It can be said that a hero can be defined as an individual of distinguished ability and courage; someone you regard as a model or ideal; someone who inspires you. Sometimes you don’t know who your hero is until he is standing right in front of you. Meet Tom Sullivan.

He was born blind. Over time his mother noticed that he seemed to have difficulty seeing. His premature birth had resulted in the need for oxygen treatment while in an incubator; he was given too much oxygen, resulting in permanent blindness. He was diagnosed with retrolental fibroplasia, or “retinopathy of prematurity”.

What Tom Sullivan then experienced was nothing less than a nightmare. He was teased by other kids; he was sent away to a school for the blind at age five; when home his world was confined to his house and a backyard surrounded by an eight foot fence. But one day, at age ten, Tom decided to jump over a barrier and change his life forever. He climbed over that eight foot fence, met the boy living behind his house, and this resulted in a lifelong friendship and someone who taught him how to ride a bike, play sports, and fish. And he has been breaking down barriers, defying all those who said “a blind person can not do that”, and performing miracles ever since.

Who is Tom Sullivan? He is only an actor, author, director, producer, singer, composer, and motivational speaker. And, if that isn’t impressive enough, he graduated first in his class at Harvard University. He has authored nine books, the first of which, “If You Could See What I Hear” was made into a widely acclaimed movie in the early 1980s. He appeared on the Tonight Show with Johnny Carson no less than 60 times, sang the Star Spangled Banner at the 1976 Super Bowl, appeared in numerous television shows, most notably a recurring role in “Highway to Heaven” (for which he also wrote numerous scripts and composed the theme song) and was nominated for two Emmy awards. One of his Emmy nominations was from a widely acclaimed show he hosted for ESPN entitled “Superior Beings” in which he profiled athletes with disabilities who use sports to exhibit uniqueness as superior beings. It was on that program where he made a quote

Continued, page 2
The story of colleagues, good friends, and sister-in-laws, Jennifer Howard, OD, MPH ('08), and Kathryn Howard Mayberry, OD, MBA ('08) was featured in the March issue of Women in Optometry.

Jordan Jones, OD ('11) and UMSL Cornea and Contact Lens Resident, Stephanie Woo, OD authored columns for the AOA Section on Contact Lenses and Cornea monthly newsletter.

Drs. Timothy Wingert and Howard McAlister were recently elected to the National Academies of Practice (NAP) in honor of their achievements and contributions to the health care profession.

Natasha Jenkins Long, OD ('07) was honored recently with the 2012 Young Careerist award from her western Nebraska community Monument Business and Professional Women’s Foundation.

Dr. Julie DeKinder and Dr. Alex Harris have been promoted from Assistant Clinical Professor to Associate Clinical Professor.

The story of Daniel Dodd, son on Nick Dodd, OD ('10) and his wife Kimberly was told in the Summer, 2010 issue of the EyeWire. He was born premature (24 weeks and weighed 1 pound 14oz). Below is a recent photo of Daniel, who just turned three and is doing great.

that will forever be associated with him and his mission in life: “If extraordinary people can do impossible things, isn’t it reasonable to assume that ordinary people can do extraordinary things.”

And Tom Sullivan is an accomplished athlete. In an earlier life he was an outstanding wrestler and has been inducted into the Wrestling Hall of Fame. He currently enjoys golfing, skiing, and skydiving while also being a marathon runner. In fact, at age 65, Tom is competing in triathlons as well as participating in the next season of “Dancing with the Stars”. Once again, he is breaking down barriers while destroying stereotypes. His story is well worth reading. For more, go to: http://sullivanlive.com, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6biUGtABUMU, and the book and movie “If You Could See What I Hear”.

Tom Sullivan, however, is first and foremost on a mission: to promote the preservation of vision – notably in our young people – to the individuals who are most interested and qualified to make a difference. And the UMSL College of Optometry was privileged that – as one of the four Colleges of Optometry selected for an InfantSee® pilot program for which he is the featured speaker – we had the opportunity to spend three days with this amazing individual. His speech to the students on the first day of his visit, was – in a word – life-changing. For many, if not most, of the students who listened to him that day it was the most inspirational talk they have ever heard in their life. He made us laugh; he made us cry; he sang songs with a passionate and strong voice that echoed off the walls of the JC Penney Auditorium. Most of all, he inspired us. We cried when, right after a photo of his wife of over 40 years, Patty, was shown in the background he said, “I would sell my soul just to have one opportunity to see her.” And his message to the students was very clear. “I want you to hate the idea of vision loss . . . If there is going to be vision preservation in our country, it’s up to you. You are the one’s who care the most about the vision of infants. Your mission is to preserve vision and eliminate blindness from the face of the earth.”

He reminded everyone that their lifelong compassion should not be limited simply to the child but to always remember that, whether they are aware of it or not: “Many parents come to your office scared, saying the silent prayer ‘please make sure my baby’s eyes are okay; please take care of my child’. Your mission should always be to preserve the sight of babies, children, and adults – only turning their darkness into light – but also seeing the change in the face of their loved ones. Then you realize that, in fact, you can make miracles happen.”

By the time he left UMSL, after receiving an honorary degree and providing the keynote address at commencement that Saturday night, he had changed the lives of those around him. For Dean Larry Davis, who had the privilege of being in his company quite often during that time, this was especially true. “For three days in May our community has had the privilege of getting to know Tom Sullivan. In support of the InfantSee program, Tom challenged each of us to be an agent of hope to families who seek our care. Tom inspired . . . while allowing us to see the very unique, special and gifted person he has become. More than most he clearly understands what it means to be a compassionate, passionate, responsible and an engaged participant in life’s journey.”

And he certainly has not ever been cheated in his pursuit of life’s journey. It’s been well chronicled that, while on a phone call in which he was receiving his first invitation to appear on the “To-
Commencement for the Class of 2012: A Very Special Graduation Ceremony

On May 12th, a record 47 young doctors culminated their optometric academic pursuits by receiving their Doctor of Optometry degree in a beautiful ceremony at the Touhill Performing Arts Center. With most of this spectacular auditorium filled with friends and family of the graduates, this wonderful ceremony was made even more special as a result of a very inspirational commencement address from renowned actor, entertainer and author, Tom Sullivan.

The Class of 2012 was special in many ways. First, this class from day one in August, 2008 has been referred to as our highest achieving class. Comments from many of the faculty have confirmed this over the past four years. They have been very hard-working and notable accomplishments including numerous campus intramural championships and runner-up finishes, a national vice-president of the American Optometric Student Association, and a considerable amount of service work, both in the St. Louis community, and in other countries. Third, this class certainly learned time management. With a record 12 children born to members of the Class of 2012 (and three forthcoming), they did an outstanding job of combining an active personal life with a rigorous curriculum and achieving excellence. Fourth, in August of 2008, 47 students were admitted (44 is ideal for our facilities), requiring room changes among other compromises. They endured and, remarkably 46 of the 47 graduates were there at orientation almost four years ago. Finally, they were the first class to make the transition to Charlotte, NC to take Part Three of the NBEO examinations, an adjustment in time, income, and anxiety that was not known or budgeted for at the time of admission. The closeness of this class and what the last four years meant to them is expressed well by Mark Wilkins, OD, “It is an honor to be a member of the Class of 2012. I have enjoyed spending the past four years together. I am confident that this group of doctors will impact many lives as they serve patients. Thanks Class of 2012 for all the memories!” Dustin Wiles, OD, feels similarly: “It was a great privilege and honor to be a part of this class. I

Dean Larry Davis with Tom Sullivan, Vice-Chancellor Glen Cope, and Chancellor Thomas George

dedicated to excellence, attributes that we fully expect them to continue during their optometric journey. Second, this class has been represented by several

Kathryn Grace Wiles was born on May 7th. She is the daughter of Derek Wiles, OD, ('11) and wife Katelyn and the niece of Dustin Wiles, OD, ('12).

Lana Brenci was born March 2nd. She is the daughter of Amanda Brenci, OD, ('09).

Congratulations to Jeff Pikul, OD, ('09) and wife Abby on the arrival of Emma on April 13th.

Congratulations to staff member Michael Howe on being chosen for the The Employee of the Month award for “Innovation & Creativity.” Michael is a Senior Research Engineering Technician.

Continued, page 4
night Show”, he thought he heard his infant daughter scream as she fell into their swimming pool. He ran out and jumped into the pool and for 60 seconds felt nothing. He finally came to the surface and exclaimed his frustrations to God. He then thought he heard bubbles on the surface of the pool; he then dove where he thought the bubbles were, and proceeded to save his daughter’s life. His first time skiing was highlighted in the weekly profiles that he provided to Good Morning America for five years. It was also the first time his seven year old son, Tommy, was going to ski. He asked Tommy, “What does it mean when people say your daddy is handicapped?” His son’s response brought tears to Tom and all who watched this program: “I don’t think it means anything. Because handicapped people are the same as other people.” So you see: Tom Sullivan has performed and accomplished everything, and more, than that of an individual with sight. Perhaps if he could see, he would notice that he has a disability. But he refuses to surrender to the omission of that sense, a sense we take for granted. He then turned to the graduates and stated, “it’s so significant because what you do means so much to me.” He implored the graduates to always show compassion for their patients and for those in need, always “walk every step of the way” with them. And always “remember a blind friend and how much he would love to experience the sense of what it would mean to see a smile.” He finished by telling them to “turn on the light of sight for their patients and by doing so, the light of hope. You are the young heroes of my future.”

Tom Sullivan’s greatest legacy will not be the many inspirational books he has authored; the hundreds of motivational speeches he has given, or his incredible athleticism. No, his legacy lies in the fact that over the next four years, he will influence thousands of optometry students to create miracles; to give the gift of vision to as many as several thousand young people who will be able to visualize a world that he has never seen. The miracle in our life is not only that Tom Sullivan was born without sight and decided not to allow that to keep him fenced in – and for that he is truly optometry’s hero - but that he is also the ultimate American hero for what he will mean to current and future generations of children.

know that UMSL has prepared each of us to provide a valuable service and that we will serve our patients, communities, and the profession well. Each of my classmates holds a special place in my heart and I pray that each of their futures will be blessed.”

The evening included the annual presentation of awards. Many graduates were honored for academic and clinical excellence. Dustin Wiles, OD, in addition to being voted Student Marshal, received six awards including the highest awards for outstanding scholarship: the Silver Medal Award, the Dean’s Award, and the M. Earl McClellan Award, the latter sponsored by the Missouri Optometric Foundation. Mark Wilkins, OD, received the Missouri Optometric Foundation award for Excellence in Clinical Skills and Melissa Lorber, OD, was awarded the William R. Jackson, Jr. O.D. Memorial Scholarship by the Missouri Optometric Foundation.

The highlight of the evening was the conferring of degrees by Chancellor Thomas George. In addition, an honorary degree, Doctor of Humane Letters was given to Tom Sullivan. Tom was quite humbled by this honor and called it the single most significant honor bestowed upon him. He then turned to the graduates and stated, “it’s so significant because what you do means so much to me.” He implored the graduates to always show compassion for their patients and for those in need, always “walk every step of the way” with them. And always “remember a blind friend and how much he would love to experience the sense of what it would mean to see a smile.” He finished by telling them to “turn on the light of sight for their patients and by doing so, the light of hope. You are the young heroes of my future.”

Scott Ream, OD, represented the Class of 1987, celebrating their 25th anniversary and Tom Greene (’85) reminded the graduates that they are now officially alumni of the College with the hope that they will help further the advancement of the College in the years to come. The evening ended with cameras flashing constantly within and outside of this beautiful venue as an outstanding group of young doctors, the UMSL Class of 2012, collected continuing memories of an evening that was truly unforgettable.
The White Coat Ceremony: A Celebration of Clinical Privileges for the Class of 2014

On May 18th, a beautiful Friday afternoon in St. Louis, 39 members of the Class of 2014 were formally awarded clinical privileges at the Millennium Student Center. In front of family and friends, many of whom had traveled long distances to witness this ceremony, the honorees received their white coat. Master of Ceremonies Dr. Ed Bennett, Assistant Dean of Student Services and Alumni Relations, reminded all of the friends and family that this was, indeed, an event worthy of their presence. He also told the honorees that, next to their graduation in May of 2014, this is the most significant event in their four years as an optometry student. Dr. Carl Bassi, Director of Research and Graduate Studies, was a very popular choice to provide some encouraging words to the Class of 2014. He presented a slide show giving a history of the white coat and its significance. Interesting enough, when asked what their most memorable moment was during their first two years of optometry school, it was when Dr. Bassi morphed into Justin Bieber (i.e., “Bieber Fever”). Dr. Ed Jarka, Chief, Eye Health Management Services, presented the “Optometric Oath” and all of the honorees and optometrists in attendance repeated it. Caryn La Buda (’13) who has served as an outstanding tutor to this class, represented her class and gave a very good presentation on what lies ahead for our young clinicians. This event was coordinated by the Class of 2013 and Caryn, Brigette Colley, Sarah Morris, and all of the class members who contributed to this program as well as attended it are to be complimented for a job well done. Of course, the highlight was the formal presentation of the white coat to each honoree. Assisting in this process were two faculty members instrumental in this process, Associate Professor Dr. Gary Bachman, and Assistant Clinical Professor Dr. Linda Marks. Congratulations to the Class of 2014. We are all very proud of you.

Three Members of the College Are Inducted Into the National Academy of Inventors®

On Friday afternoon, April 20th, at a very nice ceremony at the Student Millennium Center, three members of the College of Optometry family were inducted into the UMSL Chapter of the National Academy of Inventors®. Both Carl Bassi, PhD, Director of Research and Graduate Studies and Michael Howe, Senior Research Technician were inducted via their work, mentioned in the Winter EyeWIRE, pertaining to the Quantitative Three Dot (Q3D) device which allows doctors to detect amblyopia sooner than currently possible. Dr. Bassi was impressed with the ceremony. “It was amazing to see how much depth and diversity of work is going on at UMSL and it was wonderful to have the opportunity to see all of this great work highlighted at this ceremony.” Also inducted into the National Academy of Inventors was Raymond I. Myers, OD, Clinical Professor, whose research emphases include innovative techniques of refractive surgery and safer contact lens case design. In addition to a patent addressing lenticular refractive surgery of presbyopia, other refractive errors, and cataract retardation, Dr. Myers has several other patents pending.
The Career Change

How many people in life simply live each day the same as the one before; they really don’t enjoy their job but fail to have the courage to improve the quality of their life. Having the opportunity to see Dave Remington, OD, at a recent continuing education event – still practicing optometry into his 9th decade of life – is a reminder of someone who made a career change and, upon graduation from optometry school 30 years ago, became an adjunct professor at UMSL and his passion for the profession was very evident and instilled in our students; not to mention that he established our Student Volunteers of Optometric Services to Humanity organization. Every year our entering class has up to 10-20% of individuals who decided they wanted a career that makes much more of a difference in the lives of others than their present occupation. Some were accountants, others in sales . . . and perhaps even an engineer or two. Meet Charles “Chip” Pelton, OD, who epitomizes the individual who - even with a family at home to support - had the courage as he entered his 40s, to pursue optometry, a profession in which he sincerely believed he could make a difference in the lives of other people. “I was a mechanical engineer working for the rail industry for the last 7 years of my career before Optometry. Throughout engineering school, we were told that the curriculum was rigorous because our positions would “matter” once we entered the work force. In reality, I found that engineers tend to be put at the lower end of the pecking order when considering different functions within a company. For example, the engineering staff at a railcar company had to answer to sales (who would sell a product/service that did not exist, and expect engineering to make good on those promises). We also had to answer to purchasing, when pricing from our suppliers would dictate the equipment that we could or could not use. Accounting also had a large say in how our department was run. But the deciding factor in my leaving engineering and entering Optometry was what I perceived to be a lack of integrity on the part of the company that I was working for. During the economic downturn that occurred in the early and mid 2000’s, an emphasis was put on building railcars as cheaply as possible in order to boost the bottom line. Many companies have gone towards “lean manufacturing”, but TRUE lean manufacturing has the customer’s satisfaction as the driving force behind all operations in manufacturing. If a process does not add value for a customer, the process is eliminated. With the company that I was working for, however, virtually anything was done that would cut costs of production, even if it was detrimental to the finished product. Since we, as engineers, were the liaison with the customer’s inspectors during and after manufacture, we were left to try to pass off inferior product to the customer. I was extremely uncomfortable with this, and decided to pursue Optometry in order to do something that ‘matters’.

To Chip’s credit he had the integrity and desire to find something new. That “something” was optometry. His journey to May 12th was not an easy one, trying to balance being a parent and a rigorous curriculum but it was a decision that he cherishes and he intends to make difference. “I feel like I made a very good choice. I was under a lot of stress before leaving the rail industry, and that has gone away. I realize that I am not going to be changing the world, but if I can at least have a positive impact on patients’ lives, it will be well worth it. During my time at UMSL, I feel like my age has not been a factor. Everyone (faculty, students, staff) have treated me as if I was the same age as everyone else. Since I have two kids (one sixteen and one eleven) who are very active, it was sometimes a challenge to balance family life with school. I probably could have gotten better grades if I had devoted more time to studies and less time to things like taking kids to practices, etc., but I felt that I had an obligation to not cheat my family out of a father/husband in order to fulfill my goal of becoming an Optometrist. In the same vein, I did not participate in as many extracurricular activities or organizations as many of my classmates because of a desire to preserve family time. Overall, though, I feel like I was able to balance home life with school life fairly well.”

Don’t be surprised if Chip follows in the footsteps of Dr. Remington and has a lengthy career in optometry. “I will be working 2-3 days a week with Dr. Steve Haring (a 1989 UMSL grad) at West County Eyecare, and am currently in negotiations to buy a part time practice in Creve Coeur to fill in my remaining schedule. I will probably only see patients for 10-15 years, but then again, one never knows. I have heard that many Optometrists continue seeing patients into their seventies, because they get so much enjoyment and fulfillment out of it.”

Every class in a College of Optometry should include someone like Chip Pelton. His maturity, attitude, and the wisdom he can provide based upon his past experiences benefitted everyone around him. The profession of optometry will likewise greatly benefit from the passion he will bring to his new chosen career. And on graduation night, in the beauty that is the Touhill Performing Arts Center, no one appreciated receiving the Doctor of Optometry degree more than Charles “Chip” Pelton, OD.
The Artist

The rigors of mastering the optometry school curriculum are well known. To be successful means you can not be an island. You need the assistance of your extended family (i.e., your class); for example, with the formation of study groups for NBEO examinations which has resulted in high success rates for the Class of 2012 and, most recently, for the Class of 2013. Secondly, it’s important to have outside interests to represent a desirable and needed form of stress relief to take one’s mind off of optometry, even if for a brief time. That said, there may never be a graduate with the multi-talents of Suzanne Lakamp, OD. She is the ultimate artist with paintings displayed in the College of Optometry as well as a recent television interview on behalf of another one of her passions, ballroom dancing.

These interests have been long-term as she relates. “My great passions in life are art and dancing. I loved art from childhood onward. I prefer to paint with acrylics on custom-made canvas. During Optometry school, I have been in four juried art shows throughout St. Louis. My portfolio is mostly anatomy inspired, and portraits are my favorite. The more popular pieces are either comical or dark. I also loved dancing since I can remember. I took jazz and ballet classes when I was much younger. One day in college, a friend asked me to join her in going to a salsa dance club. It sounded like fun, and I learned the basics of how to salsa dance that night. After about a year, I then taught beginners in the Latin Dance Club at Mizzou. The same time that I started professional school, I then took a few Salsa technique classes at Just Dancing studio in St. Louis. I stumbled upon some other ballroom dance lessons, and I was mesmerized. Immediately, I signed up for group classes and individual coaching. Eventually I started competition dancing with an amateur partner. I currently dance pro-am with my coach in Latin and Standard styles of dance, including 10 dances (although I know basics to many more). I am fortunate to have one of the best instructors in the region and I place well at my competitions including single dance entries, scholarship and championship events. I will teach basics on occasion, and helped my friend Evan Shuvo instruct a group class at the 2011 St. Louis Salsa Congress.”

Believe it or not these are not the only talents Suzanne possesses. “When I am not dancing or painting, I also love playing classical piano. I have not done any musical performances in many years unless you count my two years as a church pianist.”

Her journey toward optometry was the result of her sister Anne (Lakamp) Eylar ’08. “I did not know much about Optometry until my sister, Anne, enrolled in the college years ago. I joined her in the pre-clinic one night, and I then discovered how interesting the field truly was. We have very different personalities, yet we share many interests. It only makes sense that we would have a profession in common. I am still grateful that she introduced me to Optometry. I cannot think of a better role model.”

Suzanne epitomized how successful and happy someone can be in a professional school if they are well-rounded and she learned to love the profession of optometry and the education she received at UMSL. “Optometry school is four years, which is too long to halt life outside of the classroom. I balanced school, work, dancing, art and various activities. I also happen to think that I enjoyed the last four years of my life thanks to those outside activities. There was never a period of academic burnout. Overall, I think well-rounded people are happier and healthier which helps more than just academics. I cannot think of a more suitable career for me than Optometry. This was the best decision of my life. It is a privilege to serve others through eye care. The UMSL College of Optometry equipped me with the tools I need to be a health care professional. I had a very positive experience at the college, thanks to those classmates who became my close friends, a few of my favorite professors, and the hobbies that kept me sane through it all.”

Suzanne’s professors would depict her as someone who always appears to have a great attitude and is very interested in learning. A former Pre-Optometry Club President at the University of Missouri, she has great potential in her chosen profession, notably in the area that she has developed a passion for, ocular disease. Her plans for next year are perfectly suited for her interests. “As one of the Family Practice residents at NSU in Tahlequah, OK, I plan to emphasize in ocular disease, minor surgical procedures, and geriatrics during the next year. I am a firm believer in evidence-based medicine as the gold standard in patient care.” It is evident that life for Dr. Suzanne Lakamp will always include embracement of her artwork, excellence in ballroom dancing, and the ability, the attitude, and the communication skills to be an exceptional optometrist.

Continued, page 8
The Athlete

The UMSL College of Optometry has greatly benefited over the years from students who had participated in collegiate athletics. They mastered time management, were well engaged with their class, and performed well with a rigorous curriculum. However, the College likely has never graduated anyone with the athletic portfolio of Tareq Nabhan, OD. As a youth, he and his brother both qualified for the national championships in karate. With all of its rigors and challenges, he succeeded as a dual-sport athlete in college. He ultimately tutored and scrimmaged with some of the best basketball players in the world. And, fortunately for the College, he decided to focus his career pursuits on the profession of optometry. His journey is a fascinating one as he relates: “As a pre-optometry student studying towards a bachelor’s degree in Chemistry, I struggled with being a dual-sport athlete and the intense undergraduate curriculum. Although I chose to focus on my academics, I knew I would unconsciously create the opportunity to play basketball professionally. After graduating from Pittsburg State University, I went to graduate school at the University of Kansas (KU) as a Masters degree student in Chemical Education. During my two years in the program, I was invited to play with the KU men’s basketball summer-league team and was re-invited for the next 4 years. After successfully competing with past and current NBA players, I developed the confidence I needed to make international play a possibility. More still, my 2-year chemistry and physics tutoring services to KU’s Student Athlete Support Services department put me in position to help student-athletes manage the duality of scientific curricula with Division-I athletics; a situation I was familiar with. Their reciprocal encouragement was pivotal and I credit the student-athletes for giving me the courage to make my dream a reality. After signing with a basketball agent in Los Angeles, I took the OAT and the next morning was off to Amman, Jordan to play in the premier basketball league. As point-guard of an excellent team made up of national and international NBA summer-league players, we took 2nd place in the Jordan Cup and played throughout Asia. I was living my dream. The following year I was at the University of Missouri-St. Louis as a student-doctor in Optometry."

Why Tareq did ultimately chose optometry was a result of the many and varying attributes of the profession which, he believed, were very consistent in what he desired to achieve in life. “Optometry is a science that includes the physics of vision, the anatomy of medicine, the chemistry of pharmaceuticals, the politics of legislation, and the responsibility of patient advocacy. It covers all of my scientific, political, and social aspirations. I value my patients and am committed to always being their advocate for eye and health care. When battling prostate cancer, American editor, literary critic, and essayist Anatole Broyard described his journey in finding a doctor. He states, ‘He (the doctor) would see the genius of my illness.’ I understand this to suggest that in order to understand the genius of disease one must think exceptionally and compassionately. Equally important, the doctor must be discipline to the possibilistic, probabilistic, prognostic, and pragmatic methods of medical care. Patients may not understand the mechanics of their condition, but they do care that they are in the hands of someone who understands the disease, understands their distress, and is adept in treating it and its holistic implications. I welcome their realistic expectation.”

Most important of all, Tareq is very pleased with his decision to attend the UMSL College of Optometry where - to no one’s surprise - he coordinated intramural athletics for his class and greatly assisted with numerous campus championships and runner-up finishes of these teams, often combining with students of other classes. “My experience at UMSL College of Optometry has allowed me to understand and value the responsibility of being a doctor as a clinician, researcher, and patient advocate. UMSL College of Optometry also served to provide the mentorship, camaraderie, and curriculum to become a great optometrist. I believe the majority of things that happen to us do so based on our integrity, and UMSL College of Optometry is one of my finest decisions. I am lucky to be a UMSL College of Optometry alumnus.” In addition, he benefitted from one of the most important strengths of the College, the ability to establish one of his clinical rotations, if he so desires. The resulting eight week rotation that he established at St. John Eye Hospital (SJEH) in Jerusalem was nothing short of life-changing. “This site took 3 years to establish and I owe Dr. Raymond Myers, Dr. Ralph Garzia, Dr. Alexander Harris, Dr. Edward Bennett, and Dean Larry Davis, in addition to Dr. Rema Shabany (’98) of Hadassah College of Optometry in Jerusalem and Dr. Jeanne Garth of SJEH the honor they deserve. At SJEH, I was under the mentorship of fifteen ophthalmologists; my time divided with cornea, glaucoma, retina, vitreo-retina, pediatric, and oculoplastic surgeons. I attended weekly case presentations at SJEH.
from ophthalmologists from all over the world. SJEH has offered eyecare to Palestinians in what is now known as the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) for many years. Unfortunately, the occupation has made it very difficult for Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank to get permission to access the services of SJEH. I learned from the plethora of ocular disease but began to sadly understand the effect of the occupation on the Palestinians in regards to access to eyecare and healthcare.

The situation has earned the attention of the World Health Organization (WHO) and has been described as a pandemic of diabetes and diabetic eye disease. With the restriction of travel, the denial of permission to enter Jerusalem and to leave Gaza, coupled with an imposed curfew, the restricted access to clean drinking water, the poor quality of life, and the illegal Israeli settlements, the Palestinians are left for themselves. The United Nations has described the situation as an illegal occupation in violation of Geneva Convention (IV) and of International Law, yet the Palestinians were thankful for any services we could offer; and we did.” And he was also able to pursue his other dream. “I lived in Bethlehem, worked and visited family in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron, Jericho, Amman, and Petra. While in Bethlehem, I played basketball for a professional club in the premier league as a volunteer. The coach and players were great and the natives were excellent. I routinely visited the Nativity Church, the Wailing Wall, and the Dome of the Rock, and ultimately established life-long connections that will help me understand the great religions, the political climate, and the region. I am humbled by the experience.”

Tareq is greatly indebted to his family for whom he credits all of his successes in life. He also intends to give back to his profession. “SJEH is the only external eyecare provider allowed to enter Gaza. With 1.5 million Gazans in Gaza, ophthalmologists and optometrists from all over the world come to the West Bank, East Jerusa-

No current or former student of optometry will contest the fact that the optometric curriculum is very challenging and the goal is often to work very hard and survive until graduation. Imagine balancing optometry school and being the parent of two young children, born during the optometric program or immediately before. Meet Jenna Kryder, O.D., and Melissa Lorber, O.D., two young ladies who exhibited time management skills nothing short of incredulous.

Both Jenna and Melissa entered the College with outstanding credentials, but neither had envisioned optometry as their future career until much later than the typical optometry student. For Jenna it resulted from the fact that she worked for two years as a research co-

2012 Graduates—Special Profiles cont. from page 8

The Mothers

No current or former student of optometry will contest the fact that the optometric curriculum is very challenging and the goal is often to work very hard and survive until graduation. Imagine balancing optometry school and being the parent of two young children, born during the optometric program or immediately before. Meet Jenna Kryder, O.D., and Melissa Lorber, O.D., two young ladies who exhibited time management skills nothing short of incredulous.

Both Jenna and Melissa entered the College with outstanding credentials, but neither had envisioned optometry as their future career until much later than the typical optometry student. For Jenna it resulted from the fact that she worked for two years as a research co-

ordinator in physical therapy at Washington University and ultimately ruled out both physical therapy, and a Ph.D. during that time. In fact, it was one of UMSL’s most outstanding graduates - a graduate from the College in 2010, and the Cornea and Contact Lens Residency one year later – who motivated her to pursue optometry as she relates. “Jamie Gold is a good friend of mine and we had them (her and her husband Phil) over for dinner one night and she talked about what she was learning in school (her second year). Optometry just seemed perfect- science, healthcare, serving people, and a good work-life balance. So I took the OAT, applied (only at UMSL), and got accepted!”

Melissa, conversely, graduated from Purdue University and headed toward a career in healthcare, but not necessarily optometry. After graduation, she worked for three years for a pharmaceutical company. This time period allowed her to explore different opportunities in the healthcare field. “I originally envisioned attending medical school, but the more and more I researched the options and lifestyle the less I felt like it was a good fit to raise a family. My husband and I discussed different practice modalities (e.g. nursing, pharmacy, dental) and eventually settled on optometry. As a child and a high myope, annual check-ups with my private practice O.D. were always a pleasant experience. Those handful of experiences had a big influence on my
2012 Graduates—Special Profiles cont. from page 9

decision to enter the optometric field."

Whereas having a family while being a full-time student in a rigorous curriculum would both not be easy to successfully accomplish or even recommended for most students, both Jenna and Melissa had good reasons to support their decision. Melissa and Adam had already made the decision to start a family as she initiated her optometric journey. Their daughter Natalie had just turned one when she started the program. It was also beneficial that their second child, Madeline, was born the summer between her second and third year, allowing for an unofficial maternity leave. For Jenna, it pertained to the fact that she and Dan had been trying to start a family for some time and they made the decision that optometry school would not pose a barrier to their long-term plan of raising a family. As Jenna relates, however, it had its challenges: “We found out we would have our first child (Keaton) just weeks before finals the first semester of second year—the hardest semester of optometry school (in my opinion). It was difficult—especially at first after going back to school without a traditional maternity leave. I remember one night vividly. Keaton was about 2 weeks old. Dan was out of town interviewing for residency and I was up the entire night with the baby and then had a disease test the next day. I looked at the pictures and had no idea what anything was. It was all just a fog! After Keaton was born we just decided to rely on God’s timing for our second (since getting pregnant the first time took so long). Then right after Keaton’s first birthday we found out we were expecting again. At that point I knew we were crazy!” Jenna handled it well, however, and William ("Will") was born.

Time management, of course, was crucial to their ultimate success in their optometric training. Both cited family as their number one priority and coursework was secondary. Then how did they succeed? “I treated school as a job and studied during the day, especially during breaks” states Melissa. “I spent my evenings with the children, then started studying again after they went down for the night. I did not have the luxury of cram sessions and all nighters right before tests. In a way, having more demands on my time forced me to become a better student and manage my time more efficiently.”

And they both could not have made it without a good support system, including very supportive husbands (Dan Kryder and Adam Lorber), and caring family—notably their respective mother-in-laws--and friends as Jenna relates. “We have amazing childcare. A friend and wife of a fellow optometry student, a family friend from church, and my fantastic mother-in-law have all gone out of their way to take care of my boys so well.”

The sacrifices they made for family were often at the expense of being able to be more involved with College organizations and social activities; these were sacrifices they understood but also lamented. That did not mean they were involved in the activities of the College. Jenna, in fact, performed research, was the student liaison to the American Academy of Optometry, and was a student ambassador. Both Jenna and Melissa were very dedicated Teaching Assistants (TAs) which Melissa found to be especially worthwhile. “I was able to TA my second year and continue with tutoring my third year. I really enjoyed working with the students in the class behind us and preparing for lab or study sessions really helped keep material fresh for boards, a win-win situation.”

And, oh by the way, these two remarkable young optometrists developed a close friendship during their four years at the College as Melissa relates, “The smaller class size at UMSL makes it very easy to develop a class identity and make close friends, and it is very important to bond with another individual(s) during a rigorous professional program. . . . no one fully appreciates the true emotional, physical and intellectual toll of optometry school like a fellow classmate. Jenna and I have had a strong bond from the beginning, which truly strengthened over time as we struggled with the day-to-day activities associated with being mothers in professional school.” Jenna agrees, “I’m pretty sure I found Melissa on day one and we became fast friends. I’m thankful to have had her along the journey through optometry school!”

And they both have an effective plan for the future. Jenna will complete some clinic obligations this summer necessitated by Will’s birth with the intention of practicing part-time at first and ultimately having her own optometric practice. Melissa will be completing a one year residency in ocular disease at the St. Louis Veteran’s Administration Medical Center which, we hope, will be followed by the opportunity to play a role in teaching students at the College.

The story of Drs. Melissa Lorber and Jenna Kryder is an inspiration to any young parent—or parent to be—who wonders if, in fact, they can balance a rigorous curriculum with a family. These are two of the most remarkable young ladies to attend the UMSL College of Optometry and on Saturday, May 12th, they both graduated with Highest Honors.
Established in 1989, to date twenty-one degrees (13 MS and 8 PhD) have been awarded through the Graduate Program in Vision Science (formerly physiological optics) in the College of Optometry. Alumni have gone on to distinguished careers in the armed forces and served as faculty, scholars and teachers. That success is often diminished by one measure which has served as a distraction for the past several years…the benchmark for degrees awarded that is promulgated by the Coordinating Board for Higher Education (CBHE) and the Missouri Department of Higher Education (MDHE). According to the MDHE a viable graduate program awards at least five MS and three PhD degrees annually; a benchmark few programs in Vision Science attain. Averaging less than one degree per year, beginning in 2003 the UMSL Vision Science Program was included on Missouri’s list of low enrollment graduate programs. In 2010, facing elimination, the program was retained due to the unique mission and synergy realized alongside the professional (OD) program and our commitment to fund graduate education internally without direct support from the campus.

We were not so fortunate this year. Anticipating a significant loss of funding in FY 2013 and the need to make a substantial strategic investment in order to strengthen the program its continuation became increasingly difficult to justify. Thus, it will be placed on inactive status beginning next academic year.

What does that mean? Essentially no new students will be recruited into the program and the five currently enrolled students will be provided a plan to complete their degree over the course of the next two to three years. Then, over the next five years should the fiscal climate and demand for the degree change we retain the option to revise and reinitiate recruitment of students.

While one of the worst storms in recent St. Louis history – complete with tornado warnings and damaging hail – was occurring outside on Saturday evening, April 28th, an outstanding event was occurring inside at the Student Millennium Center. The second annual “Dinner with 12 Strangers,” coordinated by the UMSL Alumni Association, included hundreds of alumni and students together in a unique opportunity for students to learn about their chosen career interest from alumni who specialize in that area. At the College of Optometry table were Graduate student, Debarshi Datta, pre-optometry student Riam Yousif, and optometry students Jenna Kryder (’12), Jason Clark (’12), Kevin Hoang (’13), and Brigette Colley (’13). College alumni present were Debbie Kerber (’92), Maureen Finch (’99), and Colleen Shear (’90). During the course of the dinner, a facilitator at each table, would promote a dialogue between students and alumni. At the optometry table Dr. Ed Bennett asked the alumni to discuss issues pertaining to the different modes of practice, how to buy in, managing staff, as well as issues pertaining to establishing a balance between practice and a home life. The program was very successful and our alumni are to be thanked for not only participating but providing very beneficial information to our students.
The UMSL College of Optometry Selected as Part of a Pilot InfantSEE® Program Featuring Tom Sullivan and Dr. Glen Steele

For a two day period in May, the UMSL College of Optometry had the privilege of being only one of four Colleges selected for a pilot InfantSEE® program that featured Tom Sullivan (featured in the cover story), and renowned pediatric specialist and chair of the American Optometric Association(AOA) InfantSEE® Committee, Dr. Glen (“Bubba”) Steele. InfantSEE® is a nationwide no-cost public health program developed to provide professional eye care for infants. Optometrists who have signed up as InfantSEE® providers can provide a one-time, comprehensive eye assessment to infants in their first year of life; therefore, the opportunity for early detection of potential eye and vision problems at no cost regardless of income is provided.

The idea for the establishment of this life-changing program occurred in 1998 via a conversation between Dr. Steele and former AOA President Dr. W. David Sullins, Jr. It was formally launched in 2005. It represents a partnership between the AOA and the Vision Care Institute of Johnson & Johnson Vision Care, Inc. although it is important to mention that the pilot Colleges program is sponsored via a grant from the Allergan Foundation.

On Thursday May 10th, Dr. Steele and Tom Sullivan spoke to the entire UMSL College student body about the InfantSEE® program, emphasizing it’s benefits and the importance of being an InfantSEE® provider. Dr. Steele, a professor at the Southern College of Optometry, a past president of both the College of Optometrists in Vision Development and the Optometric Extension Program Foundation, as well as being named one of Optometric Management’s Top Ten Optometrists of the Decade, discussed the impact that InfantSEE® has already had. Before InfantSEE® it was assumed that about 1 in 30 babies may have a risk factor for amblyopia or other vision problem. During the first 1051 babies examined via InfantSEE® it was found that 17% had eye-related problems (typically ocular motility, reduced vision, or poor binocular function) and this figure increased to 25% if the baby was a minority or was born prematurely. Dr. Steele, who’s passion about children’s vision is very apparent, implored the students to take the approach with the parents that “I will walk with you every step of the way.” He emphasized that after you tell the parents about the infant’s diagnosis, remember that the parents are scared and they need to know that you will always be there to listen to them and help comfort them through their child’s vision care journey. He stated: “By doing so, you will help babies get an earlier start toward success and help the parents through your understanding and caring. Become an Ambassador for InfantSEE® because InfantSEE® is about caring for the eyes and vision care needs for people, beginning at birth and continuing throughout a lifetime.”

Tom Sullivan’s very inspirational talk to the students is highlighted in the cover story. On Friday, May 11th, he and Dr. Steele were part of an InfantSEE® panel that addressed the community. On Friday, he emphasized the need to carefully listen and trust the instincts of the child’s parents. They see them on a daily basis and observe them very carefully. Then following up on Dr. Steele’s message he stated: “If the doctor is not in the business of hope, the family will never have it.”

The Friday program also included Lynn Navin, Director of the UMSL Child Development Center, who communicated important factors to show if a child was developing properly, and Deborah Moberly, Associate Professor (Teaching & Learning) who communicated the importance of not only reading to a child, as soon as during pregnancy, but reading from books that have songs, nursery rhymes, and bright colors.

Dr. Aaron Franzel, Chief of the Pediatrics/Binocular Vision Service at the College, presented the various components of the InfantSEE® examination and what we should be looking for as providers. Finally, Dr. Tom Cullinane (’96), discussed the case of a little boy who he detected to have congenital glaucoma. The boy’s parents also spoke about the process and the emotions they have had the past several years in caring for their son whose sight was saved by Dr. Cullinane, an InfantSEE® provider. For more information about InfantSEE® you can visit www.infantsee.org or call 888-396-EYES(3937).
Three Alumni Who Show How the College Has Benefitted from Those Individuals Who Have Transferred to UMSL

It is very evident that the UMSL College of Optometry has benefitted greatly from those individuals who initiated their optometric training at another institution. Two such students, Drs. Nick Dodd (’10), and Tonia Batts (’11) have been profiled in recent issues of the EyeWire and will most certainly bring positive recognition to the College in the years ahead. Whereas it is safe to say that - for every individual who desires to transfer to UMSL and is accepted - there are several who are not admitted.

Three graduates who we are very proud of and feel quite fortunate that they decided to transfer to UMSL are Drs. Jennifer Garner (’94), Lori Elliott (’94), and Patti Fries (’02).

For Dr. Patti Fries, who graduated with honors from the College of Optometry in 2002, one must thank her husband Jeff for the privilege of having her complete her education at UMSL. She attended The Ohio State University College of Optometry for one year. At that time Jeff was transferred to Scott Air Force Base and it was quite convenient for her to transfer to UMSL. Upon graduation she has had the opportunity to experience numerous areas within the profession including the military, teaching, working with ophthalmology, and research. “I always pictured myself in private practice but went into military practice for 3 years after graduation (Air Force . . . in fact, she is still a member of the Air National Guard in Missouri). I graduated in 2002, and in 2005 I joined the faculty at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC), and was quickly promoted to Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology. I think I found my calling here—I love the teaching and lecturing, and the constant variety of patients and students is tremendous. I love the multi-specialty setting, and the constant emphasis on education. Most recently, I joined one of our previous ophthalmology residents, who is now a corneal specialist, as a subinvestigator for a multicenter, clinical trial involving Presview Scleral Spacing Implants, and am fully immersed in the world of clinical research—a whole new arena!”

Patti and Jeff have now been married 23 years and have two children. Their oldest, Kevin, is starting his third year of college at Iowa State where he is studying Aerospace Engineering, and where his journey should ultimately result in becoming an Air Force Officer. Her daughter, Krysten, is 16 years old and entering her senior year of high school. Patti has also been active in numerous community service activities as well as mission trips. She serves as the eye-care specialist at the UNMC Diabetes Center and provides clinical services on site monthly. In addition, she has recently provided vision care services to those in need in both Thailand and Guyana.

And Dr. Fries was quite pleased with her education at UMSL and our efforts to, if at all possible, have transfer students complete their optometric education in four years. “UMSL leadership was understanding and worked with me to make the transition as smooth as possible without extending my graduation date unnecessarily. Transferring in the middle of a professional curriculum is always a challenge, but the faculty helped tremendously and reached out to me. The smaller class size was a definite plus - I was able to get to know my classmates better- and left with many friendships that I maintain to this day.” With her current responsibilities at the University of Nebraska, it is evident that Dr. Patti Fries is a rising star in the profession and the College will always take great pride in her current and future accomplishments.

Dr. Lori Elliott also experienced a journey that was not expected to travel through St. Louis. Yet 21 years after she transferred from the Illinois College of Optometry, she still resides in St. Louis and is part of a very successful private practice. And, like Dr. Fries, she was especially appreciative of the assistance she received from the College. “I originally started Optometry School at Illinois College of Optometry in Chicago, IL. In my 2nd year at ICO, I became engaged and my fiance, who was working in Chicago at the time, was being transferred to St. Louis. At first, I thought I would just finish in Chicago and move to St. Louis following graduation, but after checking to see if I could transfer to UMSL’s Optometry program, it all seemed like it would work out. The transition went smoothly. I found my classmates in St. Louis to be extremely welcoming and friendly. The classes I had taken at ICO transferred and I was able to still graduate in four years.”

Dr. Elliott married that gentleman she followed to St. Louis and she and her husband Tim will be celebrating their 20th wedding anniversary this summer. They have three children as she relates: “Jack is now 18 years old and was born on the same day as Dr. Vinita Henry’s daughter, Emily!”
We joked about being in labor at the same time, as they are only a couple hours apart in age! (Jack is headed to the University of Illinois this fall. Go Illini!) Our two others are Mitch who is a freshman in high school and Erin who is in 7th grade.” A vivid memory is that of Lori as she was completing her last week of clinic as a 4th year student apologizing for experiencing difficulty performing the calculations necessary for her GP bitoric patient. It became very understandable when she went into labor that night and both Jack Elliott and Emily Henry entered the world the following day.

After graduating from the UMSL College of Optometry with honors in 1994, she devoted an additional year to the College by accepting the position as the Cornea and Contact Lens Resident. This decision is also one she feels greatly assisted her in her career. “I was fortunate to stay a fifth year at UMSL as the Contact Lens Resident. I currently work in a private practice (in St. Peters, MO) in which we fit a lot of contact lenses, so the residency gave me an extra year of learning more about some of the specialty contact lens fits.” The contact lens faculty thought so highly of Dr. Elliott that for many years after completing the residency, until family and practice demands made it impossible to continue, she served as a part-time clinical instructor in the Contact Lens Service and was an exceptional mentor to our students.

**Jennifer Kay Garner, OD,** grew up with optometry in Houston, TX. Her father, B.J. Garner, O.D., graduated from the University of Houston College of Optometry when Jennifer was six years old and established his own private practice. He is still there today assisted by his Office Manager, Jennifer’s mother Laura. Her parents trained her how to perform essentially all of the front desk and technician responsibilities in the practice. And – as she relates - she was hooked. “Since optometry had become so integrated into my life from the many years of helping our patients in my father’s practice, it seemed quite natural to select the profession of optometry as my chosen career path”.

But how did her journey end up at UMSL, especially with an optometry program in her own back yard? She explains: “Initially, I started optometry school at my father’s alma mater, the University of Houston College of Optometry (UHCO). During my first two years of optometry school, I was heavily involved in leadership positions within numerous student optometry organizations at UHCO, as well as being elected as the Optometry Senator in the campus-wide UH student government. As a result of my participation as a leader in several optometry school activities, my written legislation for the student constitution on behalf of the optometry students, and my initiation of a Houston citywide ordinance entitled “Save Your Vision Week” with the mayor of Houston, I was fortunate to be selected as the 1992 Summer Student Intern at the AOA headquarters in St. Louis. At the end of the internship, I had become acquainted with UMSL. I discovered the top-notch educational quality of the optometry program and greatly desired to transfer optometry schools. Not only was there a smaller student to teacher ratio in a class size of 40 students, which promoted more personalized interaction with professors and clinical experiences per student, but the exceptional attributes of outstanding, world renowned faculty were extremely impressive.”

Jennifer came to the College with a very positive attitude and exceptional interpersonal skills. And she became engaged with her class immediately, not unlike Tonia Batts, O.D. (’11), likewise a transfer student who was profiled last year in the EyeWIRE. She was very satisfied with her decision to come to UMSL: “The faculty showed genuine concern about their students and demonstrated an example of kindness and compassion with patient encounters on a level that I had not seen in my previous optometry school. UMSL taught me to be a doctor, not just a clinician. Since all optometry school curricula were not exactly the same, I was required to take some classes out of order with optometry classes in different years. Although this challenged my time management skills juggling 28 hours some semesters, I thoroughly enjoyed the camaraderie with students in three different optometry classes. My personal and professional life were greatly enriched with the warm friendships that were formed and the excellent training that I received by the faculty at UMSL.”

Upon graduation Jennifer returned to Texas and worked both in her father’s practice as well as other private practices in the area. To the surprise of no one, she immediately became involved in several leadership positions, inspired by her role model parents, her passion for the profession, and her faith. She served as Chair of an important committee for the Texas Optometric Association, developed a national optometric placement program for the Fellowship of Christian Optometrists and, after serving on the Executive Board for many years, was elected President of the Harris County Optometric Society. The latter position was especially significant as, with a membership of over 500 optometrists, it was the largest society in the state. And it doesn’t end there as she relates: “I had the pleasure of serving as a Clinical Examiner for the National Board of Examiners in Optometry for several years . . . (and) from 2004-2006, I was graciously awarded the title of “America’s Top
UMSL Scores a Double Win: Nutrition and the Eye Symposium and Optometry Class Reunions

On Saturday, April 14th, and Sunday, April 15th, a popular annual tradition returned and “Nutrition and Eye V” was highlighted by renown speakers and informative presentations. The distinguished faculty included Jeff Anshel, OD, President of the Ocular Nutrition Society, Paul Chous, MA, OD of Chous Eye Care Associates (specialist in diabetes eye care and education), and Stuart Richer, OD, PhD, Director, Ocular Preventative Medicine Lowell Federal Health Care Center. The Keynote Speaker, lecturing on topics pertaining to successful aging, was John Morley, MD, Professor of Internal Medicine and Director of Geriatric Medicine at Saint Louis University. The symposium on Saturday was followed by the first of what will be annual event: a reunion of the 5 year (Class of 2007), 10 year (Class of 2002), 15 year (Class of 1997), 20 year (Class of 1992), and 25 year (Class of 1987) UMSL College of Optometry graduating classes. Debbie Kerber, OD, ('92) who coordinated the 20 year reunion, found it to be a very good experience. “The Class of 1992 had a great time catching up at the CE and wine reception. We continued our festivities and reunion at J. Bucks in Clayton, where the class of 1987 also had their reunion. It was just like old times, one big happy family!” Tentatively, the reunion for the Classes of 1988, 1993, 1998, 2003, and 2008 will again be associated with an UMSL continuing education program tentatively scheduled for August, 2013.

From the Dean cont. from page 1

I close by extending Dr. Sullivan and the entire Class of 2012 congratulations and hope for a future filled with joy and significance. Thank you for an unforgettable commencement week!

All the best,

Larry J. Davis, Dean

Transfer Students cont. from page 14

Optometrists” in the Guide to America’s Top Optometrists. Also, I had the professional opportunity of a lifetime to participate in various pre-operative and post-operative refractive surgery FDA trials as an optometric affiliate with Dr. Stephen Slade at the Slade & Baker Vision Center in Houston for the FDA approval and establishment of standard laser procedures and protocols that are used as industry guidelines today.”

Certainly optometry is the perfect profession for Dr. Jennifer Garner as it allows her to serve other people. “As I saw a plaque of the Optometrist’s

Pledge (‘Next to life itself, God’s greatest gift to man is vision, and to the service of that vision, we optometrists sincerely and faithfully dedicate ourselves’) hanging on a wall in my father’s practice each day, I was encouraged to be committed to a standard of excellence in enhancing the visual welfare of my patients and to be dedicated to the advancement of my profession. I feel truly blessed from God to have received support from my parents, my optometry professors, and my husband (the love of my life), for allowing me the opportunity to serve others.”
Aldridge Recognized as 2012 Optometrist of the Year

Dr. Karen Aldridge, Hill City, was recognized as the 2012 Optometrist of the Year during the Kansas Optometric Association Annual Convention and Seminar in Topeka. This is the highest award an optometrist can receive from the KOA and is in recognition of personal sacrifices to advance the profession and the welfare of the public.

A 1992 graduate of the University of Missouri-St. Louis School of Optometry, Dr. Aldridge is a past-president of the Kansas Optometric Association, the Kansas Optometric Foundation, and the Eye Care Council. As a KOA member, she has served on numerous committees and projects, including serving as the director of a multi-year research study looking at the link between vision problems and reading performance, for which she received the KOA Distinguished Service Award. She has been a frequent lecturer on vision and learning for teachers, school nurses, optometrists and others. Dr. Aldridge has also participated in a vision care mission to Chile through Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity (VOSH). Dr. Aldridge has balanced her professional skills and her passion for helping others through her involvement in the community. She is active in her church and is a past president of the Hill City Chamber of Commerce, a member of the Graham County Arts Council Community Easter Cantata, president of the Norton Lions Club, a host parent of foreign exchange students, and a member and president of Stitchin’ Sisters Quilt Guild. Dr. Aldridge practices in Hill City.