

# Eye Level

SPRING 2022

News & Views From Wills Eye Hospital



## GLAUCOMA TEAM REIMAGINES THE FUTURE

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MEET THE  
LARRY A. DONOSO  
ENDOWED CHAIR  
JOSE S. PULIDO, MD, MS,  
MPH, MBA

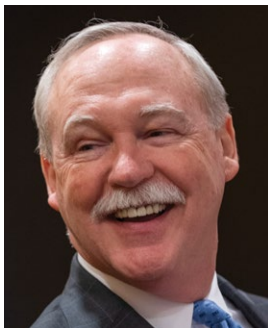
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WILLS EYE BALL  
TO HONOR  
RENOWNED  
SURGEONS

PAGE 4

# From Our Leaders



**JOSEPH P. BILSON**  
*Chief Executive Officer*



**JULIA A. HALLER, MD**  
*Ophthalmologist-in-Chief*

Welcome to the Spring 2022 issue of *Eye Level*. As we leave behind the harshness of the cold winter months and enter this much anticipated season—one marked by renewal, recovery, and new beginnings—we reflect on a milestone. It has been just over two years since the unprecedented global pandemic upended our lives.

Unquestionably, these last two years have been filled with challenges and obstacles. But in this season of optimism and hope, we are thankful for all that we as a Wills Eye family have overcome. We have said it many times before, but it bears repeating: the grit, commitment, and resilience shown by our frontline workers and the entire supporting staff at Wills Eye Hospital will forever shine in memory as a beacon of pride and accomplishment. Through all the obstacles, we continued to care for our patients; our doors never closed. We are so grateful to our entire team and know that we have all emerged stronger and more confident, ready to surmount any challenges that lie ahead.

Spring of 2022 at Wills is marked by a host of bright beginnings, and we are excited about sharing some of these in this newsletter issue. High on our list is the news that the Wills Eye Glaucoma Service suite has been totally reimaged and will soon be completely renovated, in line with our mission of delivering the highest quality of care to our patients at the cutting edge of medical innovation. This major project, made possible through the generosity of donors and a Commonwealth of Pennsylvania grant, is the subject of our cover story. You can read about the exciting plans, which will improve the overall patient experience and optimize space, on pages 2 and 3.

You will also get an inside view, on page 1, of a one-of-a-kind, accomplished visionary—the world-renowned clinician-scientist Jose Pulido, MD, MS, MPH, MBA. Dr. Pulido came to Wills in January 2021, and has already galvanized so much of our clinical, research, and educational work by his scholarly, insightful, innovative, and even entrepreneurial contributions to our team. His unique and

forward-thinking research aspires to bring hope to patients with blinding eye diseases through inventive new diagnostics and groundbreaking novel treatments.

We’re also excited to celebrate longtime cataract surgeons and leaders Robert S. Bailey Jr., MD, and Mark H. Blecher, MD, at the 2022 Wills Eye Ball in June (page 4).

And you will surely be inspired—as we were—by Janet Shapiro’s story (page 5) and her reason for establishing a planned gift—one that will live on for generations—to Wills Eye.

Finally, we want to shine a much-deserved spotlight on the newest members of our ranks—the Residency Class of 2026. On Ophthalmology Match Day, February 8, it became official. Of the more than 650 applications received, eight medical student candidates were selected to pursue their chosen field of ophthalmology at Wills Eye Hospital—where the first physician to be trained in our specialty entered our doors in 1839. What a proud tradition—and we are ourselves so honored to be chosen by the best and brightest for the next steps in their training! These talented young physicians, each with a compelling personal story, come from diverse backgrounds but are united by unparalleled qualifications, energy, and accomplishment. We warmly welcome these all-stars to Wills Eye. They give us confidence in and optimism for the future of medicine, and our field of ophthalmology.

Here’s to renewed strength and bright beginnings!  
A healthy, safe, and joy-filled Spring to all! 🍀



SCAN ME

View CATALYST, an exciting new video series where world-renowned faculty and rising stars share their knowledge and insights on clinical care, research, education and more...

[willseye.org/catalyst](https://willseye.org/catalyst)

## Eye Level

NEWS & VIEWS FROM  
WILLS EYE HOSPITAL  
SPRING 2022  
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**ON THE COVER:** Architectural rendering of future Glaucoma Service reception area, by D2 Groups.

Inset Photo: (from left) Mike Wurster, Wills Eye Facilities Director; Carol Scattergood, Glaucoma Manager; Joseph P. Bilson, Wills Eye CEO; and Jonathan S. Myers, MD, Chief of the Glaucoma Service.



# A SIT-DOWN WITH JOSE S. PULIDO, MD, MS, MPH, MBA

*Meet the Larry A. Donoso Endowed Chair & Director of the Henry and Corrine Bower Memorial Laboratories for Translational Medicine*

The world-renowned clinician-scientist joined the **Vickie & Jack Farber Vision Research Center** team in January 2021.

**Q. What does this new role at Wills mean to you?**

**A.** I'd like to leverage my background to find innovative diagnostic and therapeutic tools that can be evaluated at Wills. When I first arrived, alumnus Dominick Benedetto, MD, asked if I'd be interested in working with him and Rutgers University Bioengineering Professor Fred Silver, PhD, on a non-invasive method of measuring stiffness of tissues. I had written about this topic at Mayo. I knew Chris Rapuano, MD, Chief of the Wills Cornea Service, from our days at the University of Iowa and approached him about this prototype machine. He was happy to help. We're evaluating stiffness of tissue in corneal disease and hoping to expand its use to the back of the eye. It's the only prototype of its kind for ocular use.

**Q. What inspired you to become a retina and ocular oncology clinician-scientist?**

**A.** I think in molecules; I see them in my head, like a drawing. At 21, I graduated from the University of Chicago with both a bachelor's and master's degree in organic chemistry. I enrolled at Tulane University School of Medicine. I was drawn to the school because of a renowned endocrinology practice there. At about the same time, my father started having vision issues. This impacted my life choices and I switched from endocrinology to ophthalmology.

In 1983, I was a first-year ophthalmology resident at University of Illinois and AIDS was a newly emerging disease that was killing people. About one-third of the patients were going blind from viral (CMV) retinitis before dying. The medical community hoped an experimental drug, BWB759U, might prevent vision loss. I was involved in a toxicity study to determine the drug's effectiveness. First-year optometry resident, Colleen Howe, was also part of the group. We needed to obtain lab results by a Friday night to treat a patient on Monday

morning. Colleen's boss had another commitment and asked if she might step in. She agreed and we obtained the results in time. On Monday morning, I injected the patient, and his vision was saved. Three weeks later, Colleen and I were engaged.

The drug, now known as Ganciclovir, is used today to treat viral retinitis, predominantly in immunosuppressed patients.

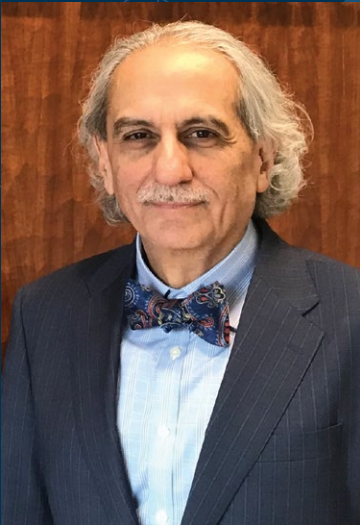
That event changed my personal life and compelled me to help patients through translational research.

**Q. What are some of the most exciting projects you are currently pursuing?**

**A.** In addition to the prototype machine, for the last two years, I've been working with a consortium that includes the University of Liverpool, University of Ulster in Northern Ireland and a biopharma company, MiNA Therapeutics, to examine small activating RNAs. I've continued that research at Wills. We're evaluating these RNAs to possibly treat inflammation of the eye, glaucoma, corneal disease and macular degeneration. The United Kingdom has considered this research worthy of a British Innovate Grant.

**Q. What is special about Wills?**

**A.** The collaboration is fantastic! Not just among the faculty and staff, but also the alums—who are so incredibly loyal. I feel that everyone has my back. We support one another to ensure success in helping patients here as well as those around the world. Every day, my work is fun and fulfilling. ■■■



## FAST FACTS

Jose S. Pulido, MD, MS, MPH, MBA

**Birthplace:** Cuba

**Early Life:** At age 5, immigrated to the U.S. with his family

**Wife:** Colleen Howe, OD

**Children:** Jose Ethan Pulido, MD

Urologist, Chester County Hospital  
West Chester, Pennsylvania

Christine Pulido, MD  
Resident in Psychiatry  
University of California, San Diego

**Favorite Music:** Everything from Classical to Classic Rock

**Favorite Ritual:** Reading the *New England Journal of Medicine* every Thursday night



Jonathan S. Myers, MD, right, examines Wayne Fluke during an office visit.  
Background: Architectural rendering, D2 Groups.

# Reimagined, Reconfigured, State-of-the-Art

The future of eye care is in the making as the Glaucoma Service, on the 11th floor of 840 Walnut Street, is launching a renovation project that will greatly enhance the patient experience.

“We’re very excited about the project,” said Joseph P. Bilson, Wills Eye CEO. “Not only will the space be better for our patients—which is really fantastic—it will also improve the teaching environment for residents and fellows, foster research initiatives and enable us to expand our clinical staff.”

Jonathan S. Myers, MD, Chief of the Glaucoma Service, couldn’t be more pleased with the timing of the endeavor. “We are dramatically expanding the space, which matches the dramatic increase of patients affected by glaucoma,” he said. “Predictions are that in the next 15 years, the prevalence of glaucoma will increase by nearly 50 percent.”

“With a baby boom population that is aging and changing demographics, we need to have the capability to see more patients and grow the size of our medical team. Reconfiguring our space will enable us to achieve this.”

Both Mr. Bilson and Dr. Myers expressed their gratitude for the generosity of the benefactors who made this project possible—starting with Michael Fux and Gloria Rubin and Jim and Sue Anderson. Wills also received a \$1 million dollar Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP) grant from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The matching grant creates partnerships between the Commonwealth, local organizations, the community and donors.

“We partnered with D2 Groups (the winning bidder),” said Bilson. “They oversaw the architectural and engineering design phase. We also worked closely with Dr. Myers and his team to tailor the space to meet their specific needs.”

The design of the 12,000-square-foot suite is complete, and renovations will begin this summer. “The construction will take place in phases to avoid disruption of daily operations,” explained Mike Wurster, Wills Eye Facilities Director, who is coordinating the myriad details of the \$2.5 million dollar project.

Bilson emphasized that staying current and taking on a major renovation project every couple of years is part of a

**“Predictions are that in the next 15 years, the prevalence of glaucoma will increase by nearly 50 percent.”**

— Jonathan S. Myers, MD, Chief of the Glaucoma Service



Reza Razeghinejad, MD, and Jonathan S. Myers, MD.



BENEFACTORS



▲ *Nataasha Nayak Kolomeyer, MD, in the operating room.*



▲ *Daniel Lee, MD, presenting at a conference.*

strategic initiative at Wills. Bilson has been collaborating with Julia A. Haller, MD, Ophthalmologist-in-Chief, and service chiefs to customize these projects. “It’s all about looking to the future and ensuring that Wills remains the worldwide leader in eye care,” he said.

The Glaucoma Service has about 25,000 patient visits per year. Prior to 2020, physicians performed 80 surgeries a month. In 2021, that number jumped to 100 a month.

The current layout of three hallways, each with six exam rooms, has been redesigned with five hallways—each with five rooms. This will allow for about 65 percent more exam space. In addition, each new hallway will include rooms with testing equipment.

“Three to five million people in the United States have glaucoma,” said Dr. Myers. “If we include those who are at risk and should be screened—that number is closer to 10 to 15 million.” The risk of glaucoma increases with age, he added, particularly for those over 60, which is why annual screenings by an ophthalmologist are critically important. The prevalence of glaucoma is less than 1 in 100 at age 40, but increases to as much as 1 in 10 for people in their 80s.”

For people with a family history or those of African American or Hispanic heritage, Dr. Myers explained, the risk is about four times as great. For these patients, he recommends an exam every one to two years, beginning at age 40.

Carol Scattergood, Glaucoma Manager, said that COVID dramatically changed their office operations and patient flow. These changes, particularly social distancing measures, were top of mind as they consulted over the past year with architects and engineers.

The new suite will feature a reconfigured waiting room and a bright, spacious, patient-friendly reception area. “When patients come off the elevator, they will face a reception desk with four greeters,” said Scattergood. “Check-in will be more seamless, and our goal is to care for patients efficiently, professionally, quickly and safely.”

Said Dr. Myers: “We are incredibly fortunate that we received this RACP grant and that the Wills leadership—starting with Mr. Bilson and Dr. Haller—had the vision to apply for it and committed the resources to find matching funds. They saw the need and found a way to make it possible to provide a better environment and a better experience for our patients.” ■■■

► *CEO Joseph P. Bilson during a planning session.*



“Wills Eye has always been a highly regarded leader in eye care, and we are honored to support them in this project. It is so important that patients continue to receive the quality care they deserve in a state-of-the-art environment.”

— Sue and Jim Anderson



“These renovations will enhance the already stellar care that our family and many others receive. We are thrilled to be able to support this exciting evolution in glaucoma care at Wills Eye.”

— Gloria Rubin and Michael Fux

**Glaucoma** is one of the world’s leading causes of blindness and affects three to five million Americans. There are various types of glaucoma, but all may lead to progressive damage to the optic nerve with loss of vision. Risk factors include age, family history, increased eye pressure and race/ethnicity (African American or Hispanic heritage). Although glaucoma may be asymptomatic in the early stages, if detected early, it can be treated non-invasively with prescription eye drops.

GLAUCOMA

TOO MUCH FLUID STAYS IN THE EYE THIS INCREASES PRESSURE

HIGH PRESSURE CAN POTENTIALLY DAMAGE THE OPTIC NERVE

# Wills Eye Ball to Celebrate Renowned Surgeons

**R**obert S. Bailey Jr., MD, and Mark H. Blecher, MD, who shaped the standard of care for cataract surgery nationwide, will be saluted for their long-time leadership on June 25 at The Union League of Philadelphia.

The Ball, which will recognize Dr. Bailey and Dr. Blecher for their unparalleled accomplishments, will benefit the Wills Eye Cataract and Primary Eye Care Service (CPEC)—the entry point for general and specialized care for patients and the hub of the resident education program.

Both doctors arrived at Wills Eye Hospital in the 1980s as members of the prestigious residency program. “Since that time, nothing has changed as rapidly or profoundly as ophthalmology to the benefit of our patients,” said Dr. Blecher. And after teaching hundreds of residents, few have had as profound an effect on the field as Drs. Bailey and Blecher.

As CPEC’s Director for the past 20 years, Dr. Bailey oversaw resident teaching in the clinic and operating room. He helped develop courses in basic and advanced cataract surgery, which included utilizing offsite and onsite wet labs so residents could build surgical skills. He developed a surgical mentorship program that paired attending surgeons and residents, and together with Dr. Blecher, instituted biweekly reviews of surgical videos with residents. “The experience of Wills Eye residents is incredibly diverse and valuable, different from just about all residency programs,” said Dr. Bailey. An expert in anterior segment surgery, Dr. Bailey has been an invited faculty member at Harvard Medical School’s highly regarded Intensive Cataract Surgical Training Course. He has also published and presented extensively.

Dr. Blecher served as Co-Director of CPEC for the past 18 years, treating a wide range of ophthalmic diseases and teaching residents in a decidedly Socratic style. He’s been at the forefront of modern cataract and refractive surgery and performed more than 20,000 cataract and 10,000 LASIK surgeries. He was involved in the Food and Drug Administration’s clinical trials of intraocular lens, a key element of modern cataract surgery. In recent years, Dr. Blecher has concentrated on premium cataracts and new



Robert S. Bailey Jr., MD, and Mark H. Blecher, MD.

cataract surgical technology, presented papers and taught courses at nationwide conferences, and served as Senior Medical Editor of *Review of Ophthalmology*, the field’s most widely read publication.

Both physicians have stepped back from their CPEC leadership roles. Dr. Bailey remains an active clinician and mentor to residents. Dr. Blecher continues to see patients and has taken on a new role, bringing a physician’s perspective to the operations and growth of Wills Eye.

Net proceeds from the Ball will further enhance technology within the operating suites and teaching spaces, greatly advancing the clinical skills of residents and fellows. “This will take surgical teaching to the next level,” said Dr. Blecher. ■

**For event information and reservations, please contact Linda Mancini at 215-440-3154 or [LMancini@willseye.org](mailto:LMancini@willseye.org) or visit [willseye.org/wills-eye-ball](http://willseye.org/wills-eye-ball).**



## Annual Conference Hosts Ophthalmology Leaders

The energy at the Marriott in Old City Philadelphia was palpable! After a one-year hiatus, the 74th Annual Wills Eye Hospital Conference returned to an in-person event this past March.

Named lecturers included Roger A. Dailey, MD, FACS; Osamah Saeedi, MD, MS; Tamara R. Fountain, MD; Emily Y. Chew, MD; and Terry Kim, MD.

Thanks to all who attended!



◀ (L to R): Sunir J. Garg, MD, FACS, Conference Coordinator and Co-Director of Retina Research, and Mrittika Sen, MD, of the Ocular Oncology Service and recipient of the P. Robb McDonald Award for best scientific paper by a fellow.

▶ (L to R): Dilru C. Amarasekera, MD, the James S. Shipman Award recipient for best scientific presentation by a resident, and Sunir J. Garg, MD, FACS.





# From Generation to Generation

## JANET SHAPIRO CHOOSES PHILANTHROPY TO HONOR HER LATE PARENTS

Eleanor Shapiro knew something was different about the floaters she was experiencing in her vision. When she visited a retina specialist in her hometown of Wayne, New Jersey, the doctor wasted no time in sending her to Wills Eye and world-renowned specialists Carol L. Shields, MD, and Jerry A. Shields, MD.

Eleanor was diagnosed with ocular melanoma and started her treatment right away. This was July 1997, and the gold standard of care was an intensive five-day course of plaque radiotherapy, a focal form of radiation. Eleanor spent her 70th birthday at Wills Eye Hospital.

“Everything about my mom’s experience was top-notch,” recalled her daughter, Janet Shapiro, also of Wayne. “It’s amazing what happens there: the expertise of the doctor, the attention to detail in treatment; she could not have been better cared for anywhere else.” Eleanor’s treatment was successful and there were no adverse effects to her eye or vision.



Janet Shapiro (right), in Florida, with her parents, Eleanor and Joseph Shapiro.

**“It’s amazing what happens there: the expertise of the doctor, the attention to detail in treatment; she could not have been better cared for anywhere else.”**

– Janet Shapiro

Years later as Janet looked back on her mother’s experience, she said: “Wills Eye gave my mom seven extra years and what a gift that was for my family. My mom passed away in 2005 but because of Wills Eye and her excellent care, she got that extra time. She even fulfilled her dream of taking her whole family on a cruise for her 75th birthday. I feel so blessed and grateful.”

Janet and her mom shared an especially close relationship, and like many parents, Eleanor passed on some valuable lessons to her daughter. The Hebrew concept, *tikkun olam*, is one example. “It means to do your part to make the world a better place, to repair the world,” explained Janet. “My parents felt fortunate for the good life they enjoyed, so they frequently picked a meaningful charity and made a gift to show their gratitude. Today, I follow that example and make a gift to Wills Eye every summer in honor of my mom’s August 1st birthday. It’s my way of expressing my appreciation.”

Janet has taken this notion a step further in creating her estate plan. “I have included a bequest in my will and established a Charitable Gift Annuity, all to benefit Wills Eye,” said Janet. “I wanted to honor my parents during my lifetime and ensure that others will benefit from quality healthcare as my family did.” ■■■



Janet Shapiro and Eleanor Shapiro on a family cruise in 2002.



### James Wills Society

Who could have imagined the impact that James Wills, a Philadelphia Quaker grocery merchant, would have on the field of ophthalmology? In 1832, he bequeathed a gift of \$116,000 (equivalent today to nearly \$4 million dollars) that led to the establishment of Wills Eye Hospital. The extraordinary outcome of his generosity has benefitted generations of patients who have come to Wills Eye Hospital for sight-saving care.

Today, the *James Wills Society* recognizes and thanks those individuals who have provided a gift to Wills Eye in their estate plans. Society members learn about the potential impact of their gift and can direct it toward an area of their choosing.

**If you have already provided for Wills Eye in your estate and have a question or want to learn more, contact Suzanne Beers at [sbeers@willseye.org](mailto:sbeers@willseye.org) or 215-440-3153.**

## GIFT OPTIONS

There are many ways to include Wills Eye in an estate plan, while also meeting specific goals for your family.

### Gift from your Will or Living Trust

Include a bequest provision in your will or living trust.

### Retirement Plan Designation

Name Wills Eye as a beneficiary of your IRA, 401(k), 403(b) or other qualified retirement plan, perhaps secondary to your spouse. For donors 72½ and above, a Qualified Charitable Deduction can potentially lower your taxable income.

### Charitable Gift Annuity or Charitable Remainder Trust

Establish an annuity; receive a tax deduction and fixed payments for life. After your death, the remaining principal passes to Wills Eye.



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## WILLS EYE HOSPITAL HOSTS COMMUNITY MENTOR PROGRAM



Walter P.  
Harris Jr., MD,  
and program  
participants  
suture artificial  
skin in the  
MOST lab.

This past fall, Wills Eye Hospital hosted the Courtyard Mentor Network, a community outreach initiative that introduces Philadelphia area youth to possible future careers. After Wills physicians Walter P. Harris Jr., MD, and Douglas M. Wisner, MD, shared personal stories of their career journeys, the boys, ages 11 to 15, donned surgical scrubs and gloves and headed to the William Maul Measey Ophthalmic Surgical Training (MOST) lab.

The participants, from the Courtyard community in Philadelphia, learned about eye anatomy and were given the opportunity to suture artificial skin, perform ultrasonography, use a slit lamp, and surgically implant an intraocular lens in an artificial training eye.

This robust and exciting event was the first of many planned outreach efforts to help increase diversity in the field of ophthalmology. 



*Swing for the  
Gift of Sight*

Whitemarsh Valley Country Club

For event information, contact Linda Mancini  
at [LMancini@willseye.org](mailto:LMancini@willseye.org) or 215-440-3154.

**SAVE THE DATE**

**SEPTEMBER 12, 2022**