

NEWSIGHT

Summer 2019



Director, Sander R. Dubovy, MD and Executive Director, Elizabeth Fout-Caraza, present Dr. William Culbertson with the Victor T. Curtin Award.

Page 2

Annual Open House and yacht tour of Biscayne Bay

Page 3

5th Annual Donor Family Celebration held at Flamingo Gardens

Page 4

Krissy's story: profile of a three-time corneal transplant recipient

Page 6

New Board of Directors installed at yearly gala

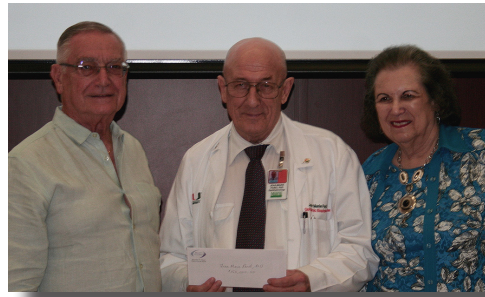
Dr. William W. Culbertson Honored with Award

Florida Lions Eye Bank is pleased to recognize our 2018-2019 Victor T. Curtin Award recipient, William W. Culbertson, M.D.! Named after our founding Medical Director, the Victor T. Curtin Award is presented annually to a member of the medical community who has supported and advanced the work of Florida Lions Eye Bank. Dr. Culbertson, a corneal specialist and faculty member at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute, has been an ardent supporter of our mission for almost 40 years.

In addition to serving as Florida Lions Eye Bank's Associate Medical Director since the mid- 1980's, Dr. Culbertson was instrumental in helping the Eye Bank develop its Descemet Stripping Automated Endothelial Keratoplasty (DSAEK) preparation technique. Prior to this, surgeons processed this tissue in the operating room just prior to surgery. It was Dr. Culbertson who first suggested that Florida Lions Eye Bank could process DSAEK tissue in its laboratory, helping to reduce patient costs and valuable operating room time. He spent countless hours helping the eye bank perfect its technique and training our lab staff. Since 2007, Florida Lions Eye Bank has provided over 1,000 DSAEK ready tissues! Today, Dr. Culbertson is a member of Florida Lions Eye Bank's Medical Advisory Committee where he continues to help the eye bank stay on the forefront of new technologies and opportunities facing our organization. Thank you, Dr. Culbertson!

Florida Lions Eye Bank Open House 2019

Fifth Annual Donor Family Celebration Held at Flamingo Gardens



Beauty of Sight Foundation President, Juan Tejera (left) and Research Committee Chair, Elizabeth Dawson (right) present Jean-Marie Parel, PhD with a check for \$150,000 to support ophthalmic research.

Keynote speaker and corneal transplant recipient Nolan Bourgeois addresses guests in Berrocal Auditorium.



On March 30, 2019, Florida Lions Eye Bank opened its doors to Lions from Multiple District 35, and supporters in our community, for an afternoon of fun and education. Over 120 people attended the Annual Open House Celebration, making it the best-attended event of its kind in years.

The day started at 10 AM, with guests and staff assembled in Bascom Palmer's Berrocal Auditorium. Executive Director Elizabeth Fout-Caraza discussed Florida Lions Eye Bank's successes over the past year, and forthcoming projects for 2019-2020. Keynote speaker Nolan Bourgeois shared his story about struggling with a complicated ocular infection before receiving a corneal transplant at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute. Finally, Florida Lions Eye Bank's Beauty of Sight Foundation presented checks to Dr. Jean Marie Parel and Dr. Sonia Yoo, for the funding of two worthy ophthalmic research projects.

After the presentation, guests toured Florida Lions Eye Bank's four laboratory facilities to learn more about the inner workings of the eye bank and its associated research. A barbecue lunch was served on the Retter Patio, with music by a live DJ and a door prize drawing. And then the fun really began! The group traveled by charter bus to Miami's famous Sea Isle Marina, where they boarded the 120' luxury party yacht Midnight Sun. The group enjoyed the yacht's open bar while taking in the sights of Miami's Biscayne Bay.

Florida Lions Eye Bank hosts an Open House Celebration every year in March. If you would like to attend next year's event in March 2020, please contact us by email at info@fleb.org. We will make sure you receive the details of the event in early spring.



Clockwise from top left:

Guests aboard the Midnight Sun enjoy sightseeing in Biscayne Bay.

The Midnight Sun luxury party yacht.

The staff of Florida Lions Eye Bank enjoy the yacht cruise.

Staff member Concetta Triglia, PhD, gives Open House guests a tour of Florida Lions Eye Bank's cornea laboratory.



On Sunday, April 14, 2019 over 329 family members, friends, and loved ones of eye donors gathered at Flamingo Gardens for the fifth annual Donor Family Celebration. This event, the best-attended of its kind, celebrated the legacy of the 975 people who became eye donors to Florida Lions Eye Bank in 2018. Families and loved ones of these selfless individuals were invited to an afternoon of fun, remembrance, and reflection. The event featured lunch, music, arts and crafts, face painting, and a butterfly release ceremony dedicated to the memory of their loved ones. Donor families also had the opportunity to tour Flamingo Gardens, a lush 60-acre wildlife sanctuary and botanical gardens in Davie, FL, famous for its centuries-old trees and free-roaming peacocks.

The 975 South Floridians who became eye donors in 2018 provided corneas to 1,057 transplant recipients, and 729 specimens for medical research. Over 60% of these donors had chosen to register as eye, organ and tissue donors on their driver's licenses. Florida Lions Eye Bank is deeply grateful for the gifts these selfless individuals gave, and our staff was honored to meet so many people whose loved ones restored the beauty of sight. A few of these families are pictured above; to view the complete photo album from the event, follow us on Facebook! And to register as an eye, organ, and tissue donor, visit www.donatelifeflorida.org.



Krissy Kissoon: A Three-Time Corneal

Transplant Recipient Tells Her Story

Krissy Kissoon is a 36 year old three-time corneal transplant recipient from Trinidad. Krissy's three transplants all took place at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute in Miami with tissue provided by Florida Lions Eye Bank. We first got to know Krissy when she reached out to us to thank her donor's family after her first transplant. Since then, Krissy has had two more corneal transplants, and she has sent letters of thanks to those donors' families as well.

Krissy is an unusual patient. Many corneal transplant recipients only need one graft over the course of their lifetime. Krissy has had three. While some corneal disease patients have problems with other parts of their eye, many do not. Krissy, however, has a complicated ocular history, requiring numerous eye surgeries.

But Krissy's most unusual quality is her enduring gratitude. At every opportunity we spoke to her, she expressed thanks to her cornea donors' families, and appreciation for the doctors who worked hard to preserve her vision. Florida Lions Eye Bank is proud to share Krissy's story, one of resilience in the face of adversity.

In her own words, here is Krissy's story.

In February 2017, I developed serious vision problems, which resulted in my inability to perform my daily routine. This included being a mother to my son Zidan, who was two and a half years old at the time, and performing my work duties as an auditor, a career I had studied for years to achieve. I went from being completely independent to being dependent upon my family's support.

I was seen by several eye specialists near my home in Trinidad. None of my doctors were certain of my diagnosis: they considered bilateral keratitis, dendritic ulcers, acanthamoeba, and other infections. I received many different treatments for my unknown condition, including antibiotics, anti-inflammatory, antifungal, and antimicrobial medications, steroids, and corneal cross linking, but there were no improvements to my vision.

From February until April 2017, my vision worsened and my pain increased. My corneas were scarred, and I developed cataracts and glaucoma as well. I spent most of my time in a dark room, as my eyes teared constantly, and were extremely



sensitive to light. I couldn't go outside at all! My vision was so bad I couldn't recognize my own face in the mirror, or see the faces of my son or my family. Everything in the world was unrecognizable, including the clothes I wore, the home I lived in, and the food I ate. Thank God for my hearing, and the ability to touch, feel, and taste.

In May 2017, my doctors in Trinidad referred me to Bascom Palmer Eye Institute (BPEI) in Miami. My condition had become so severe that my local physicians knew I needed highly specialized care. At BPEI, my doctors conducted several tests and biopsies, but found no evidence of fungus, bacteria, parasites, or any other pathogen. To date, the cause of my eye problems remain unknown.

To try to heal the surface of my damaged corneas, I was prescribed Serum Tears, a biological therapy made by Florida Lions Eye Bank. Serum Tears are eye drops created by combining my own blood serum with saline. I had to order a three month supply to take home with me to Trinidad, which meant that Florida Lions Eye Bank had to draw a lot of blood. Unfortunately, this treatment was not suc-

cessful. My doctors also placed an amniotic membrane graft on both eyes, hoping to restore the surface of my corneas. This too was unsuccessful.

In June 2017, I received my first corneal transplant to my right eye at BPEI. At the same time, I had the lens of the eye removed. Lens removal is similar to cataract surgery—a procedure in which the patient's cloudy lens is replaced with a clear, artificial lens— but unlike cataract patients, I was unable to have an artificial lens implanted due to the severity of my eye condition. Unfortunately, my vision didn't improve after this procedure. Worse yet, my right eye started to show significant signs of graft rejection. In late 2017, I had to undergo a vitrectomy and glaucoma valve implant, since my eye pressure was not stabilizing.

While dealing with these complications with my right eye, I was also struggling with problems with my left eye. My left cornea was scarred, and the eye had developed a cataract, resulting in severely blurred vision. In order to stabilize my left eye, a procedure called a tarsorrhaphy had to be performed, in which my eyelids were partially sewn together to narrow the eyelid opening. I remember feeling at that time like I was losing hope. It was becoming harder and harder to imagine a bright future. I continued to pray and keep my faith, and trust that God would help me through this difficult time.

In May 2018, my left eyelids were reopened, and I had my second corneal transplant and cataract surgery done, to my left eye this time. I also had a vitrectomy and glaucoma valve implanted, since the pressure in my left eye was unstable. I am still recovering from this procedure, but my vision has improved. I can now identify people and objects at a certain distance.

In February 2019, I was scheduled for my third corneal transplant and lens placement in my right eye. I felt optimistic about getting the vision to my right eye restored. However, within a

week of this combined surgery, I developed some complications. The pressure in my right eye was still unstable, despite having a glaucoma valve implant and vitrectomy performed in that same eye in September 2017. I was dismayed to have to undergo two more unexpected surgeries to my right eye, to reposition the glaucoma valve and repeat the vitrectomy.

Finally, in mid-2019, after my multiple surgeries, I am now able to enjoy the benefits of my new transplanted corneas. My vision is still hazy, but I am able to see better than I could two years ago. My son is now five years old. I can see his face, and I enjoy spending time with him. When my vision failed, he was

just a toddler, and had to go live with his father because I was unable to take care of him. Now, I am learning to become more independent, and performing tasks for myself at home. I hope to be able to drive a car again, and go back to work.

I would like to thank the following people who helped me on my journey toward better vision:

- Dr. Guillermo Amescua, Dr. Jaime D. Martinez, Dr. Luis E. Vasquez, Dr. Allister Gibbons, Dr. Jack Stringham, Dr. Lucy Zhang, Dr. Zubair Ansari, Dr. Nicolas Yannuzzi, Dr. Paul Palmberg, Dr. Jayanth Sridhar, and all the doctors and nurses who cared for me at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute. These

doctors and others performed my many eye surgeries: without their knowledge and hard work, I don't know where I'd be today.

- Jennifer Chavez, Lead International Patient Coordinator.

(Continued on back cover)

Opposite: Krissy before the onset of her vision problems.

This page: Krissy, after multiple eye surgeries.

Back cover: Krissy with her son Zidan today.



Welcome Our New Board of Directors!

Thank You to Our Financial Supporters!



On June 1, 2019, Florida Lions Eye Bank celebrated the installation of its Board of Directors for the coming 2019-2020 year. The gala celebration took place at the beautiful Spring Run Golf Club in Estero, FL. Approximately 60 guests were in attendance, including Lions from throughout the Multiple District. A sincere thank you goes to those who attended and made this year's celebration a success!

Guests of the 2019 Installation Gala enjoyed an open bar, generously sponsored by Lubitz Financial Group, and fine cuisine served by the talented staff of the Spring Run Country Club. A silent auction of donated items, and a raffle of the tables' centerpieces, raised funds for Florida Lions Eye Bank.



Immediate Past President Norma Callahan, PDG, gave thanks to her fellow Lions on the Board of Directors for the opportunity to serve. Bob Hilliard, PCC, received the prestigious Ross Carr Memorial Award in recognition of his devotion to Florida Lions Eye Bank's mission. The Jimmy Nelson award for Club of the Year was presented to the Marco Island Lions Club. Incoming President, Kenneth Engstrom, PDG, pledged to lead Florida Lions Eye Bank in new and exciting directions in the coming year.

Florida Lions Eye Bank holds an Installation Gala every year in June to celebrate the appointment of the incoming board of directors. Any and all Lions in the Multiple District are invited to attend. To make sure your club receives an invitation to next year's Installation Gala, please email Florida Lions Eye Bank at info@fleeb.org to be added to our mailing list for special events.

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Krissy's Story, Continued

(Continued from page 5)

- Maria Henao and the Department of Social Services at BPEI, from whom I received excellent advice and much-needed information when I first arrived in Miami for treatment.
- Dr. Deo Singh and his team at the Caribbean Eye Institute.
- My family and my son, who motivate me every day. I couldn't have come this far without their love and support.
- And of course, I am ever so grateful to my donors and their respective families. I am so sorry for your loss, but at the same time, I am so grateful for those persons who gave me an opportunity to see again.

It has been a very long and hard journey, but I try my best to keep my faith and remain optimistic. As a corneal transplant recipient, someone's eye donation helped me to see again. I encourage everyone to consider donating your eye, tissues, and organs, as you can help save and improve the lives of others in meaningful ways. May God bless you all.

