

eye WIRE

A publication for the alumni and friends of the University of Missouri-St. Louis College of Optometry

A Very Special Night for the Class of 2013

The evening of May 18th was a very special one for a very special class, the class of 2013. A beautiful graduation ceremony was once again held at the Blanche Touhill Performing Arts Center, the perfect venue for 40 very deserving young doctors of optometry in front of a large audience of family and friends. Once again the ceremony was presided over by Chancellor Thomas George who conferred their degree. Prior to this special moment they proceeded to the stage led by their Student Marshal, Brigette Colley. Once seated everyone was in for a special treat, the National Anthem as performed by a talented member of the class, Angel Husher . . . and she was awesome. Little did Angel know that her evening was just beginning as she was later awarded the prestigious William Feinbloom Low Vision Award and later yet, accepted a proposal for marriage from her (now) fiancé, Neil Rodriguez.

During the ceremony over 26 awards were presented. Among

the highlights, were presentation of the awards for highest scholarship (i.e., Silver Medal Award, Dean's



2013 Graduates

Award, and the M. Earl McClellan Award) the latter sponsored by the Missouri Optometric Foundation. These awards were given to Caryn LaBuda. The Missouri Optometric Foundation Award for Excellence in Clinical Skills was given to Jacqueline Gabbert.

The Commencement speaker was Jeffrey L. Weaver, OD, MBA, MS. Dr. Weaver is the Executive

Director of the American Board of Optometry, and the immediate Past President of the Missouri Optometric Association. He retired as a Colonel from the U.S. Army Reserve after serving 30 years as a clinical optometrist, administrator, researcher and commander.

He is a Diplomate in Public Health and Environmental Vision of the American Academy of Optometry and is an adjunct Professor in the College of Optometry. Dr. Weaver quoted the familiar biblical passage from Luke 12:48: "From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more

will be asked." He then proceeded to emphasize how it will relate to their responsibilities as optometrists. "Sometime in the future, when all has been said and done, you will look back over the course of your career and life and ask, "Did I fulfill my responsibility?" You will be measured by your answers to questions such as:

- Did I reach my potential?
- Was I passionately dedicated to my patients?

Class of 2013

(Cont. from page 1)



Graduates on stage



Dean Larry Davis, Dr. Jeff Weaver, Provost Glen Cope, and Chancellor Thomas George

and engagement which included three national

officers and the President of the American Optometric Student Association. And their performance on the NBEO examinations was among the highest in UMSL history. We are

all proud of the Class of 2013 and greatly appreciate what they have meant to our College. As they now begin their journey as optometrists, don't be surprised if you see their names as optometric leaders in the very near future.

• Did I demonstrate integrity and courage, and stand up for what is right?"

The most important event of the evening was the awarding of the Doctor of Optometry degree and each honoree—as announced by Dean Larry Davis—crossed the stage, was hooded by Drs. Ed Bennett and Vinita Henry and congratulated by Provost Cope and Chancellor George. This was a class that greatly distinguished themselves as well as the College of Optometry. They personified a true 'family' in their closeness and how they helped each other succeed. They exhibited an unparalleled level of College, state, and national service



Vocalist Angel Husher



Commencement Speaker Dr. Jeff Weaver



Student Marshal Brigette Colley



Drs. Gary Bachman, Jeff Weaver, Howard McAlister, Tom Greene ('85) and Scott Ream ('87)

2013 Graduate Profiles

The Voice of an Angel

Angel Husher, O.D. ('13) was not—in many ways—your typical applicant. First (among many abilities) she is a very talented singer. Secondly, she came to the College under very trying circumstances as she relates: "In 2009, when I flew to Missouri to interview at UMSL, I got into a near-fatal car accident that resulted in several days in the hospital and a cancelled interview. Thankfully, they were able to squeeze an interview in the following week. I will never forget that day, not only because I didn't take any pain medication, but also because Dr. Brown and Dr. Bennett made quite an impression. They were very passionate about the college, which solidified my feelings that UMSL was the place I wanted to spend the next four years." The Admissions Committee felt similarly about Angel. Her

incredibly positive attitude in combination with a history of unparalleled engagement in activities were predictors of someone who would have a very positive impact, both on her class, and the College of Optometry. She did not disappoint.

To the surprise of no one, Angel became a very active member of perhaps UMSL's most active class. She served as President of the UMSL Student Volunteers of Optometric Services to Humanity (SVOSH) from 2010-12 and through her dedicated efforts UMSL continues to have one of the most active SVOSH organizations in the country as she relates: "With SVOSH, I

was given the opportunity to travel all around the world to help people who have absolutely nothing to give in return. I got so much more from these trips than I could ever accurately describe with words. These experiences were enlightening and positively life altering. I am also extremely proud to have won the Project Foresight Business Plan Scholarship on a national level with my best friend and classmate, Jacqueline Gabbert (Ladd). We spent hundreds of hours

selecting the perfect location, creating an appealing business name with a logo, developing a catchy jingle, crunching numbers, and basically everything else that goes into a business plan."

Of course, Angel's

other gift is perhaps her magnificent singing voice. She won the inaugural, campus wide UMSL National Optometric Student Association Talent Show. She also became the first student from the college to perform at graduation as she performed both the national anthem at the beginning of the ceremony and UMSL's Alma Mater at the conclusion . . . and her beautiful voice made an exceptional evening become that much more memorable.

And did she ever love the Class of 2013. "Every day spent with my classmates has made me a better person. I will never again have the opportunity to be surrounded

by such a dynamic yet unified, hardworking yet sociable, and high achieving (both with academics and co-curricular activities) group of people. We have been through a lot since day one. Starting by being dubbed as the "not-so-academically-achieving class" to ending with bringing national acclaim to our school and scoring outstanding on National Board Exams. We've left a unique mark at UMSL; the Class of 2013 is certainly special. We're special because we started with a common goal: we not only wanted to succeed, but we wanted to succeed as a unified class. When someone in the class did well, we were just as happy and proud as if it were ourselves that had gained that achievement. I beam with pride when learning about a classmate's new adventure. I know that this is just the beginning for us." And it is just the beginning for this special young optometrist. Don't be surprised to see Dr. Angel Husher represent her chosen profession in a very positive way in the years to come.

The Difference Maker

Recruiting students for the College of Optometry is actually little different than recruiting an exceptional athlete for a division one college. Just as having grown up in Terre Haute, Indiana and observing how Larry Bird single-handedly took Indiana State University to the championship game of the 1979 NCAA basketball tournament, one student can make the difference between a very good class and an outstanding class . . . someone like Brigette Colley ('13).

She wasn't supposed to come to UMSL. As a co-founder (with Amber Mayberry, O.D. '13) of



The Class of 2015 Honored During the White Coat Ceremony



On May 24th, the Class of 2015 received their 'White Coat' in a ceremony at the Millennium Student Center. Formally receiving the white coat is symbolic, representing the granting of clinical privileges. Next to graduation, this is looked upon as the most important accomplishment in the four years of optometric training. What is significant with the Class of 2015 is that all 41 students passed the clinic privileging exam the first time. The Master of Ceremonies of this event was Dr. Ed Bennett, Assistant Dean of Student Services and Alumni Relations, and he described the unique qualities of this high achieving class (see quote).

In what has become an annual tradition, Dr. Carl Bassi, Director of Research and Graduate Studies, was selected by the class to give some encouraging words. Additionally, his presentation was both humorous and uplifting. As each member of the class was honored, their white coat was presented

by Dr. Gary Bachman, Associate Professor, and Dr. Angel Simmons, Faculty Coordinator of Admissions. In addition, the students were welcomed by Dr. Tom Cullinane ('96), St. Louis Society Trustee for the Missouri Optometric Association.

"The Class of 2015 is one who has achieved academic excellence . . . and you truly are our perfectionist class and I hear this from other faculty members as well. Of course you did your very best imitation of the television show "Survivor" after the Fall semester of last year and it is evident based upon your performance in not only the White Coat proficiency but also in the large number of other proficiencies you have endured the last 2 months that you have tremendous potential clinically. Of course, you have also distinguished yourselves and the UMSL College of Optometry outside of the College itself be it from producing an award winning ASCO video, from the performances of an outstanding Christian rock band, to winning campus intramural championships, and to doing the improbable . . . hitting a half court shot that makes the national media. And, as you know, in only two years you have established close friendships that you will have for the rest of your life; and you will only get closer to your extended family in the years to come."

Dr. Ed Bennett

Another nice tradition is for a leader in the fourth year class to provide some encouraging comments. This was well performed by Andrea Peerson ('14), who recognized the well over 100 friends and family of the honorees who were present in the audience. "Many of you travelled quite some distance to be here for this event! What a testament of your love and dedication to their future! . . . You've put in sleepless nights, blood, sweat, tears and prayers with the hope of raising this child up to be a respectful, hard-working man or woman when

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2013 Graduate Profiles

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the Truman State University Pre-Optometry Club as a freshman, the word from sources within the organization was that she was not seriously considering UMSL. However, she gradually learned that the College had many of the qualities she desired in a graduate program. "I chose to attend UMSL because of the small class size and community feel amongst students and faculty. It really felt like everyone in the program was rooting for me to succeed, and that was comforting and reassuring. I knew there would be times when professional school would become overwhelming, and I needed people I could band together with to achieve my goal of becoming an optometrist."

Brigette's influence with her classmates, with the student body as a whole, and with the College of Optometry was incredible. It seemed like she was the organizer, the adviser, the mentor, the friend. As Chair of the Class of 2013 Academic Committee she unselfishly put her notes and powerpoints on a common website to help her classmates. She was one of the key reasons why UMSL won the coveted Spirit Award from the American Optometric Student Association and she is front and center in the outstanding 2012 Student Bowl Rules video which amazed all of the students attending that year's Student Bowl. She and Caryn LaBuda O.D.('13) were exceptional drop-in laboratory tutors, an extensive program in which they conduct sessions every week tutoring first year students on subject matter pertaining to all of their courses. She held numerous officer positions including a member of the Admissions Committee (for which she was honored at graduation with the 2013 Student Service Award), Vice-President of the Student Volunteers of Optometric Services to Humanity (SVOSH), Treasurer of Beta Sigma Kappa,

and Teaching Assistant for Neuro-anatomy. As a result of these accomplishments complimented by her outstanding academic performance, Brigette served as Student Marshal leading her class to the platform for the graduation ceremony.

She takes great pride in her class being honored with the "Spirit" award and for assisting in the Student Bowl Rules video. However, she is most proud of her and UMSL's involvement with SVOSH. "SVOSH sent me on a life-changing mission trip to Puebla, Mexico. It opened my eyes to how lucky we are to have access to quality eye care, and how debilitating not having a pair of glasses or healthy eyes can be. It takes students like us to clean and accurately read glasses to allow people on missions to successfully help someone see clearly for the first time."

And she is very proud of her class. "The mix of different personalities somehow turned into this beautiful blended family that carried each other through school. I can't think of a single classmate that didn't play some role in my success here at UMSL. It is incredible to think how much we have all grown and changed over the last four years. I have seen these people get engaged, get married, have babies, and most importantly, develop into intelligent and compassionate clinicians. The one thing that hasn't changed is our united front and unconditional love for each other. I can't wait to cheer on all my classmates as we take this profession by

storm. Expect to continue hearing big things about the UMSL Class of 2013 in the years to come."

Brigette's success can be attributed to a supportive husband and, with the birth of Olivia last March, motherhood. "While it has always been my dream to become an optometrist, it has also been my dream to become a mother. It is incredible that both those dreams came true within two months of each other. Olivia motivated us to return to our hometown, Macomb, IL to be close to the family and community we both grew up in. Though we will miss St. Louis, we are excited to be able to start careers, raise our little girl, and give back to a place that has given so much to us." This summer Brigette will begin her professional career as an associate doctor in the practice of a good role model and UMSL graduate, Dr. Tim Bengston ('86) at Professional Eyecare Center in Macomb.

Jimmy Stewart, in the movie "It's a Wonderful Life", found through his guardian angel that – after his "death" and removal from ever existing – he discovered that his

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Bringing UMSL College of Optometry to Life

By Nick Palisch

Over the past several months the College of Optometry in conjunction with the university marketing team developed a new recruitment tool to highlight the College of Optometry. The [video](#) will be used for a variety of special events in an effort to show what UMSL has to offer prospective students. The video, narrated by Dana Rozell (a current third year), walks you through various aspects of the college and highlights key components of what makes UMSL a great place

to earn an O.D. degree. Dr. Vinita Henry, Clinic Director believes the video “sends an important positive message about what the UMSL College of Optometry is. It showcases our wonderful students.” Having a video allows the college to showcase important parts of the college and our student body. The video will be featured on the college’s website and social media platforms. Reaching a new audience will help expand the knowledge and help to attract highly qualified students to

the optometry programs. Check out the video by clicking on the QR code and feel free to share the video with others who may be interested in UMSL and optometry. The [video](#) will also be used as an introduction to UMSL-College of Optometry at the clinical directors meeting which will be held at the college this year.



As Eye See It

By Nick Palisch

In my first couple of weeks with the College of Optometry I remember meeting with my first prospective student and his father. Little did I know at the time the father of this prospective student was an alumni of the college of optometry. Since I was still new in my role and I had never given a tour Linda Stein led all three of us through the building. In the process of the tour I began to talk to the father and son about optometry and the application process for admission into the college. The meeting was refreshing and a learning experience not only for the student, but for me—this was a learning experience about the college and about what a good candidate looks like for admission. I was simply amazed by this young man and his demeanor during our entire meeting I knew he would be a solid candidate for admission into the UMSL College of Optometry. This first tour and meeting with a prospective student set the bar for my future student encounters and most of all—it began

the learning experience for what my role would entail. Fast forwarding to present day we have admitted 45 students into the Class of 2017. Each and every one of them have inspired me and left an impression within me about what a student should look like—but most of all each and every student that will be joining the class of 2017 are like my children—each of them will grow over the next four years and so will I. They all went through the admissions process for the first time and quite honestly so did I.

My role has been a constant learning experience and sometimes an experiment of new things and the reaction I would get from them in trying new things in the department of student services. They inspire me to get up every day and come into this office and hopefully make a difference in someone’s life. The Class of 2017 is comprised of many diverse backgrounds and individual person-

alities which will eventually merge into a culture for this class. Personally, this class will be the group that I am tied closely to as they experience everything for the first time over the next four years. Just like researchers who compile data from observing cultures and behaviors—I will be walking with this new class in watching how they grow and develop over the next four years. I will document the learning and development process and take what I know about them now and see how things change over the next four years when they walk across that stage at graduation.

Each of these new students have become like family to me—and in the next four years I am excited to watch them grow into fine optometrist in May 2017. I am amazed by the backgrounds of these students and the excitement that radiates from them. Ten months later that young man who came in with his father to take a tour and gather more information about applying to the college is now a member of the class—following in the footsteps of his father.



2013 Graduate Profiles

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beloved town and townspeople had fallen under the control of a mean, corrupt banker. Whereas the Class of 2013 would have made UMSL proud without her existence, the excellence that defined Dr. Brigette Colley allowed her to elevate her beloved class to nothing less than a Hall of Fame level.

The Writer

A very important component of a successful class is diversity. Just as individuals such as Angel Husher, Jake Hayward, and Carrie McDowell brought their singing and dancing talents to the class, there was no more fascinating and diverse background than that of Josh Keil, O.D., ('13). Certainly his path toward optometry was lengthy and adventuresome. “As a boy growing up in Alaska I dreamed of going to foreign countries to practice medicine. My dad even bought the book, *Where There Is No Doctor*, for me. Through college, I worked on an ambulance and considered going to Physician’s Assistant school. My plans were sidetracked, however, by the first big discussion about national healthcare under the Clinton administration. At that point, I grew interested in healthcare policy. Consequently, I earned a Masters Degree in Healthcare Administration from the University of Missouri and went to work for the Navy in 2002. For seven years I travelled the world, specializing in patient movement on and off of ships, away from tent hospitals in Kuwait, and finally worked on war plans in Hawaii. While in Hawaii, I also planned Navy medical missions in Thailand. During these trips to remote jungle villages, my old interest in clinical care was rekindled by the Navy optometrists

who were able to make immediate and lasting differences in those villagers with glasses. By then, I was in my early 30’s and felt that I could not delay a doctorate degree any longer. I had seen enough of the many types of clinicians to know



that I was meant for optometry.”

And, as profiled in an earlier EyeWire, he is an accomplished writer. “I have worked on writing fiction as a hobby for over a decade now. My first novel, *Delaying Death*, was self-published in 2009 and is loosely based on my experiences while working on an ambulance. Prior to and during optometry school, I have nearly completed a new book that draws on my many experiences of Alaska—from commercial fishing to working on the Alaska Railroad. I hope to seek an agent for the book in the next year or two.”

He greatly enjoyed his experience at UMSL, notably the opportunity to customize his clinical experience and perform fourth year externships at Children’s Hospital and the Saint Louis Eye Institute. However, pursuing a rigorous graduate school program while being the father of three required much assistance. And he succeeded as a result of a very supportive wife and his second family, the Class of 2013. “No one helped me achieve my doctorate more than my wife, Stacie. Without her constant support before, during, and after optometry school, I would have never become a doctor.” And then there was his class. “I had no idea I would be joining a class of so many high-achievers! From day one, I noticed many individuals with lofty goals and strong motivation. I was not too surprised to see them achieve or surpass all those goals while contributing so much to so many extracurricular organizations. What was surprising, however, is that these same high-achievers were not competitive with me or each other. Class notes were freely shared by all and study tips were widely disseminated. As a student with three young kids and who was ten years removed from undergraduate school, the help I received from my classmates was sorely needed and greatly appreciated.”

Josh Keil, O.D. is very proud of his chosen background and his military background and his future plans will combine both passions. “The Navy paid for optometry school for me, and I plan to make a career out of the military. I will report next month to the naval medical clinic in Mayport, Florida to serve the eyecare needs of the sailors and Marines stationed there

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UMSL Well Honored at the SLOS Annual Banquet



New SLOS Officers (left to right): Drs. Paul Whitten, Steve Rosen, Drew Biondo, Joe Castellano, Erin Niehoff, Kim Layfield, and Jason Riley.

On the evening of Tuesday, June 11th, in a very nice ceremony at an exceptional venue, the Kemp Auto Museum, many UMSL graduates were installed as officers of the Saint Louis Optometric Society (SLOS). Dean Larry Davis officially installed the officers for the 2013-14 year. The new officers are: President – Jason Riley, O.D. ('07), President-Elect – Kimberly Layfield, O.D. ('07), Vice President – Steven Rosen, O.D., Secretary – Erin Niehoff, O.D. ('09), Treasurer – Joseph Castellano, O.D. ('11), Sergeant at Arms – Andrew Biondo, O.D. ('11), Immediate Past President – Paul Whitten, O.D. ('00), and Trustees to the Missouri Optometric Association – Robert Goerss, O.D. ('01), and Thomas Cullinane, O.D. ('96). Dr. Davis was quick to point out that all of the officers are UMSL graduates but one (Dr. Steve Rosen) but the one exception is married to an

UMSL graduate: Karen Rosen, O.D.('84). In a humorous and well planned out presentation, Dr. Davis gave each officer a "unique" gift to use in their newly-elected position. In the case of Dr. Rosen it was a white colonial judge's wig which he wore for the remainder of the presentation.

Dr. Ed Bennett, introduced by Dr. Davis, was the recipient of the R. A. Koetting Memorial Award, formerly the Lifetime Achievement Award. The 2013 Optometrist of the Year was past SLOS President and one of the most active members of the organization over the last 25 years, Dr. Scott Tomasino. Popular representative of Midland Optical, Mike Jobe, was honored with the Friend of Optometry Award.

2013 Graduate Profiles

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as well as their families. I will likely serve as an optometrist in many different locales. My wife and I hope to be stationed overseas someday. I hope the profession of optometry will serve me well for many years beyond the Navy as well. After all, it is one of the best jobs in America!"

Dr. Vinita Henry Receives Contact Lens Award

Dr. Vinita Henry ('85), Clinical Professor, was awarded the Lester E. Janoff Memorial Award, the highest honor given by the Association of Optometric Contact Lens Educators(AOCLE). The award was presented to Dr. Henry at the annual meeting of the AOCLE, held May 30th – June 2nd at the Western University College of Optometry in Pomona, CA. This award is

presented to an AOCLE member who has demonstrated excellence in the area of contact lens education, research, and publication. Specifically, the criteria for the award include publications in refereed journals, textbooks or textbook chapters; and active participation in AOCLE events, past or present. Ideally the recipient will show a broad range of contributions in the

above areas with accomplishments that have had a positive impact upon our profession. Dr. Henry is Past-Chair of the AOCLE and, in the opinion of current Chair, Dr. Bruce Morgan, is a very deserving recipient. "Dr. Henry certainly represents the high standards of this award, named after a renowned optometric educator, administrator, contact lens clinician and researcher."

College Loses an Old Friend

Joseph W. Huff, who served as an assistant professor at the University of Missouri–St. Louis from 1982 to 1988 in what was then the School of Optometry, died unexpectedly of a flu-like illness May 27 in Carrollton, Ga. He was 56 years old.

Huff came to UMSL in 1982 after earning a doctorate in physiology from the Medical College of Georgia. UMSL's optometry pro-

gram had begun in 1980. He also was a biophysics postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Ophthalmology at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. He left UMSL in 1988 and was named an assistant professor in the Department of Ophthalmology at the Bethesda Eye Institute at St. Louis University School of Medicine.

Huff devoted his life to corneal research aimed at doubling or tripling eye bank storage, enabling more recipients to receive transplants. He authored 40 published research papers on contact lens solutions and the cornea. At the time of his death he was an associate professor of biology at the University of West Georgia in Carrollton.

Class of 2015 White Coat Ceremony

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they moved out from underneath your roof. You've probably received many stressed out phone calls these past two years and have been a rock of encouragement to help them persevere... Knowing good and well they would be just fine! Thank you for being the support they needed." And she reminded them about how important the white coat was for her after one year in clinic. "First of all, there is an element of respect associated with the coat. Patients readily asked ME the questions concerning their care! . . . Secondly, a white coat is associ-

ated with leadership. It is a symbol that all health care professionals share. That's right, you are one step closer to being a health care professional. A leader among the community in which you serve. Be leaders among your peers and strive for excellence. . . . Lastly, wear the coat with purpose. It was earned and should be worn with pride. Be thinking about the type of legacy you want to leave. We have been challenged by those before us to leave the profession a little better than when we started. Whenever you practice, act as if someone

were watching. Don't settle for mediocre. Serving the community or getting involved in our political profession, as a student is a great way to establish a foundation of service in the future. Start making those steps toward your legacy today."

Congratulations once again to the Class of 2015. We wish you the best in your journey toward the Touhill Performing Arts Center in May, 2015.

Ed Bennett Promoted to Professor

By Larry Davis

Promotion is an important accomplishment in the life of optometric educators. It is symbolic of significant and sustained contributions to academic optometry.

One member of the College faculty recently received such distinction. Ed Bennett who began his faculty appointment in the College in 1982 and has taught each of the students who have completed the program was recently promoted to professor. He established the first residency at the school in 1985 and now serves as



Assistant Dean for Student Services and Alumni Relations. During his career he has held 18 editorships; his scholarly work includes six books including the first text devoted solely to Gas Permeable Contact Lenses; 85 published articles; 14 invited book Chapters; 42 Paper/conference presentations to scholarly/professional groups; 19 Abstracts; and 3 Book reviews; his refereed articles have been cited at least 141 times.

His professional service is deep and wide. What do his former students say? “[He] made me want to excel in a way that made study-

ing easy. I never felt pressure from him, only encouragement. Another wrote “I always felt he was there for us as support.”

What do fellow educators say? One optometric educator now dean at another school says [His] accomplishments [are] “truly remarkable.” Another described [Him] as a “truly outstanding academic optometrist and a leader

in his profession.” Another says that his “stature in the contact lens community has been reached by only a select dozen or so people.”

Dr. Bennett has been the recipient of many awards throughout his career including, twice selected by UMSL students as Optometric Educator of the Year. In June he received the Robert A. Koetting Award (formerly the Lifetime Achievement Award) from the Saint Louis Optometric Society.

Congratulations Ed! Thank you for your many years of service to Missouri’s College of Optometry.

Notables

In the July issue of the AOA News the following UMSL graduates were honored:

Rebecca Wartman, OD, ('87) was honored as the North Carolina OD of the Year. She is an AOA volunteer and currently practices in Asheville, North Carolina.

Thomas Greene, OD, ('85) was recognized for his selection as the Missouri OD of the Year. He currently practices in Jefferson County, is a past president of the Missouri Optometric Association, and is the current president of the Missouri Optometric Foundation.

Scott Burks, OD, ('02) was selected as the Missouri Young OD of the Year. He currently practices in Buffalo, Missouri and is treasurer of the Missouri Optometric Association.

Drs. Ed Bennett and Vinita Henry’s 4th Edition of “Clinical Manual of Contact Lenses” (Wolters Kluwer/Lippincott Williams & Wilkins) is now available.

Jennifer Carter O.D. ('02) is the proud mother of Jillian Rae, born July 14th.

Kim Layfield OD ('07), and her husband Matt are the proud parents of Jack Stewart Layfield, born on May 26th.

Beckham Maxwell Weeden born July 22; parents are Kyle Weeden ('08) and Katie Hahn Weeden ('07).

The Winning Goal—Triumph Over Tragedy to Achieve Fellowship: The Story of Megan Alberts ('10)

This is the story of a high achieving goal-oriented young lady, Dr. Megan Alberts, a graduate of the UMSL College of Optometry class of 2010. Megan was always an individual who was accustomed to accomplishing her goals . . . and more. Her dream of pursuing optometry school and becoming an optometrist was realized with her admission into the optometry program in August, 2006 after only three years of undergraduate training at UMSL. A collegiate basketball player, Megan wanted to complete her fourth year of eligibility despite the rigors of the first year optometric curriculum. With much determination and a strong work ethic she was successful in doing so becoming only the second College of Optometry student to concurrently participate in collegiate sports (the other was Tim Blankenship, ('06).

But Megan had another important goal: to gain Fellowship in the American Academy of Optometry. After completing a residency at the Marion VA Medical Center in Illinois, and accepting a position with the Ker-ville VA Hospital in Texas Megan had completed her requirements and was ready to take her Oral Examination at the 2012 Annual Meeting in Phoenix. However, a week before the meeting, Megan had a life-threatening motorcycle accident. The next 5 days con-

sisted of extensive surgeries with insertion of many plates and pins to help in the repair of 15 broken bones.

What happened next is inspiring and shown in a [five minute video](#) on the American Academy of Optometry website.



This video highlights a truly inspirational story about Dr. Megan Alberts and her unwavering dedication to becoming a Fellow, even when faced with a horrific life-threatening accident.

Megan relays her unwavering determination to leave the hospital and go straight to the Academy meeting: “I knew the minute I got in the hospital that I was going to Phoenix because I wanted my Fellow. It was my dream.” She contacted the Academy office to let them know about her situation and they went above and beyond the call of duty providing her not only with a wheelchair but also a personal chauffeur to help her not only

attend her Oral Examination but also continuing education classes and other events. She passed her examination and when she came across the stage and received her Fellowship from President Karla Zadnik, OD, PhD, it represented the most meaningful highlight of

the Saturday night banquet. To Megan it meant everything professionally as she relates in the video: “It says a lot about the clinic I’ll run and what my patients mean to me. I want to be the best I can be so that a patient comes to me about anything I’ll either know what to do or refer them to the right person.”

For anyone who cares about lifelong learning and the importance of pursuing the dream of becoming a Fellow in the American

Academy of Optometry, there is no more inspiring story than that of Dr. Megan Alberts.

“I was on the committee that reviewed her work and conducted her interview. She was literally in pieces during her oral exam. She was one awesome and determined doctor. She told us about her accident and I could not believe she still came,” according to Keshia Elder, O.D., Associate Clinical Professor.

It really showed how important AAO is to our profession and the pride doctors take in becoming a fellow.

UMSL Shows Their Spirit at Optometry's Meeting



A great representation of team spirit for the UMSL students.

They traveled en masse all the way to San Diego for Optometry's Meeting, held June 26-29. Approximately 30 students represented the College very well and exhibited the kind of spirit we are well known for (and honored for with the Spirit Award in 2011). They showed up with costumes, face paint, and much animation over 90 minutes before the doors opened for the Student Bowl and stormed into the convention ballroom and assumed their rightful position in the front rows. Led by trustee Devin Sasser ('15) setting the stage for our deserved contestant Courtney Kwan ('14), it was an enjoyable and exciting evening for everyone.

It is evident that few—if any—Colleges have as much student engagement as UMSL. Their involvement in the American Optometric Student Association and, in particular, Optometry's Meeting speaks volumes about their passion about the profession as once again we had one of the highest percentages of our student body present at the meeting compared to all of

the Colleges in the country. And as Trustee Devin Sasser relates, it was well worth it. "Although UMSL is not characterized as being the biggest school, we more than make up for it in spirit! This year's Student Bowl was an excellent example of that. Our creative "Please Don't Feed the Animals" theme made a big splash! As a member of the AOSA Board of Trustees the majority of my time was spent in meetings in which de-

isions were being made on behalf of students across the country. It just does not get more exciting than that!"

Trustee-Elect Nicole Ethridge ('16) concurs. "I've gained so much out of my experience at Optometry's Meeting. In just a few short days, I had the opportunity to gain valuable insight on how the other 23 optometry schools operate and how we can work together to achieve common goals. Through all the time spent talking with other schools about our similarities and differences, I felt an enormous pride for my own school and a desire to fight for bylaw changes that will benefit UMSL Optometry. Our strength at UMSL is truly our students. Other Trustee Elects and representatives from other schools pulled me aside and told me how impressed they were by UMSL's closeness and team spirit. Although we did not win the coveted spirit award, I think we definitely made a positive impression on the other schools. OM was a life-changing experience that strengthened my bond not only to other schools of optometry, but to my own as well. Go UMSL!"



Courtney Kwan ('14) (center) was the contestant representing UMSL.

Dr. Jarka Receives FastTrack Funding Grant

Dr. Edward S. Jarka, Clinical Assistant Professor and Chief of the Eye Health Management Service, received a grant of \$42,000 from the University of Missouri "Fast-Track Program" for the development of intellectual property judged to have potential for development to a licensable product. Over 80 project summaries were submitted from faculty throughout the University of Missouri system. Each were rated by a series of committees as to the likelihood for successful development to an invention. Eventually, 13 projects were selected to receive a maximum \$50,000.00 award. Three projects were selected from the University of Missouri-St. Louis with Dr. Jarka's "A Hand-held Meibomian Gland Warmer and Expressor" device being one of the selected projects for funding. Dr. Jarka, with technical assistance from Michael Howe and Wayne Garver, plans to have a prototype developed for first phase testing by spring of 2014.

Meibomian gland dysfunction (MGD), is a common, unpleasant chronic condition that affects nearly 40% of routine eye care



Dr. Ed Jarka

patients and approximately half of all contact lens wearers.

About Fast Track Funding Awards

In 2008, the UM Office of Research and Economic Development piloted a one-time funding program designed to enhance the university's research discoveries by moving them further down the commercialization pipeline. From the projects funded under the program, numerous patent applications and license agreements resulted, as well as the raising

of more than one million dollars in research funding and investment capital. Due to this success, the Vice-President for Research and Economic Development has committed \$500,000 for a second round of funding under the Fast Track program.

The UM Office of Research and Economic Development will provide funding up to \$50,000 per proposal to support prospects from each of the UM campuses. Funding under this program is to allow recipients to focus on development, testing, or prototype construction, and/or conduct specific market research. This evaluation may lead to industry collaboration, licensing, the formation of a new company, or the abandonment of the technology for commercial application. Funds received are not to be used for basic research, but to evaluate the commercial potential of existing research. The funding request should be the lowest cost proposal to complete the work.

[See more here.](#)

As Eye See It

Cont. from page 6

As we begin the enrollment process for the Class of 2018 I will hold close to me the memories of the first class I was part of forming and as new classes come in over the next several years—the class of 2017 will always be "my class" and when they graduate from school in 2017 I will also feel like I have graduated from learning about the life of an optometry student. I will have countless hours of "research"

and practical data from the class of 2017 to help guide me, but most of all I will be proud of their accomplishments and in the end likely forging a life-long relationship with them. No matter how many classes follow them—the Class of 2017 will always be "my" class. As they prepare to learn about optometry and develop I plan to learn more about them and that will be alone—rewarding. Sometimes as I walk down the hall

giving a tour or meeting with a new prospective student I think about my first tour and the imprint they left on me—and I just smile. As I see it—my role is more than just a job—it's a passion to forge a family in the college and at the end of the day I can go home knowing I made a difference in someone's life—just like this father and son did in my career with UMSL.

UMSL Graduate Begins a New Journey

The rigors of the curriculum of an optometry school program are well known. Add to that being a fifth generation optometrist with a name that brings instant respect in the state of Missouri and includes a former Missouri Optometric Association OD of the Year. Then there is the challenge of entering an exceptional class that ultimately graduated many leaders in the profession. No, life was never easy for Dr. Erin Searfoss Hartung ('04) who entered the UMSL College of Optometry in August, 2000 and graduated with honors four years later. Not surprisingly she blazed her own trail after graduation and gained respect within the profession for her own accomplishments which included a position as an Associate Professor of Clinical Optometry at the UMSL College of Optometry. Unfortunately, a serious career-ending medical condition greatly altered the path of her journey which has now resulted in another opportunity. It is an inspirational one that we strongly encourage everyone to help ensure that she enjoys the success that she greatly deserves. As she states: "I am a fifth-generation Optometrist who has always wanted to help open eyes to

the endless possibilities that exist if one only believes. I am a desmoid tumor survivor who fought for years to find a cure to this debilitating and rare disease. It took a lot of research and soul searching, but with the help of some awesome surgeons and the endless love of my family, I found a cure. After a 14 hour surgery, I have regained my life. It is not the life I once had, but better yet it is a life full of new beginnings. As a result of the desmoid tumor and drastic surgery necessary to save my life, I am no longer able to practice as an optometrist. Through my healing journey, writing came very naturally and gave me hope that I would have a life after my illness. I have created char-

acters who remind us to believe in miracles. Characters that empower themselves and us, to take charge of our lives so that we can turn our dreams into reality. Enny Penny's Wishes is the first book in a series of picture books written for children that shows the amazing power of a simple wish. To find the Enny Penny series or to contact Erin go to ennypenny.com.



Dr. Erin Searfoss



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Faculty Present at Geriatric Institute



Dr. Jennifer Bulmann



Dr. Kathleen Boland

Drs. Jennifer Bulmann, Assistant Clinical Professor and Kathleen Boland, Assistant Clinical Professor, gave a presentation at the 24th Annual Saint Louis University Summer Geriatric Institute, Faints, Falls and Frailty on June 11, 2013. The event was presented by the Department of Internal Medicine, Division of Geriatric Medicine and the Missouri Gateway Geriatric Education Center. The title of their presentation was Visual Impairment: A Fall Risk? The description of their presentation was as follows "Visual Impairment has proven to be a significant risk factor in falls. Presentation will include numerous eye disease entities and their affect on vision and mobility. Life-like simulation will be a part of the presentation to aid in the understanding of visual func-

"On behalf of Dr. John Morley and my colleagues in the Saint Louis University Geriatric Education Center, I want to extend our gratitude for the support that you provided to the 24th Annual Summer Geriatric Institute. Your willingness to share your time and expertise with our conference attendees helped to make this year's Institute another successful and well-received continuing education event."

Marla Berg-Weger, Ph.D., LCSW
Professor, School of Social Work
Executive Director
Geriatric Education Center

tioning." Audience members were a combination of physicians, psychologists, nursing, PT/OT, social workers and nursing home administrators. Dr. Bulmann's interest is in the area of vision rehabilitation,

geriatric optometry and disease treatment and management. Dr. Boland's interests include primary care, children's vision, low vision and geriatric care.

Continuing Education Opportunity

Annual Optometry Academe 2013 - Retina Sunday, August 18, 2013

The course focuses on an update of the diagnosis and management of retinal disorders. It is a must for every optometrist!

Speakers: Joseph Pizzimenti, OD, Carlo Pelino, OD, Kevin Blinder, MD

Topics:

- Essentials in Posterior Segment Disease - 2 hrs.
- Optical Coherence Tomography in Ocular Disease - 2 hrs.
- Retina Update: Diagnostic Dilemmas – 2 hrs.
- Medical and Surgical Retina Updates - 2 hrs.

Tuition:

\$300.00

Location:

JCPenney Conference Center - Auditorium
(Continental breakfast and lunch provided)

[REGISTER HERE](#)

Call [Lis Ellerbusch](#) for more course information. (314) 516-5615



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Don't miss out on the next issue!

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If you have missed a previous issue of the EyeWire you can navigate to the [archive page](#) as well as the current issue from optometry.umsl.edu.