta Sorority (from which she received her 75-year pin in 2014), and regularly listed in *Who’s Who in the Finance Industry*.

“Elizabeth had a great sense of humor with a mischievous grin and twinkle in her eye. It was always a pleasure to be around her,” Dr. Skuta added. “We miss Elizabeth but will be forever grateful for her broad influence and extraordinary generosity.” ■

To make a gift in your will or living trust, please see page 32.

## GREGORY L. SKUTA, MD, HONORED FOR 12 YEARS CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER AND CHAIR OF THE OU

### ON THE EVENING OF OCTOBER 14, 2021, FAMILY, FRIENDS, FACULTY, STAFF, DONORS, AND BOARD MEMBERS

gathered at The Petroleum Club in downtown Oklahoma City to honor Gregory L. Skuta, MD, for his dedication to the Dean McGee Eye Institute (DMEI) and the University of Oklahoma (OU) Department of Ophthalmology. Dr. Skuta served as the third president and chief executive officer (CEO) of DMEI and the Edward L. Gaylord professor and chair of the OU Department of Ophthalmology from April 2009 through February 2021. During his 12-year tenure,

- Dr. Skuta presided over completion of the \$47-million expansion and renovation project at DMEI's Oklahoma Health Center location, which was dedicated in 2011. An additional \$3.1 million renovation in 2018 established The Chickasaw Nation Center of Excellence for Diabetic Retinopathy and Macular Degeneration.
- He successfully recruited 17 ophthalmologists, four optometrists, and seven vision scientists to the Institute and helped raise its profile in national rankings (top eight among public universities).
- Research funding from the National Institutes of Health and Research to Prevent Blindness was in the top 10 nationally for public universities.
- The residency program expanded from three to five trainees per year, and new fellowship positions also were established.



*Dr. Gregory Skuta (right) is shown during the champagne reception prior to the October 14 dinner event with his daughter Catherine "Cate" Wright, DPT (left), one of Anne and Greg Skuta's three children and a physical therapist with Physical Therapy Central in Oklahoma City.*

- DMEI/OU physicians and scientists rose to leadership positions in numerous state or national organizations and received almost four dozen major awards for teaching, research, and service.
- The organization brought in over \$45 million in donations and experienced major growth in the DMEI Foundation.

"Dr. Skuta has made a tremendous impact at the Eye Institute," states David E. Rainbolt, chair of the DMEI Board of Directors. "Under his leadership, DMEI expanded its laboratory and clinical space, acquired cutting-edge technology, and recruited some of the best talent in the country in terms of clinicians and scientists. His efforts have helped position DMEI in the upper echelon of eye care on a national and international basis."



# OF SERVICE AS DMEI PRESIDENT AND DEPARTMENT OF OPHTHALMOLOGY

John P. Zubialde, MD, executive dean of the OU College of Medicine, speaking at the event, noted that “commitment and faithfulness to mission... creates great institutions” and that Dr. Skuta’s “faithfulness to the mission through both good and challenging times has certainly paid off and has truly been amazing for our corporate success.”

Remarks also were shared by David W. Parke II, MD, chief executive officer of the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO). Dr. Parke served as DMEI’s second president, CEO, and department chair from 1992 to 2009 (see pages 8-9).

At the October event, R. Michael Siatkowski, MD, MBA, DMEI’s current CEO and department chair, announced the creation of the **Gregory L. Skuta, MD Endowed Chair in Ophthalmology** in honor of Dr. Skuta’s accomplishments and service to the Institute. According to Dr. Siatkowski, “The chair was created as a perpetual and highly visible symbol of the enormous impact Dr. Skuta has had on DMEI/OU and as a way to extend his influence far into the future. This chair will join the chairs named for the first two presidents of DMEI – Thomas E. Acers, MD, and David W. Parke II, MD – and the other six endowed chairs that reside at DMEI/OU.” Three of the eight current endowed chairs and an endowed professorship were established during Dr. Skuta’s leadership tenure.

Dr. Skuta has served as president of the AAO, American Glaucoma Society, and American Eye Study Club; is an emeritus director of the American Board of Ophthalmology; is a

past member of the Board of Governors of the World Glaucoma Association; and has served in numerous other leadership roles. He and Anne, his wife of 37 years, have three adult children, two children-in-law, and one granddaughter.

Dr. Skuta continues to serve the Institute as a full-time member of the faculty. In March 2021, he was appointed as vice chair for faculty development and external relations and holds the David W. Parke II, MD Endowed Chair in Ophthalmology. He remains active as a member of the DMEI Executive Committee and Board of Directors and in patient care; medical student, resident, and fellow education; faculty promotion and support; fundraising and publications; donor and public relations; and other roles. “I am thankful for Greg’s willingness to continue to serve,” said Dr. Siatkowski. “It is an ongoing testament to his love for the Institute and his dedication to our mission.” ■

Endowed chairs serve as important tools in recruiting and retaining top-quality faculty by supporting their educational, academic, scholarly, and service activities. Our goal is to raise at least \$1 million for the Gregory L. Skuta, MD Endowed Chair in Ophthalmology. Through February 15, 2022, a total of \$840,000 has been raised towards this goal. If you are interested in supporting this effort, we encourage you to send a check in the enclosed envelope or to donate online at [www.dmei.org/donate-now](http://www.dmei.org/donate-now). Thank you for your consideration!

# Planning for a Bequest

**PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE AND CREATING THE LEGACY** you wish to leave is one of the most effective ways to ensure a lasting impact. Making a gift in your will or living trust, known as a bequest, can guarantee that your legacy endures (see pages 28-29). Your gift may be a specific dollar amount, a percentage of your estate, or the remainder after all other provisions are specified.

The federal tax ID number for the DMEI Foundation is: 73-1396478

Below is suggested language to use when drafting your bequest.

## Sample Language

For an unrestricted gift that allows the Dean McGee Eye Institute to determine how to use the funds based on the most pressing needs, use the following language for your will and/or trust:

*"I give to Dean McGee Eye Institute Foundation, a nonprofit corporation currently located at 608 Stanton L. Young Blvd., Oklahoma City, OK 73104, or its successor thereto, \_\_\_\_\_ [written amount or percentage of the estate or description of property] for its unrestricted charitable use and purpose."*

To designate your provision for a particular purpose:

*"I give to Dean McGee Eye Institute Foundation, a nonprofit corporation currently located at 608 Stanton L. Young Blvd., Oklahoma City, OK 73104, or its successor thereto, \_\_\_\_\_ [written amount or percentage of the estate or description of property]. This gift should be used for (state purpose) if and so long as Dean McGee Eye Institute Foundation determines that the need exists. If Dean McGee Eye Institute Foundation shall determine at the outset or at a later time that the need does not exist, or no longer exists or for some reason it is not possible (or prudent) to administer my gift as originally intended, then Dean McGee Eye Institute Foundation may, in its sole and uncontrolled discretion, direct the use of my bequest for a purpose related as closely as possible to that stated above."*

If you have named the Dean McGee Eye Institute Foundation in your will or trust, please let us know so we can ensure that your gift is used according to your wishes. Notifying us of your plans will enable us to plan for the use of your future gift. However, if you prefer to remain anonymous, we will keep your name and gift in strict confidence.

Please contact Jim Durbin, executive director of development, at 405.271.7803 or [jim-durbin@dmei.org](mailto:jim-durbin@dmei.org) for more information. ■

## Emerging Vision Scientist, Lea D. Bennett, PhD, Advocates and Educates Virtually

**ON SEPTEMBER 21, 2021, THE ALLIANCE FOR EYE AND VISION RESEARCH (AEVR)**

held its seventh Annual Emerging Vision Research Day, which virtually engaged 28 early-stage investigators nominated by their Departments of Ophthalmology or Schools/Colleges of Optometry from across the nation.

Lea D. Bennett, PhD, an assistant professor in the University of Oklahoma (OU) Departments of Ophthalmology and Physiology and whose laboratory is housed in the Dean McGee Eye Institute (DMEI), was among the participants.



Lea D. Bennett, PhD  
Assistant Professor  
Departments of  
Ophthalmology and  
Physiology

Usually held on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, this 2021 virtual event replicated components of past years' activities, including AEVR's annual International Age-related Macular Degeneration Awareness Week Congressional Briefing and brief videos by each of the 28 emerging vision scientists (EVSs) in which they described their research and its potential promise for patients. A 30-minute session entitled *Moving Beyond COVID-19 in My Career Pathway* represented a special symposium for this year's meeting and involved 22 of the participating scientists in addressing such topics as patient engagement, research models and cell cultures, collaborations, training, and career pathways. This video discussion followed that held with the 22 EVSs in September 2020 addressing pandemic disruptions, which was published in July 2021 in *JAMA Ophthalmology*.

On September 24, and under the auspices of the National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research

(NAEVR), the EVSs participated in more than 60 virtual Advocacy Day meetings with health staff from Congressional delegation offices—including those of several Members with jurisdiction over National Institutes of Health (NIH)/National Eye Institute (NEI) appropriations and NIH authorization. After thanking Members for NIH/NEI funding increases in the FY2016-2021 timeframe, they urged them to finalize FY2022 appropriations expeditiously with NIH funding at \$49.4 billion and NEI funding at \$877 million. Since several offices asked the EVSs about the impact of COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns, they were also able to advocate for the Research to Spark the Economy (RISE) Act, which authorizes \$25 billion in emergency funding for research recovery efforts, including \$10 billion for the NIH.

“The challenges faced during international shut-down mandates due to COVID-19 still continue, but, together, we are learning to move forward and adopt different and even better ways to do research. It was an honor to discuss these issues with Congressional staff, who received this information with sympathy and reassurances for increased awareness and funding for vision science,” said Dr. Bennett, whose research is focused on inherited retinal diseases. “Participating in this event taught me about government finance and policies, as well as how to excel as an early investigator and in my career pathway in the face of a pandemic.”

The Alliances designed this program to be an important component of these early-career vision scientists' professional development and to train the next generation of vision research advocates. The 28 participating investigators came from 20 different institutions across the United States. ■

# 14th Annual OU Vision Workshop and

## THE 14TH ANNUAL OU VISION

## WORKSHOP WAS HELD SEPTEMBER

22-23, 2021, in the

Tullos O. Coston, MD  
Lecture Hall at the Dean  
McGee Eye Institute  
(DMEI). The keynote

speaker and Fifth Annual  
Robert E. Anderson, MD,

PhD Lecturer was Paul A. Sieving, MD, PhD,  
former director of the National Eye Institute  
(NEI) and currently professor of ophthalmology  
at the University of California – Davis, where  
he holds the Neil and M.J. Kelly Presidential  
Endowed Chair in Vitreoretinal Research. His  
September 22 Anderson Lecture was entitled  
“Developing Gene Therapies for Inherited  
Retinal Degenerations.”

Dr. Sieving is known internationally for his studies of human retinal neurodegenerative diseases, including retinitis pigmentosa (RP). Born in Indiana, Dr. Sieving earned his undergraduate degree from Valparaiso University. After receiving a master’s degree in physics from Yale University, Dr. Sieving attended Yale Law School (1973-74), and then obtained his MD degree (1978) and a PhD in biomedical engineering (1981) from the University of Illinois. He also trained as an ophthalmology resident at the University of Illinois, after which he studied retinal physiology as a postdoctoral fellow (1982-84) at the University of California, San Francisco. After completing a clinical fellowship in inherited retinal degenerative diseases at Harvard’s Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary (1984-85), Dr. Sieving joined the faculty of the University of Michigan (1985-2001) and held the Paul R. Lichter Endowed Chair in Ophthalmic Genetics.



Paul A. Sieving, MD, PhD

In 2001, Dr. Sieving became the director of the NEI at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), where he oversaw an \$800 million budget that supported 1,800 vision research scientists and clinicians at 245 institutions in the United States (U.S.) and abroad. He originated a major translational program termed the *NEI Audacious Goals Initiative in Regenerative Medicine*, a 15-year effort to understand the biological basis of cell regeneration and use this to develop novel therapeutic technologies. At the NIH, he also continued clinical and research studies as a tenured senior investigator in the NIH Intramural Research Program. Dr. Sieving has published approximately 300-peer reviewed papers in ocular genetics and the pathophysiology of retinal neurodegenerative diseases.

Dr. Sieving’s major scientific contributions include identification of a novel mechanism to protect photoreceptors by modulating the retinoid cycle in the eye using 13-cis-retinoic acid (isotretinoin), which has led to several therapy efforts for Stargardt macular degeneration. He also conducted the first human clinical trial of ciliary neurotrophic factor to rescue rod and cone photoreceptors in RP. In addition, Dr. Sieving has worked on the pathophysiologic basis of X-linked retinoschisis (XLRs) and created an XLRs transgenic mouse model, which led to a gene therapy trial for XLRs at the NEI.

Among Dr. Sieving’s many honors and awards are memberships in the U.S. National Academy of Medicine, German National Academy of Sciences, American Ophthalmological Society, and Academia Ophthalmologica Internationalis. He has received the Research to Prevent Blindness Senior Scientific Investigator Award, Alcon Research Award, Honorary Doctor of Science from Valparaiso University, Pisart Vision Award from the New York Lighthouse International, Pyron Award from the American

# 5th Annual Anderson Lectureship

Society of Retinal Specialists, and Visionary Award from the Glaucoma Research Foundation.

Dr. Sieving and his wife, Pam, have been married for 51 years and have two sons, a daughter-in-law, and one grandson.



*Dr. Robert "Gene" Anderson (left) posing with Dr. Paul Sieving (right) on DMEI's front lawn during Dr. Anderson's retirement reception on September 22.*

## Dr. Anderson's Retirement Recognized Belatedly

Following Dr. Sieving's Anderson Lecture, a retirement reception and ceremony honoring Robert E. "Gene" Anderson, MD, PhD, was held on DMEI's front lawn. Attendees from across the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center (OUHSC) campus gathered to recognize

Dr. Anderson for his 25 years on the OUHSC faculty, his more than 20 years of service as the director of vision research at DMEI, and also his more than 10 years as the chair or interim chair of the OU Department of Cell Biology.

Those honoring Dr. Anderson with remarks included R. Michael Siatkowski, MD, MBA, DMEI's chief executive officer and department chair; Paul A. Sieving, MD, PhD, former director of the NEI; John P. Zubialde, MD, executive dean of the OU College of Medicine; Gregory L. Skuta, MD, DMEI's past president and department chair; and David E. Rainbolt, chair of the DMEI Board of Directors.

Dr. Anderson retired from OUHSC on June 30, 2020. Due to COVID-19, a formal gathering had been postponed until September 2021. For more

information about Dr. Anderson's enormous achievements, please refer to DMEI *InVision*, issue 21, summer 2020, pages 26-27.

## More on the OU Vision Workshop

Vision research trainees presented their work in oral presentations all day on September 23. After the trainee presentations, Dr. Sieving delivered a career development lecture at the workshop entitled "16 Views of Photoreceptors: Thoughts on a Career of an Ocular Retinal Clinical Physiologist."

To cap the two-day event, a celebratory awards dinner was held in the Lotus Pavilion at the Oklahoma City Zoo. Graduate student Manali Kamath, from Kevin K. Fuller, PhD's laboratory, won the OU Vision Workshop's R.E. Anderson Award for Best Paper, while Jorge D. Lightfoot, PhD, a T32 vision research postdoctoral trainee also from Dr. Fuller's lab, received the OU Vision Workshop's Wei Cao Award for Innovation.

DMEI's leadership would like to extend a special thank you to the OU Vision Organizing Committee: faculty supervisors, Drs. Michael H. Elliott, Yan Chen, and Kevin K. Fuller; postdoctoral fellows, Drs. Jorge Lightfoot and Md Huzzatul Mursalin; graduate students, Eric Enyong, Yeboah Kofi Gyening, Manali Kamath, James Regun Karmoker, and Bridget Parrish; and DMEI's director of external relations and development, Melody Marcum. ■



*Award winners Dr. Jorge Lightfoot (second from left) and Manali Kamath (center) pictured with Dr. Paul Sieving, the 2021 Anderson Lecturer (left), Dr. Robert "Gene" Anderson (second from right), and Dr. Michelle Callegan (right), DMEI's current director of vision research.*



## \$1.81 Million Grant to Study Staphylococcal Eye Infections Awarded by National Eye Institute

***STAPHYLOCOCCUS AUREUS***, one of more than 30 types of staphylococcal bacteria, can be devastating to vision when it infects the eye. To better understand how the bacterium begins the infection process, Michelle C. Callegan, PhD, FARVO\*, director of vision research at the Dean McGee Eye Institute (DMEI) and for the University of Oklahoma (OU) Department of Ophthalmology, has earned a five-year, \$1.81 million grant from the National Eye Institute (NEI), a component of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). She also holds another active R01 grant and an R21 grant from the NEI.

Dr. Callegan is the Dean A. McGee Professor of Ophthalmology, a Professor of Microbiology and Immunology, a George Lynn Cross Research Professor, and an Edith Kinney Gaylord Presidential Professor. During her career, she has investigated various pathogens that cause infections of the eye, including *Klebsiella* and *Bacillus*. Her current focus on *Staphylococcus*

*aureus* (*S. aureus*) brings her full circle – when she was a graduate student, she developed the first-ever research model of staphylococcal keratitis, an infection of the cornea that can threaten vision if not treated promptly.

“Staphylococci live in and on us, and most of the time they don’t cause problems,” Dr. Callegan said. “But when *S. aureus* is able to start an infection, it can cause serious complications anywhere in the body, including the eyes. In addition, *S. aureus* is on the Centers for Disease Control’s list of serious threats because of antibiotic resistance.”

Researchers understand less about how *S. aureus* begins an infection in the eye than they do subsequent parts of the infection process. Dr. Callegan decided to focus on that initial part of an infection, when *S. aureus* is able to circumvent the eye’s immune defenses. *S. aureus* is a very “sticky” bacterium because of

\*Fellow of the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology

its ability to adhere to tissue, she said. Once stuck to the surface, *S. aureus* forms abscesses and secretes toxins that kill surrounding cells.

That is the case in *S. aureus* keratitis, an infection that can result in corneal perforation and the need for a corneal transplant. Keratitis is common in contact lens wearers who do not take proper care of their lenses, Dr. Callegan said. The bacterium acts similarly in exogenous endophthalmitis, an infection inside the eye that can occur after surgery or an injury to the eye.

*S. aureus* also displays unique behavior in endogenous endophthalmitis, in which an infection originates elsewhere in the body then travels to the eye via the bloodstream. Some bacteria, like *Klebsiella*, can only cross the barrier between the bloodstream and retina if the vasculature is “leaky” (sometimes caused by conditions like diabetic retinopathy). “*S. aureus* isn’t stopped by the barrier – it will go across vasculature that is leaky or intact,” Dr. Callegan

said. “We don’t know why *S. aureus* ignores the ocular barrier. It will produce an abscess almost anywhere. The eye is just another place that, if the bacterium can find its way in, will create problems. And if such infections aren’t treated properly, people can lose their vision.”

With her new grant, Dr. Callegan aims to better understand why *S. aureus* is able to circumvent the body’s ocular defenses and cause blinding infections. Although staphylococcal species share characteristics, *S. aureus* is among the most dangerous for the eyes and the body.

“The more bacteria that we work with, the more we discover that they’re all very different. Different species have different ways of interacting with the immune response in the body. It’s worth investigating them individually, but if you can pinpoint aspects of these different organisms that are similar, you can target these factors and develop new treatments to fight them,” said Dr. Callegan. ■

## SAVE THE DATE



6th Annual Robert E. Anderson, MD, PhD Lecture  
Thursday, September 8, 2022

15th Annual OU Vision Workshop  
Thursday/Friday, September 8-9, 2022

Tullios O. Coston, MD Lecture Hall, Dean McGee Eye Institute, Acers Pavilion, Fifth Floor

**Tonia S. Rex, PhD**

Spencer and Marlene Hays Director in Translational Vision Research

Professor of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences

Associate Vice Chair for Translational Research

Vanderbilt Eye Institute

Vanderbilt University Medical Center

## RESEARCH FACULTY— DEPARTMENT OF OPHTHALMOLOGY

Martin-Paul Agbaga, PhD

Robert E. Anderson, MD, PhD\*

Lea D. Bennett, PhD

Richard S. Brush, BS

Michelle C. Callegan, PhD, FARVO

Daniel J.J. Carr, PhD, FARVO

Yan Chen, PhD

Phillip S. Coburn, PhD

Michael H. Elliott, PhD, FARVO

Kevin K. Fuller, PhD

Darren J. Lee, PhD

Feng Li, MD, MPH, MS

Raju V.S. Rajala, PhD

\* Professor Emeritus

# VISION RESEARCH RECEIVES AT DEAN MCGEE EYE INSTITUTE AND

## THE VISION RESEARCH PROGRAM AT

the Dean McGee Eye Institute (DMEI) and University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center (OUHSC) recently received a five-year, \$2.96 million grant renewal from the National Eye Institute (NEI). Called a P30 Vision Core grant, it supports the work of researchers in 19 laboratories with advanced equipment, sophisticated software, and other innovations to drive research that ultimately will improve the quality of life for patients seeking care for their vision.

Vision research is among the most highly funded areas of investigation at OUHSC. The current grant was originally awarded in 2011 and included several “cores” of specialized equipment available to vision researchers across the campus and at the neighboring Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation (OMRF). The grant renewal expands those cores, giving researchers additional tools to more quickly translate their findings into treatments.

“The amount of this grant renewal is based on the fact that most of our individual researchers hold R01 grants from the NEI, which is considered the gold standard in vision research funding,” said Michelle C. Callegan, PhD, FARVO, director of vision research at DMEI and professor in the departments of ophthalmology and microbiology/immunology in the OU College of Medicine. “Because our vision researchers have been so successful in attracting federal grant funding, we were able to renew this P30 grant, which not only advances their efforts, but helps us to recruit new vision researchers and trainees interested in vision science.”

The grant also will fund the creation of a new core in ocular immunobiology, providing researchers advanced methods of analyzing the immunological underpinnings of eye disease. “There is an immune-related slant to every model of eye disease,” Dr. Callegan said, “so the development of this core is really important to us.” The Ocular Immunobiology Core will be led by Darren J. Lee, PhD, whose



*Michelle C. Callegan, PhD, FARVO  
Director of Vision Research  
Dean A. McGee Professor of Ophthalmology  
George Lynn Cross Research Professor  
Edith Kinney Gaylord Presidential Professor  
Professor, Department of Microbiology and Immunology*



*Darren J. Lee, PhD  
Assistant Professor, Department of Ophthalmology  
Adjunct Assistant Professor, Department of Microbiology and Immunology*



# \$2.96 MILLION BOOST OU HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER

own research focuses on autoimmune uveitis, an inflammation of the eye that is the third-leading cause of blindness in the United States.

Other cores include a Model Imaging Core that allows researchers to analyze visual function and other physiological parameters of eye disease models. The core also includes an emphasis on genotyping to ensure the genetic consistency of research models. It is led by Raju V.S. Rajala, PhD, whose research focuses on neurodegenerative diseases of the retina. The Cellular Imaging Core provides sophisticated equipment that allows researchers to visualize physiological processes at the cellular and subcellular levels. That core is directed by Michael H. Elliott, PhD, FARVO, whose research focuses on cellular membranes and how they control cellular signaling in vision.

“The technology in these cores is very expensive. One individual researcher could not afford the equipment that we have,” said Dr. Callegan, who leads the overall administration of the grant. “Not only do many different

researchers use the equipment, but the cores also facilitate multidisciplinary collaboration between researchers from ophthalmology, physiology, pathology, microbiology and other areas across campus, as well as OMRF.”

Since this P30 grant was first awarded in 2011 (a prior NEI vision core grant was in place from 1999 to 2010), vision research has significantly increased at DMEI and OUHSC. More than 25 researchers across OUHSC and at OMRF are focusing on eye diseases, and multidisciplinary collaborations between vision and non-vision research laboratories have flourished. Several new vision researchers have been recruited, launched their own laboratories, and gained their own independent funding.

“Many exciting things have occurred because of this P30 grant,” Dr. Callegan said. “This funding has provided resources to which our investigators otherwise would not have access, and it has advanced research toward our ultimate goal, which is improving and restoring vision.” ■



*Raju V.S. Rajala, PhD  
M.G. McCool Professor of Ophthalmology  
Edith Kinney Gaylord Presidential Professor  
Professor of Physiology  
Adjunct Professor of Cell Biology  
Mentoring Faculty, Oklahoma Center for Neuroscience*



*Michael H. Elliott, PhD, FARVO  
Associate Professor, Department of Ophthalmology  
Presbyterian Health Foundation Presidential Professor  
Associate Professor, Department of Physiology  
Mentoring Faculty, Oklahoma Center for Neuroscience*



*Drs. Tammy Yanovitch and Andrew Melson pose during the annual awards ceremony for the Academy of Teaching Scholars held in September 2021 on the Robert M. Bird Health Sciences Library patio at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center.*

## Tammy L. Yanovitch, MD, MHSc, and Andrew T. Melson, MD, Recognized by Academy of Teaching Scholars

### TWO MEMBERS OF THE FACULTY

at the Dean McGee Eye Institute (DMEI) were recognized by the Academy of Teaching Scholars (ATS) in the University of Oklahoma (OU) College of Medicine at the ATS' annual awards ceremony held in September 2021. Tammy L. Yanovitch, MD,

MHSc, was accepted and appointed as a faculty member in the ATS, and Andrew T. Melson, MD, was selected as the recipient of a 2021 M. Dewayne Andrews, MD Excellence in Teaching Award in Graduate Medical Education (GME).

Dr. Yanovitch's induction into the ATS was the result of a rigorous selection process, as she is only the second member of the DMEI/OU faculty (R. Michael Siatkowski, MD, MBA, is the other) to join this prestigious group. In addition, she received a \$5,000 educational research grant to enhance her activities as the Institute and OU Department of Ophthalmology's director of medical student education, a role she assumed in July 2020.

Dr. Yanovitch is a clinical associate professor and pediatric ophthalmologist with special

interests in amblyopia, eye muscle surgery, double vision, pediatric glaucoma, and children with special needs. She received an M. Dewayne Andrews, MD Excellence in Teaching Award in GME in 2019 and also has earned an American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) Achievement Award and AAO Secretariat Award. In addition, Dr. Yanovitch has served on the AAO's Subspecialty Day Planning Committee and as a member of the Item Writing Committee for the American Board of Ophthalmology (ABO). She is an ABO examiner, vice president of the Learning Disabilities Committee for the American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus (AAPOS), and an editorial board member for AAPOS' scientific journal.

Dr. Yanovitch is a *magna cum laude* / Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of Tulsa and earned her medical degree (Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society) from the OU College of Medicine. She completed her internship and ophthalmology residency at DMEI/OU (receiving two Acers Resident Honor Awards) and her fellowship in pediatric ophthalmology and strabismus at Duke University, where she also served on the faculty before joining the DMEI/OU faculty in 2011.

Dr. Melson is an assistant professor and associate residency program director (see page 48) in the OU Department of Ophthalmology. His clinical and teaching activities include a blend of medical and surgical neuro-ophthalmology and comprehensive

ophthalmology/cataract surgery. Dr. Melson has received numerous honors and awards, including the AAO Achievement Award in 2020 and the Gaylord Faculty Honor Award at DMEI/OU in 2021.

Dr. Melson earned his undergraduate (*summa cum laude*) and medical (Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society, Gold Humanism Honor Society) degrees from Saint Louis University, and completed his internship at Methodist Hospital in Indianapolis, Indiana. He then served as a resident in ophthalmology at DMEI/OU, was chief resident during the 2017-2018 academic year, was the co-recipient of the Acers Resident Honor Award at DMEI in 2018, and completed a neuro-ophthalmology fellowship at DMEI/OU (receiving the Annie Moreau, MD Fellow Teaching Award) before joining the DMEI/OU faculty in 2019.

Dr. Melson is the seventh member of the DMEI/OU ophthalmology faculty to receive the Andrews Excellence in Teaching Award in GME. Other members of the ophthalmology faculty to be recognized with an Andrews Excellence in Teaching Award in GME (residents and fellows), Clinical Education (medical students), and/or Preclinical Teaching (medical students) include Drs. Annie Moreau (2), R. Michael Siatkowski, Brian K. Firestone, Andrew K. Bailey, Tammy L. Yanovitch, Cynthia A. Bradford, and James C. O'Brien.

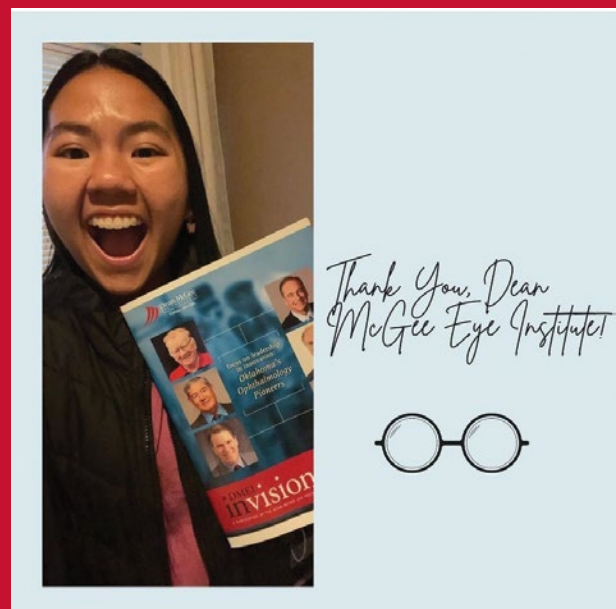
Congratulations to both Drs. Yanovitch and Melson and to all of the past DMEI/OU ophthalmology faculty honored by the Academy of Teaching Scholars! ■

## Dr. Jessica Lucas Addresses OU Pre-Optometry Club

IN OCTOBER 2021, Jessica L. Lucas, OD, FAAO, was an invited guest speaker at the University of Oklahoma (OU) Pre-Optometry Club. Dr. Lucas is a graduate of the University of Texas at Dallas and Northeastern State University College of Optometry. She joined the clinical staff at the Dean McGee Eye Institute in 2011.



Jessica L. Lucas, OD, FAAO  
Clinical Instructor



"I absolutely loved hearing from Dr. Lucas about the optometry field; it makes me so excited and confirms my desire to be in this field!"

- Lilly Pham, sophomore at OU-Norman, studying health and exercise science on the pre-optometry track.

# THE 29TH ANNUAL WALTER J. STARK

## THE 29TH ANNUAL WALTER J. STARK MEMORIAL LECTURE WAS DELIVERED

by Wallace L. M. “Lee” Alward, MD, in the Tullos O. Coston, MD Lecture Hall at the Dean McGee Eye Institute (DMEI) on September 20, 2021. Dr. Alward’s presentation was entitled “My 30-Year Journey with a Glaucoma Family: The Story of Myocilin.”

Dr. Alward is professor emeritus in the University of Iowa Carver College Medicine’s Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences. Prior to his retirement in 2020, he served as vice chair of the Department as well as the Frederick C. Blodi professor of ophthalmology and director of the glaucoma service.



*Dr. Wallace “Lee” Alward (center) pictured with members from the Stark family and select DMEI faculty during the annual Walter J. Stark Dinner on the eve of the 2021 Stark Lecture.*

Born in New Brunswick, Canada, Dr. Alward moved to Ohio at age seven, earned his bachelor of arts degree from Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio, and received his medical degree from The Ohio State University in Columbus. He completed a general surgery internship at the University of Pittsburgh, followed by six years as a commissioned officer and physician



**SAVE THE DATE: Monday, October 17, 2022**  
**THE 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL WALTER J. STARK MEMORIAL LECTURESHIP**  
8:30 am–9:30 am • Tullos O. Coston, MD Lecture Hall

**James Chodosh, MD, MPH**

*Edith Ives Cogan Professor of Ophthalmology  
Associate Director, Cornea and Refractive Surgery Service  
Associate Chief of Ophthalmology Education  
Massachusetts Eye and Ear  
Harvard Medical School*

# MEMORIAL LECTURESHIP

in the United States Public Health Service in Alaska. Dr. Alward then served his residency in ophthalmology at the University of Louisville, where he was chief resident, and completed a glaucoma fellowship at the Bascom Palmer Eye Institute in Miami. In 1987, he joined the faculty at the University of Iowa and remained on the Iowa faculty for his entire 33-year career.

A renowned clinician-scientist, Dr. Alward has co-authored more than 200 peer-reviewed publications with a research focus on the molecular genetics of glaucoma. He has contributed to several key ophthalmic genetic discoveries (including for Axenfeld-Rieger syndrome and normal-tension glaucoma) and was part of the team that described the first genetic linkage for open-angle glaucoma (GLC1A) and the mutations in the myocilin gene at the GLC1A locus as the cause for juvenile open-angle glaucoma and 3-5% of adult onset open-angle glaucoma.

Dr. Alward is an outstanding leader and educator who has served as a director and the

chair of the American Board of Ophthalmology, trained 37 glaucoma fellows, authored two textbooks, and delivered 24 prior named lectures. He was the inaugural recipient of the American Glaucoma Society's (AGS') Outstanding Educator Award in 2016 and is being recognized as the AGS Guest of Honor in March 2022. Dr. Alward received the Regents Award for Faculty Excellence from the University of Iowa in 2012 and has been recognized by the American Academy of Ophthalmology as a Guest of Honor (2018) and with both a Life Achievement Honor Award and Secretariat Award. Project Orbis (flying eye hospital) has named him a "Hero of Orbis." He is listed among the *Best Doctors in America* and is also an avid golfer.

Dr. Alward and his wife Kazi have three married children and five grandchildren.

It was an honor for the Dean McGee Eye Institute to host Dr. Alward, one of the most prominent leaders in American ophthalmology, as the 29th Walter J. Stark Memorial Lecturer! ■

## Dr. Moreau Receives Teaching Award

IN AUGUST 2021, Annie Moreau, MD, FACS, received a 2021 Outstanding Teacher Award from the University of Oklahoma (OU) College of Medicine. On a 1 to 7 scale, her average teaching score exceeds 6.5.

We are proud to recognize Dr. Moreau, who has received numerous teaching awards (including the prestigious 2020 Stanton L. Young Master Teacher Award and a 2018 OU Regents' Award for Superior Teaching) for her exceptional and consistent excellence in medical education! ■



Annie Moreau, MD, FACS  
Associate Professor  
Edith Kinney Gaylord  
Presidential Professor

# Seven Medical Students Pres

**THE 2022 ANNUAL MEETING OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CATARACT AND REFRACTIVE SURGERY (ASCRS)** will be held April 22-26 in Washington, DC. The meeting is internationally recognized for its focus on education and technological advances relevant to anterior segment surgery, which help attendees from across the globe acquire knowledge to improve surgical outcomes and patient care. There are hundreds of research submissions each year, and typically only a few (if any) medical students from a single institution would be selected. Amazingly, seven medical students from the University of Oklahoma (OU) College of Medicine will be in attendance at this year's meeting: Deanna Dang (MS4), Michael Heath (MS4), Jacob Rogers (MS4), Raj Patel (MS4), Asher Khan (MS3-4, currently taking a research year), James Colton Hill (MS2), and Anushka Raj (MS2).

"The first four students worked over a year gathering data and sifting through more than 4,000 patient charts to then develop their projects," said Kamran M. Riaz, MD, a corneal and anterior segment surgeon and clinical associate professor at the Dean McGee Eye Institute (DMEI). Special acknowledgment goes to Jacob Rogers who, even though he is not applying for ophthalmology, still had the integrity and discipline to continue with his ophthalmology research work. Asher Khan is taking an entire year to do research at DMEI and has already published two papers in six months, with another four to six likely before he finishes.

Dr. Riaz applauded the MS2 students for taking the entire summer between their MS1-MS2 years to do their respective projects. "Colton Hill's project involved analyzing more than 2,000 eyes, and Anushka Raj's project was a prospective study of eye measurements on patients using two devices with approximately 250 eyes (thus far, the largest published paper on her topic has about 80 eyes). All of these students have worked incredibly hard, and they deserve tremendous credit," Dr. Riaz said.

Dr. Tammy L. Yanovitch, a clinical associate professor and director of medical student education at DMEI/OU, expressed her appreciation to Dr. Riaz for his willingness to work with these young people. "Seven OU medical students with podium presentations at ASCRS is an unprecedented accomplishment and a true testament to Dr. Riaz' commitment to medical student research and education," stated Dr. Yanovitch. "I am grateful to be at Dean McGee and thankful that Dr. Michael Siatkowski makes teaching and working with medical students a top priority." Dr. Yanovitch also commended Dr. Mark A. Fergeson, associate dean for student affairs, and others in the OU College of Medicine for actively supporting medical student involvement in ophthalmology research. In addition to their support from the College of Medicine, each of these students will receive \$500 from DMEI to assist them with their travel costs to attend the ASCRS meeting.

Deanna Dang (MS4), who will pursue her ophthalmology residency at DMEI/OU, observed, "At our institution, patients who are considering

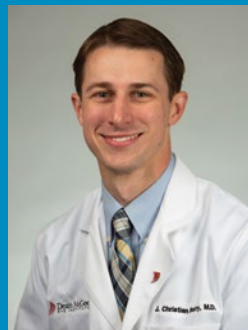
# ent at ASCRS

cataract surgery undergo immediate sequential biometry measurements with both the IOLMaster 700 and the Lenstar. We are fortunate that DMEI has both of these biometers to study; very few institutions in the country have access to both. This not only helps us deliver the best possible care for our patients, but also helps us to advance clinical research.”

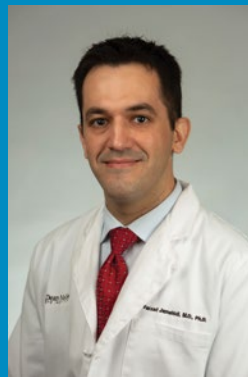
These biometers assess the measurements needed by surgeons to select their patients’ new intraocular lenses (IOLs) for cataract surgery. “In general, our patients’ eyes have measurements assessed with both biometers,” Dang continued. “However, patients with very short or long eyes or very flat or steep corneas may have differing calculations between the two biometers, differences that may be clinically significant.” Dang is presenting “Variability between Two Biometers in Eyes with Extreme Axial Length and Keratometry Measurements,” which includes the largest number of patients studied comparing these two biometers. She also will present a second paper on accuracy of IOL formulas in eyes with previous corneal transplant surgery.

“I am incredibly impressed by the productivity of these students, which would not be possible without Dr. Riaz’ dedication to clinical research and Dr. Yanovitch’s expertise in medical education,” said Dr. R. Michael Siatkowski, DMEI’s chief executive officer and chair of the OU Department of Ophthalmology. “We are honored and excited to be preparing the next generation of ophthalmologists.” ■

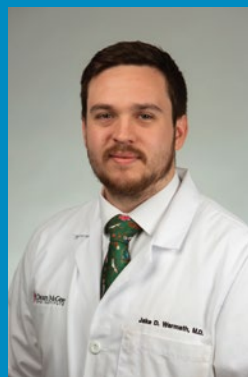
Three of the Dean McGee Eye Institute’s five PGY-4 residents will be continuing with ophthalmology subspecialty training as fellows during the 2022-2023 academic year. Congratulations to Drs. Berry, Jamshidi, and Warmath!



J. Christian Berry, MD  
Glaucoma Fellowship  
Dean McGee Eye Institute  
University of Oklahoma  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma



Farzad Jamshidi, MD, PhD  
Retina Fellowship  
University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa



Jacob D. Warmath, MD  
Cornea Fellowship  
University of Florida  
Gainesville, Florida



## DMEI Alumna Allyso Finds Satisfaction in

**AS THE DAUGHTER OF A PHYSICIAN, FORMER DEAN MCGEE EYE INSTITUTE (DMEI) RESIDENT** Allyson D. Schmitt, MD, knew early on that she too wanted to become a doctor, never even considering another career.

Today Dr. Schmitt has more than fulfilled that ambition, with a thriving ophthalmology practice in her hometown of Knoxville, Tennessee, where she also completed her undergraduate education at the University of Tennessee and now specializes in pediatric ophthalmic care.

Part of Dr. Schmitt's medical training included a three-year residency at DMEI and with the University of Oklahoma Department of Ophthalmology. She graduated in 2009, along with fellow residents Drs. Eric S. Guglielmo and Jake P. Bostrom. Prior to that, she earned her medical degree and completed a general medicine internship, both at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center in Memphis.

Dr. Schmitt originally intended to become a pediatric cardiologist or some other type of pediatric specialist. After her first year of medical school, however, she worked a summer

job in a PhD's vision research laboratory, which introduced her to ophthalmology.

"As someone who never wore glasses or had any occasion to visit an ophthalmologist, it wasn't until this point that I realized the complexities of the eyes and vision, and really considered the scope of what an ophthalmologist would do," she said. "I loved the precision of ophthalmology and the life-changing impact of improving a person's vision. Also, I enjoyed learning about the surgical side of ophthalmology, and appreciated the clinical side and the ability to build long-term relationships with patients."

Dr. Schmitt said that her DMEI residency was a defining moment in her medical training, as it was then that she first realized she could combine her two medical passions into one fulfilling career.

"As I rotated through clinics and surgery with Dr. Mike Siatkowski and Dr. Lucas Trigler, I realized that pediatric ophthalmology was the best fit for me," she said. "I loved and still love the enthusiasm and energy that children bring to a clinic day. I enjoy the challenge of getting a good exam, even when the child is not initially cooperative. I also find that it is a specialty with a wide variety of pathology and



# n Schmitt, MD, Saving Children's Vision

BY STACI ELDER HENSLEY

a broad range of surgical interventions. No two clinical or operating room days are the same, and I am constantly learning and growing.”

Dr. Schmitt said that she was extremely grateful for her residency experience, and felt supported by both the attending physicians and staff. She and her husband were parents of a 5-month-old baby when she began her residency, and the DMEI team was very welcoming and supportive of her young family.

“The training opportunity was excellent,” she added. “I encountered a wide range of ophthalmic conditions and learned how to manage them medically and surgically. I felt very prepared as I entered my fellowship, though I also felt prepared to enter comprehensive ophthalmology at the end of my DMEI residency. It takes a special skill set to be able to teach and train residents, and I am very appreciative of the willingness of the faculty and staff at Dean McGee to pour into residents in that way and to teach the next generation of ophthalmologists.”

After completing her residency, Dr. Schmitt went on to a fellowship in pediatric ophthalmology and strabismus at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville. In addition to her private medical practice, she

is a medical staff member at East Tennessee Children's Hospital. She and her husband, Jonathan, have two sons and a daughter, a fact which helps her empathize with her patients' parents.

“In pediatric ophthalmology, parents sometimes have intense anxiety about their child's eye conditions or the possibility that they may need surgery on their eyes,” she said. “As a mother myself, I can relate to a parent's concerns and understand that their issues are driven by the desire to do what is best for their child and allow them the best possible outcome. This can mean extended time discussing the future needs of a child with a congenital malformation or simply reassuring parents who are upset that their child will need glasses.”

Dr. Schmitt added that, in her opinion, current advances in medical and surgical techniques make it an exciting time to be practicing in her field. Many pediatric patients require long-term care, which allows her to build solid relationships and provide ongoing support so that the child obtains the best vision possible.

“When children and families comply with the required treatments and we have a great visual result, it makes it all worthwhile.” ■



Andrew T. Melson, MD  
Assistant Professor  
Associate Residency Program  
Director

## DR. ANDREW T. MELSON JOINS RESIDENCY PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

**ANDREW T. MELSON, MD, WAS SELECTED AS THE SECOND ASSOCIATE RESIDENCY PROGRAM DIRECTOR** effective September 1, 2021. He joins Drs. Carolyn E. Kloek (associate residency program director) and R. Michael Siatkowski (residency program director) as a member of the residency education leadership team at the Dean McGee Eye Institute (DMEI)/University of Oklahoma (OU) Department of Ophthalmology.

“As a former DMEI/OU ophthalmology resident and neuro-ophthalmology fellow, and now as a faculty member and director of resident clinic, Dr. Melson has repeatedly demonstrated his excellence in patient care, program administration, and medical education,” stated Dr. Siatkowski, also DMEI’s chief executive officer and Edward L. Gaylord professor and chair of the OU Department of Ophthalmology.

Learn more about Dr. Melson and his achievements on pages 40-41. ■



## SAVE THE DATE! DMEI Ophthalmology Symposium 2022 46th Annual OU Resident and Alumni Meeting Friday/Saturday, June 10 – June 11, 2022

42nd Annual Tullos O. Coston, MD Lecture (June 11)

**Robert E. Wiggins Jr., MD, MHA**

*President, American Academy of Ophthalmology  
Past President, American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus  
Managing Partner, Asheville Eye Associates, Asheville, North Carolina*



IT'S NOT JUST DMEI'S PHYSICIANS WHO ARE EXCEPTIONAL

# Meet Our Champion Support Team

BY STACI ELDER HENSLEY

**NO MEDICAL ORGANIZATION CAN ACHIEVE TOP-TIER STATUS WITHOUT AN OUTSTANDING SUPPORT TEAM – ONE THAT INCLUDES RESEARCHERS, ADMINISTRATORS, FACILITY MAINTENANCE, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT), AND OTHER BEHIND-THE-SCENES PERSONNEL SUPPORTING OUR SCIENTISTS AND THE PHYSICIANS WHO PROVIDE DIRECT PATIENT CARE.** At the Dean McGee Eye Institute (DMEI), we are blessed to have such a team in place, and in this issue, we would like to introduce you to some of the phenomenal team members that our patients do not always get to meet:

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## Cristal Phares

### Clinical Applications Specialist

Accurate health records and smooth computer performance are critical to good patient care, and as DMEI's electronic health records (EHR) team leader, clinical applications specialist Cristal Phares provides a full range of support for our clinical and administrative staff, in both EHR and traditional IT computer support.

Phares works alongside a team of nine EHR/IT experts who provide technical support to all of DMEI's clinics. "I do training with doctors, technicians, and new providers, and do work flow analyses," she said. "I also configure software, test, and troubleshoot. There is so much technology that trickles down into the workload, and we help as best we can." She has also helped with billing audits and other key tasks, and often assists patients who have issues learning to utilize their online patient portal.

Phares said she takes pride in knowing how critical her role is to the Institute's success.

"The technical environment is the main way we collect information, and if someone can't do their job because of technical issues with the computers or programs, that's not acceptable," she said. "We're in the fixing business, so ultimately our staff can do their jobs."

Her own job keeps her on the move, as Phares and her team provide support for five DMEI locations and several other specialty clinics, some located as far away as Shawnee and Enid. More recently, she has dealt with an increase in the need for remote access devices for DMEI staff working from home during the pandemic.

"We had to get people set up at home with encrypted laptops, etc., which was more on the IT side," she said. "That has added an extra element to the job, as a lot of staff are still working from home."

Dean McGee switched from print to electronic records in the summer of 2012. Phares became an original member of the EHR team in early 2012, eventually being promoted to the team coordinator position.

"It's been a perfect fit for me," she said. "I love the challenges we face every day, and I like that I'm skilled and experienced enough in my job that whenever people call, I can help them."



## Patrick Bishop

### Facility Maintenance

Dean McGee's clinics, surgery center, and administrative offices are among the finest in the country, and keeping them in that condition is the job of facility maintenance coordinator Patrick Bishop. Since 2010, Bishop has been responsible for all building repairs and maintenance for DMEI's multiple locations. He takes pride in knowing that each facility runs smoothly and boasts an attractive, welcoming atmosphere, both inside and out.

"I love what I do for a living," he said. "I get to fix things daily, with each day being generally different than the previous one." Along with routine maintenance projects, "I've even had the pleasure of fixing dozens of shoes, a daughter's favorite necklace, or a toy. It's a great feeling to be able to help others."

Bishop has personal as well as professional ties to DMEI. His wife was in the midst of a battle with thyroid eye disease, and soon after he was hired, she began treatment at DMEI.

"Thanks to our fine doctors, my wife recovered, and that was one of the reasons I knew I belonged here," he said. "We help so many people, my wife included, and we have great staff and coworkers."

Bishop said that one of his most memorable experiences was on a day when DMEI was closed due to inclement weather, with a foot of snow on the ground and an outside temperature of minus 17 degrees. Bishop went to the Institute to assist a stranded researcher, and, while handling that situation, discovered that water was leaking from a fourth-floor sprinkler line. He was able to take quick action, which kept the facility from being flooded.

More recently, supply chain issues stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic have made his job more challenging, as it is difficult to obtain needed parts. "It disappoints me to have to tell someone that a job will take weeks instead of hours due to the shortages we are experiencing," he said.

Bishop is known for his outstanding performance, which earned him one of DMEI's very first "Mustache for the Mission" awards, presented to employees who go above and beyond. For him, though, it's not about the recognition, but the job itself.

"I get paid to do something I love doing," he said. "It doesn't get much better than that."

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**Jerod Warren**  
Optical Lab Lead Technician

He may never meet them in person, but as the lead technician of DMEI's Optical Lab, Jerod Warren has a huge behind-the-scenes impact on many patients' lives.

Warren is in charge of a two-person team responsible for processing all glasses orders that come through the DMEI lab, as well as maintenance and repairs to the lab machinery. Along with creating individual pairs of glasses, he also pulls and verifies lenses, processes payments, does patient data entry, and is responsible for stocking lenses and other materials. The lab is located at the Oklahoma Health Center campus, where all of the DMEI clinics' glasses orders are processed.

No two pairs of glasses are alike, he said, but all require patience and precision to create.

"I find that a lot of people aren't very familiar with how the process works as a whole," Warren said. "Machines do a lot of the cutting and shaping, but we (technicians) still have to line everything up and make sure all is being done correctly. It's important to remember that we're working with millimeters at a time, and being 2 or 3 millimeters off can essentially amount to a full reset of the lenses."

Keeping up with orders has been challenging of late, he said, due to COVID-related supply chain issues, which have made it hard to keep lenses in stock and lead to delays in processing orders for more complicated prescriptions, notably trifocals.

Nevertheless, "I really enjoy the challenges the job sends my way," Warren said. "There is always something new to overcome or solve, and there's something very cathartic about overcoming obstacles like that."



**Nan Perkins**  
Patient Financial Services

Paying for medical services can be confusing and anxiety-inducing for many people. Helping our patients understand the complexities of paying for their care, as well as finding payment options, is the job of DMEI's Patient Financial Services Office.

The office has a team of four, supervised by Nan Perkins, who has been with the Institute for five years. The group is housed at the main Oklahoma Health Center campus, and provides services to all of DMEI's locations.

"My team and I work directly with patients to help them understand their billing, insurance deductibles, coinsurance, and copays," Perkins said. "We notify surgery patients of any out-of-pocket fees they may have for their upcoming procedures. If a patient is uninsured, we see if they will qualify for our patient financial assistance program, and, if not, we work with the patient to come up with a payment plan to make it possible for them to move forward with their treatment. My team also handles the drug fund assistance programs, which finance injectable medications that some patients can't afford but require to continue their treatment."

Perkins and her team also assist DMEI physicians with billing questions and concerns.

Like other departments, COVID-19 has impacted patient financial services, which can be frustrating. "We have not been able to meet face-to-face with patients as much to explain their bills or benefits," Perkins said. "It is sometimes easier for patients to see what someone is talking about, rather than just hearing it."

Paying for medical care can be stressful even when a person has health insurance, and Perkins and her team take great pride when they can alleviate someone's anxiety and find ways to make the recommended treatment plan financially possible. Being able to reduce their apprehension, she said, is incredibly rewarding.

"A patient came into the office who was struggling with medical bills due to all of her health issues, and my team and I were able to help her apply for our financial assistance, as well as provide assistance with outside facilities and physicians," Perkins said. "The patient made a special trip back to DMEI just to say thank you and provided us with a card of appreciation. The fact that that patient took time to show us appreciation lets my team and me know we are doing the right things."

"Customer service is often looked at as a small piece of the puzzle, but, in fact, we handle a piece of each and every department within DMEI and the McGee Eye Surgery Center," she added. "We have to wear many different hats from moment to moment to be able to assist our patients and coworkers."

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**Sandra Cooper**  
Purchasing Coordinator

Making every cent count is at the heart of every decision made by purchasing coordinator Sandra Cooper. Not only is she exceptionally good at her job, Cooper also is one of those upbeat individuals who has a smile and kind word for everyone, whether it's patients, vendors, or her fellow DMEI employees.

While she could easily stay at her desk most of the time, Cooper is a people person who prefers interacting with others one-on-one. She's a familiar face to the staff at all of DMEI's metro locations, traveling around to each of these sites on a regular basis. By communicating directly with everyone and seeing their working environment, it makes her better able to understand their needs.

As purchasing coordinator, Cooper is responsible for just that – every single purchase made on behalf of DMEI. Those purchases can range from something as small as paper clips to office furniture, operating room equipment, and big-ticket building maintenance components. She also is responsible for ordering all medical supplies and medications. It's a complicated job, requiring constant attention to detail, and it keeps Cooper hopping. Much of her time is

spent researching products and product sources for every single item she orders, always looking for the best deal.

"I believe in going the extra mile to help everyone and to help Dean McGee," she said. "I consider it my duty to save every penny I can. I may only find something for \$50 less, or \$5 less, or even 10 cents less, but every penny saved adds up. Times are tough, and I look out for Dean McGee."

The COVID-19 pandemic has made parts of her job much more difficult, Cooper said. In particular, supply chain issues are making it hard to obtain needed medications, masks, and gloves. Those that are available have a much higher price tag – which has made it challenging to find what is needed at a reasonable cost.

"It doesn't matter how hard it is to track down the best bargain. I'm gonna find it, one way or another," she said.

Cooper said she loves to help out whenever and wherever she can, and works closely with facility maintenance coordinator Patrick Bishop to ensure the smooth running of the operation. Her positive attitude and willingness to go the extra mile has earned her two of DMEI's employee recognition "Mustache for the Mission" awards and Employee of the Month at DMEI in February 2022 (see page 22).

"I love working at Dean McGee," she said. "Everybody is a team player, and everyone here means a lot to me."





**Rita Ward, RN**  
Recovery Room/Risk Manager

As a registered nurse, Rita Ward fulfills a critical role at DMEI, supervising the recovery room of the McGee Eye Surgery Center (MESCC). It's a busy job, especially when combined with her additional duties of supervising infection control protocols and credentialing all clinical staff.

Ward's days are long ones, as surgical patients typically begin arriving at 6 a.m., and the final ones are discharged around 6 p.m. "We see between 650 to 800 patients in a month, usually averaging about 700," she said. "I walk in the door and I start working, literally helping with pre-op, tracking lab work, finding IVs, etc. I just do what I can to help them get started."

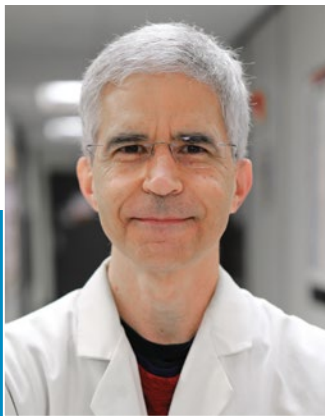
Ward supervises a team of 20 nurses, who care for patients in both the preoperative and recovery rooms. It's a challenging role, as "we

have some ophthalmology patients who are very sick – they have diabetes, high blood pressure, heart problems, asthma, COPD," she said. "But when you are able to help a patient – like someone who had cataracts removed and can now see clearly – knowing you've done something to improve their life is my favorite part of the job."

Outside her pre- and postoperative care responsibilities, Ward is tasked with ensuring that all of the Institute's physicians are properly credentialed to meet MESCC's bylaws, as well as guidelines from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care. That, along with meeting infection control protocols, means a lot of hours spent verifying and submitting required information to regulatory agencies, writing reports, and doing in-house documentation, as well as staff supervision.

"I have a lot of things I'm responsible for, but if it's a patient problem, that's always the first priority," she said. "I love that I get to interact with everyone – the patients, our doctors, anesthesiologists, residents, and fellows. That's what makes it fun and worthwhile."

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**Roger Astley**  
Research Technician

Researching bacterial infections in the eye and training students to do the same is the task of DMEI's Roger Astley, research technician. Astley not only performs research and maintains equipment; he also supervises and trains student researchers, making sure they have the materials, tools, and education they need, along with any help or advice on a day-to-day basis.

Astley works in the laboratory of director of vision research Michelle C. Callegan, PhD, FARVO, studying two specific types of bacterial infections in the eye. The first is endophthalmitis, which can occur after surgery or from an injury, like being poked in the eye with a sharp object. The second is keratitis, an infection of the cornea that often results from poor contact lens hygiene. Both are potentially blinding, and the team's goal is to better understand the infections, and thus provide more effective treatments, before vision is lost.

In keeping with DMEI's role as a cutting-edge medical research facility, Astley said the lab's students have made many small discoveries pertaining to the infectious process and what occurs during bacterial endophthalmitis. "We are trying to understand how a living thing (bacteria) causes a disease in another living thing (humans)," he said. "Living things are

complicated. We have to figure out how to break the infection process into simple enough parts that we can understand what is happening."

Special challenges were overcome this past year, he noted, when COVID-19 quarantines forced the lab to shut down or "pause" its operations.

"My job is to keep everything running, so shutting down the lab last year was hard," he said. "Research develops a momentum when it's going well, and it was hard to regain that momentum at first when we came back."

"The technologies and medical treatments we enjoy today were just research projects yesterday," Astley noted. "If we want to continue to progress and enjoy good health, we must continue to support research."

For him personally, Astley said the opportunity to constantly learn is what he enjoys most.

"In this field, we will always encounter new information and new techniques," he said. "In some of my former jobs, once I learned the skills I needed, I just attended professional development to keep up to date. In my current position, I have to read articles every week to keep up on the new developments, and there are always new skills I'm learning to keep up with developing technology."

"The individuals featured in this article are every CEO's dream," said R. Michael Siatkowski, MD, MBA, DMEI's chief executive officer and the Edward L. Gaylord professor and chair of the University of Oklahoma Department of Ophthalmology. "They are extremely intelligent, highly ethical, and effective communicators who are fully dedicated to the DMEI mission. We truly could not do what we do without them. What's even more amazing is that we employ dozens more with important behind-the-scenes roles who fulfill their duties in a similar fashion. We are both thankful for, and blessed by, these unsung heroes of the Dean McGee Eye Institute." ■



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*Great things...are never done  
by one person. They're done by  
a team of people.*

”

- Steve Jobs



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