

Eye Level

SPRING/SUMMER 2024

News & Views From Wills Eye Hospital



**THE REMARKABLE CAREER OF
PETER R. LAIBSON, MD**
CORNEA SERVICE DIRECTOR EMERITUS

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CONFERENCE**

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GIFT OF VISION**

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From Our Leaders



JULIA A. HALLER, MD
Ophthalmologist-in-Chief

JOSEPH P. BILSON
Chief Executive Officer

Welcome to the Spring/Summer 2024 issue of *Eye Level*. As we move from one season to the next, we again reflect on the many accomplishments at Wills Eye that further our mission to preserve and restore vision. The Wills Eye family continues to grow with the addition of medical staff who bring extraordinary talent and expertise—expanding our impact locally and around the world.

We are grateful to our patients, donors, and all our supporters who understand the importance of philanthropy to achieve vital goals in healthcare. The generosity and foresight of these individuals empowers Wills Eye to maintain our standard of excellence in care, perpetuate our commitment to education, and introduce groundbreaking discoveries and treatments.

One example of the generosity of donors is an upcoming capital project, which will enable the hospital to renovate the 9th floor Cornea Service. These planned changes will enhance the patient experience with a more functional, streamlined design, including the addition of new exam rooms. It will also improve the teaching environment for residents and fellows and promote research activity.

Speaking of the perpetuation of our mission, this issue's cover story, beginning on page 2, is about the remarkable legacy of Peter R. Laibson, MD. The Cornea Service Director Emeritus joined Wills Eye in 1965 when the subspecialty was in its infancy. With a career spanning more than 50 years, the impact he has had at Wills Eye and around the globe is unparalleled. We applaud the very humble Dr. Laibson for his myriad of achievements, including the transformational advances in patient care and the mentoring of hundreds of fellows and countless residents. And we are incredibly grateful to Dr. Laibson, his wife Ruth, and their family for a gift to establish a Cornea Service Chief Endowed Chair.

On page 1, meet Shruthi Harish, MD, who brings to Wills a unique background in both neurology and ophthalmology. Dr. Harish shares a glimpse of how advances in the field of neuro-ophthalmology are offering hope and improving lives.

Advances were also on display at the 76th Annual Wills Eye Conference this past March, page 8. The event was co-chaired by Sunir J. Garg, MD, FACS, and Zeba A. Syed, MD. Dr. Syed will take the reins next year as the chair—accepting the torch of leadership. Congratulations to the Silver Tray awardee—Allen C. Ho, MD. A well-deserved honor and the highest that the Wills Eye family bestows on one of our own.

And further recognizing the power of philanthropy is the story of Joseph and Barbara Betz, page 8. The couple share Joseph's experience as a patient of Jonathan S. Myers, MD, Chief of the Glaucoma Service, which led to the creation of a fund for ophthalmic education and research as part of their estate plans.

Patient success stories always warm our hearts and are at the core of all we aspire to achieve at Wills Eye. The story of Paul Triolo, MD, page 9, is one example. Dr. Triolo reveals the challenges he encountered when he suddenly lost his binocular vision due to a condition known as intermittent exotropia. Enter Kammi B. Gunton, MD, Chief of Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus Service, who corrected his vision with an outpatient procedure. The results—life altering.

Wills Eye also changes lives through prevention. This past April, we held the third successful Wills Eye on Diabetes Day. Led by Dr. Allen C. Ho, Director of Retina Research and Co-Director of the Retina Service, along with a dedicated team of physicians, medical students, and other volunteers, free diabetic eye screenings were given to community members. The citywide event, which also included screenings at Scheie Eye Institute and Temple Ophthalmology, is part of an all-out effort to eliminate preventable diabetic blindness.

Another important milestone is graduation, coming up on June 28. We look forward to celebrating the achievements of our residents and fellows and wish them success as they begin new chapters in their lives. We know that the training they received at Wills Eye will stay with them as they enter the larger world to make their mark. Yet, as that door closes, we open another. We wish a warm welcome to the next outstanding group of fellows and the Resident Class of 2027.

The future of ophthalmology couldn't be brighter! ■■■

Eye Level

NEWS & VIEWS FROM
WILLS EYE HOSPITAL
SPRING/SUMMER 2024
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On the Cover: Peter R. Laibson, MD

SIT-DOWN WITH SHRUTHI HARISH, MD

Dr. Harish joined the Neuro-Ophthalmology Service in August 2023. She brings a unique set of skills to Wills Eye, with extensive training and expertise in dual subspecialties of neurology and ophthalmology.



Shruthi Harish, MD

Q. You first completed a residency in ophthalmology in India, followed by one in neurology in the United States. How does the study in the two different fields help you as a physician?

A. Ophthalmology was always my calling. I completed an ophthalmology residency and a glaucoma fellowship in India. Family ties brought me to the United States, but I saw it as a chance to further my skills in training for a neuro-ophthalmology career. As a subspecialty, neuro-ophthalmology is an intersection between neurology and ophthalmology and dual training in these specialties provides a significant advantage. The potential impact on patient care is immense. I consider myself fortunate to have embarked on both journeys.

Q. What interested you about neuro-ophthalmology?

A. Since my ophthalmology residency days in India, I enjoyed neuro-ophthalmology more than the other subspecialties due to its profound impact on patient care. What captivates me the most is its ability to keep me grounded in core medicine, emphasizing the importance of treating the patient rather than just the symptoms. Neuro-ophthalmology exemplifies the idea that the eye serves as a window to the brain and the body. The subspecialty extends beyond the eye, playing a crucial role in detecting serious systemic conditions as well as rare diagnoses. Truly humbling is the fact that neuro-ophthalmology boils down to fundamental clinical skills such as comprehensive history taking, medication review, and a meticulous clinical examination—the core features, which embody the essence of being an effective clinician.

Q. What type of patients/medical conditions do you treat?

A. We take care of patients with neurologic or systemic conditions, which involve the eye. These conditions may affect the afferent visual system—which includes the optic nerve and the pathways that travel to the occipital cortex in the brain or the efferent visual pathways, which could impact eye muscle coordination and control. Some examples include optic neuritis, neuromyelitis optica spectrum disorders (NMOSD), MOG (myelin oligodendrocyte glycoprotein) associated disease, thyroid eye disease, myasthenia gravis, and idiopathic intracranial hypertension.

Q. What drew you to Wills Eye Hospital?

A. Working in an academic environment has always been my career aspiration. Wills Eye Hospital, which is renowned globally, was a frequent reference during my ophthalmology residency, so much so that I always envisioned contributing to the prestigious *Wills Eye Manual*! Upon reevaluating my career path in the United States, Wills Eye emerged as the ideal intersection of my academic and clinical passions.

Q. What advances do you foresee/expect in the field of neuro-ophthalmology?

A. Neuro-ophthalmology presents a fascinating yet challenging landscape. Ongoing research delves into advanced diagnostics to detect disorders in their initial stages. There are promising avenues coming up such as gene therapy and novel immunomodulatory treatments for autoimmune neuro-ophthalmological conditions, which offer hope for improved therapeutic outcomes. 🌟

FAST FACTS

Shruthi Harish, MD

Spouse: Anush Kumar Nambi

Children: 11-year-old daughter, Swara Anush

Hobbies: Music connoisseur, reading, travel, travel planning, newbie pickleball enthusiast.

Favorite Ritual: making delicious Indian masala chai.

Favorite Pastime: karaoke singing, lining up the next vacation, spending time with friends and family!

Peter R. Laibson, MD

Cornea Service Director Emeritus

MORE THAN A CAREER:

A Lifelong Calling



▲ Cornea Service members in 1994 (from left): Christopher J. Rapuano, MD, Vera Kowal, MD (fellow), José Alvaro Pereira Gomes, MD (fellow), Reza Dana, MD, MSc, MPH (fellow), Matthew Goren, MD (fellow), Peter R. Laibson, MD, and Elisabeth J. Cohen, MD.



Peter R. Laibson, MD, retired from Wills Eye Hospital in 2012 after 47 years, yet the Cornea Service and its thriving fellowship program, which he developed and nurtured, remains an integral part of his life. As editor-in-chief of Eye Level, I recently had the opportunity to speak with Dr. Laibson and share the story of his pioneering career. –Jan L. Apple

Mentor, revered teacher, internationally renowned ophthalmologist, art collector, family man, and so much more.

The 90-year-young Dr. Laibson has witnessed seismic shifts over the many decades that he has been immersed in his beloved profession. In fact, his influence and mentorship to hundreds of cornea fellows and countless residents created a ripple effect throughout the country and around the globe. Whether through a corneal transplant that restored vision, a medication regimen to treat an infection, or the diagnosis of a rare condition, Dr. Laibson’s impact cannot be understated.



▲ Peter and Ruth Laibson in their Center City Philadelphia home.

One of the unique aspects of the cornea subspecialty, he explained, is that a physician can develop long-term relationships with patients. In some cases, that includes multiple generations in a family as corneal diseases can have a genetic component.

As Director Emeritus of the Cornea Service, Dr. Laibson shared some highlights of a remarkable career that has truly been an impassioned life calling. And through it all, his wife of 60 years, Ruth Laibson, has been by his side—supporting and enhancing his efforts and impact.

The Laibsons have lived in Center City Philadelphia since 2016, but raised their children, David, Rebecca, and Rachel, in Haverford, Pennsylvania. The couple also have three grandchildren.



▲ The Laibson Family in 1976.

Early Years

Dr. Laibson was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. His father was an insurance salesman, his mother, a homemaker. “My mother stayed home to take care of my sister and me. In those days, this was the norm,” he said.

From a young age, Peter Laibson knew he wanted to become a physician. “I had an uncle who was a GP, a family physician,” recalled Dr. Laibson. “I always admired him. I loved kids, so at first, I thought I wanted to become a pediatrician.” Yet, after his uncle took him to visit the family’s pediatrician to discuss the specialty, the physician suggested that ophthalmology had more to offer. “He told me that I would be able to take care of children and adults, diagnose, treat, and perform surgical procedures—and all of this with few night calls,” remembered Dr. Laibson, who was convinced that this would be his path.

Education

In 1955, Peter Laibson obtained a bachelor’s degree from the University of Vermont. In 1959, he graduated from the State University of New York, Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn. “At that time, there was very little training in ophthalmology during medical school,” recalled Dr. Laibson, who then enrolled in Harvard Medical School’s Basic Science course. He completed his ophthalmology residency at Wills Eye Hospital in 1964.

A Twist of Fate

During his residency, then Wills Eye Ophthalmologist-in-Chief Irving Leopold, MD, with whom he was conducting herpes simplex virus research, was unable to attend a conference on the West Coast. “He asked me to go in his place,” said Dr. Laibson. “This was very unusual as I was only a resident.” It was there that he met Claes Dohlman, MD, who took the young physician under his wing and urged him to become a corneal fellow at Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary (MEEI) in Boston after his residency. “This was the first major corneal fellowship in the United States,” said Dr. Laibson.



▲ Peter Laibson, right, at about age 10, with his sister, Audrey.



▲ Juan Arentsen, MD, and Peter R. Laibson, MD, circa 1978.

Career at Wills Eye Hospital

Dr. Laibson joined the Wills Eye medical staff in 1965. He was the first full-time physician at the hospital (then located at 16th and Spring Garden Streets) who was fellowship-trained in cornea. The subspecialty was in its infancy, and the Wills Eye cornea clinic was open just half a day a week. Not only did Dr. Laibson grow the service to become a world-class leader in corneal transplants and in the discovery and treatment of corneal diseases, but in 1967, he created the first corneal fellowship program at Wills Eye.

In the early years of his career, Dr. Laibson was involved in research to treat infections of the cornea due to viruses such as herpes simplex, herpes zoster, and adenovirus. “At the time, there was no treatment for herpes simplex of the cornea,” said Dr. Laibson, who collaborated on a double-blind study that tested the first anti-viral drug to treat herpetic keratitis. The research was funded by the National Eye Institute (NEI) of the National Institute of Health (NIH). The medication became the standard course of treatment for viral eye diseases.



A former location of Wills Eye Hospital at 16th and Spring Garden Streets.

About half of Dr. Laibson’s clinical practice was dedicated to corneal transplants, the other half to infections and diseases of the cornea. Under his leadership, the Cornea Service was responsible for numerous innovations, including the discovery of a bacterial disease resulting from wearing contact lenses overnight and the identification of corneal dystrophies in families.

Corneal Transplants—Then and Now

Over the course of his career, Dr. Laibson performed about 8,000 corneal transplants. “When I first began, corneal transplants took an hour and were inpatient procedures,” he said. “It was at least a year before the patient’s vision improved. There was a long waiting list to get a cornea from Lions Eye Bank of Delaware Valley (now

Continued on page 4

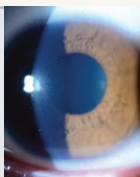


▲ Peter and Ruth Laibson on their wedding day, December 1963.

Meeting His Future Wife Ruth

When Dr. Laibson was enrolled in Harvard’s Basic Science course, a physician-friend urged him to come to New York to meet Naomi Segal, a Julliard-trained concert pianist who performed professionally with her identical twin sister, Ruth. His friend was dating Ruth. Dr. Laibson declined the invitation as he was involved with eye research at MEEI. Two years later, in April 1963, another medical friend was dating Naomi. Dr. Laibson then had the opportunity to meet Ruth—and the rest is history. “Ruth and I were married that December,” said Dr. Laibson.

Cornea: The cornea is the transparent part of the eye that covers the colored iris and the pupil and allows light to enter the inside. The cornea’s main function is to refract or bend light.



► Peter R. Laibson, MD (on right), with former patient Ken Gray.



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AltruVision), and about two-thirds of those transplants were successful. Today, the technology is very different; the procedure takes about 20 minutes and patients usually see well within days. There are new techniques where only a small fraction of the back layer of the cornea is replaced, rather than the full corneal thickness. Almost all of the transplants are outpatient procedures and require few or no sutures.”

Dr. Laibson’s dedication to the corneal subspecialty didn’t stop at Wills Eye. He also served as Medical Director of the Lions Eye Bank for 50 years until his retirement in 2017.

Helping thousands of patients over his career has been rewarding on multiple levels. Some of those success stories remain etched in memory. He shared one from 35 years ago: “The patient was a 25-year-old woman diagnosed with keratoconus. She needed full-thickness corneal transplants on both eyes, but the waiting list was a year long.” The patient’s mother was very ill, he elaborated, and decided that when she passed away, her cornea would be donated to her daughter. Weeks later, she died and Dr. Laibson performed the transplant on the woman’s first eye. About two years later, the patient’s father passed away. He also donated his cornea for his daughter’s other eye. The bittersweet story was so unusual that the news quickly spread around the world. “The patient’s only regret was that she missed

the funerals of both of her parents as she was in the hospital having her corneal transplants,” remembered Dr. Laibson.



◀ Peter R. Laibson, MD, examines the late John Chaney, former Temple University basketball coach, following a cornea transplant in 2004.



▲ From left: Claes Dohlman, MD, Peter R. Laibson, MD, Jay Krachmer, MD, and Christopher J. Rapuano, MD.

Fellows

“One of my major legacies is that I grew the Cornea Service and built the fellowship program,” reflected Dr. Laibson. “Of course, I’m pleased to have been associated with publishing over 365 papers, but the accomplishment that I am most proud of is the mentoring and teaching. It’s really come full circle. I helped to train over 200 fellows and hundreds of residents; many went on to become significant leaders in the field.”

Dr. Laibson has maintained relationships with his former fellows as well as his mentor from MEEI and close friend, Dr. Dohlman, now 101.

In 2012, he and Ruth established an endowed clinical corneal fellowship in their names, now one of three named corneal fellowships at the hospital.

And in 2022, the couple established the Peter R. and Ruth Laibson Endowed Cornea Lectureship, furthering their commitment to corneal education.

International Reach and Renown

Many of Dr. Laibson’s fellows came to Wills Eye from other countries and brought their acquired expertise back to their communities. “My first fellow was from Brazil,” said Dr. Laibson. As a result, other physicians from Brazil and around the world sought his training. In addition, Dr. Laibson presented more than 25 named lectures abroad, including in Brazil, Peru, Venezuela, Columbia, Chile, Argentina, Japan, Hong Kong, India, Europe, Israel, Mexico, Canada, South Korea, and Taiwan.

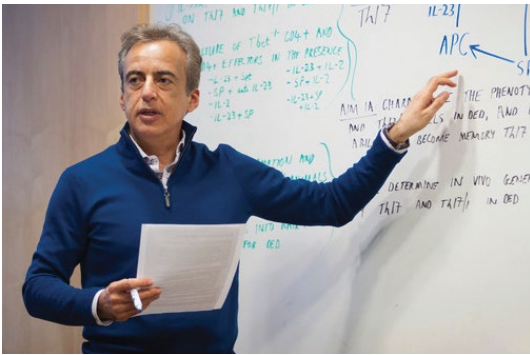
► Peter R. Laibson, MD, and longtime colleague Joseph C. Flanagan, MD.



▲ Peter R. Laibson, MD (center), recipient of the Cornea Society Gold Medal, surrounded by former fellows at a 2010 Cornea Society meeting in Boston.

“The accomplishment that I am most proud of is the mentoring and teaching. It’s really come full circle. I helped to train over 200 fellows and hundreds of residents; many went on to become significant leaders in the field.”

—Peter R. Laibson, MD



Reza Dana, MD, MSc, MPH

Extended Family

“The fellows became part of our family,” stated Ruth. “Their experiences here were rather unique.” Not only did the fellowship strengthen the physicians’ understanding of cornea, the Laibsons immersed them in Philadelphia culture: trips to the Barnes Foundation, The Philadelphia Orchestra, and the Arden Theatre, to name a few. “We invited them to our home for luncheons and dinners,” said Ruth. “It was a way of life.”

Reza Dana, MD, MSc, MPH, was a corneal fellow 30 years ago, but the experience remains indelible. “I love Peter and Ruth. They are really a duo,” stated Dr. Dana, Chief of the Cornea Service at Massachusetts Eye and Ear, Senior Scientist, and Claes H. Dohlman Chair in Ophthalmology at Harvard Medical School.

“Peter teaches with his heart and mind. It’s a quality that many of us who have trained with him have tried to emulate. He is the quintessential teacher; as an administrator, leader, or physician, he always taught by example. He is a totally genuine, really warm, engaging person. He listens and supports his students in their endeavors. Those qualities have come across to his fellows and we have all benefitted.”

Dr. Dana, who holds 38 patents, has trained hundreds of fellows and research post-doctoral students, many of whom have become department heads.

Terry Kim, MD, Professor of Ophthalmology at Duke Eye Center and Chief Medical Officer & VP Global Medical Safety at Alcon Vision, LLC, was a fellow from 1996 to 1997. Dr. Kim described his mentor as a kind, humble man, and a world-class surgeon, physician, and educator. “Peter is truly a family man, in both his personal and professional circles,” said Dr. Kim, who was welcomed with open arms by the Laibsons.

“I feel like part of a family,” he continued. “I am so honored to be included among some of the giants in the field that Peter has trained, such as George Waring III, MD, Jay Krachmer, MD, and Eric Donnenfeld, MD.”

Dr. Kim shared that his mentor has always been there as a source of support and encouragement: “Whenever I accomplished something—whether I received an award or when I was named Cornea Chief at Duke—I would always get a phone call from Peter.”



Eric Donnenfeld, MD, Peter R. Laibson, MD, Terry Kim, MD.

“Peter teaches with his heart and mind. It’s a quality that many of us who have trained with him have tried to emulate.”

—Reza Dana, MD, MSc, MPH

In May 2020, Dr. Kim was named President of the American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgeons (ASCRS). The prior month, he lost his father to COVID. “Peter was there to support me and I can’t tell you how much that meant to me,” said Dr. Kim.

“Peter is truly a Renaissance man who is young at heart, filled with energy and enthusiasm. And he inspires me to do the same. He has taught me to pay it forward, and that’s what I’m trying to do with my residents and fellows.”

Irv Raber, MD, who officially retired in December, attributes his entire career trajectory to Dr. Laibson.



From left: Christopher J. Rapuano, MD, Beeran Meghpara, MD, Peter R. Laibson, MD, and Irv Raber, MD, at a recent Wills Eye Annual Conference.

“Peter taught me all there is to know about cornea,” said Dr. Raber (fellow 1978/1979). Originally from Canada, Dr. Raber had planned to return there after completing his one-year fellowship. Instead, Dr. Laibson stepped in. “There were two academic corneal jobs at the time,” remembered Dr. Raber. “One was at Penn, the other at the University of Florida. I was offered both positions simply on Peter’s recommendation.” Dr. Raber became Chief of the Cornea Service at Penn’s Scheie Eye Institute. He later transitioned to private practice with Ophthalmic Partners and was a longtime member of the Wills Eye Cornea Service.

“Peter taught me all there is to know about cornea.”

—Irv Raber, MD

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“Whenever I accomplished something—whether I received an award or when I was named Cornea Chief at Duke—I would always get a phone call from Peter.”

—Terry Kim, MD

LIFE-CHANGING
EYE CARE



Eleanor Flanigan, EdD, and daughter, Rebecca J. Elias.

It has been more than four decades since Eleanor Flanigan, EdD, met Dr. Peter Laibson, but to this day, she calls him her hero.

The Madison, New Jersey resident shared her harrowing experience that led her to

Wills Eye Hospital all those years ago.

In 1979, the now Professor Emerita of Information Technology from Montclair State University was teaching a class at a local college. “I was suddenly struck by an excruciating pain in one eye,” recalled Eleanor. “It then proceeded to both eyes.” She visited an ophthalmologist who instructed her to wear a patch. However, he provided no diagnosis. Eleanor heeded the physician’s advice, patching both eyes. But doing so was an insurmountable challenge. The patch pressed her eyelids down and prevented her from teaching and performing daily activities with her two young daughters. “The pain was unbearable. I couldn’t see and couldn’t do anything,” said Eleanor, who decided to visit a specialist at Wills Eye Hospital. “I grew up in Philadelphia and knew of Wills’ reputation.”

At her first appointment with Dr. Laibson, she received a diagnosis—recurrent corneal erosion. “With no warning, the cornea suddenly splits,” explained Eleanor. “Dr. Laibson was very careful, knowledgeable, and compassionate.” He prescribed eye drops to treat the condition and to prevent her eyes from developing any type of bacterial infection.

“The medication kept the condition under control and after about four months, it was improved. I was filled with gratitude,” said Eleanor. Dr. Laibson referred her for follow-up care to one of his former fellows, the late Walter Mazzanti, MD, as his office was closer in proximity to Madison.

“In our family, we refer to Dr. Laibson as Saint Peter Laibson,” said Eleanor. “It was his care that healed the debilitating pain and saved my sight.” ■■

Note: Eleanor’s daughter, Rebecca J. Elias, has been affiliated with Wills Eye for over 25 years, and serves as Executive Assistant to Ophthalmologist-in-Chief Julia A. Haller, MD.

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“Peter loved teaching fellows,” said Dr. Raber, adding that Ruth is a driving force behind him. “I attended many dinners at their house over the years. I feel so lucky to have been taught by Peter, to have him as my mentor and dear friend.”

Dr. Raber underscored his mentor’s passion and commitment to the next generation: “He would always say he was the grandfather to my fellows.”

Retirement

More than a decade since Dr. Laibson’s retirement, Wills Eye remains top of mind. He virtually attends Friday morning Chiefs Rounds and speaks at conferences, such as the 76th Annual Wills Eye Conference this past March. And once a year, he lectures to fellows about the history of corneal transplants. Yet, he also finds time for other pursuits.

The Laibsons’ home reflects their eclectic interests. The walls are lined with paintings and photographs, and there are sculptures displayed throughout their apartment. They both participate in book clubs and yoga classes. Dr. Laibson likens his admiration for artistic creations to that of his passion and skill for working with his hands as a surgeon.



◀ Peter and Ruth Laibson view their collection of photographs.

▼ The Laibson Family (clockwise from bottom left): Max Laibson, David Laibson, Peter R. Laibson, MD, Nina Zipser, Ruth Laibson, Maritza Gerena, Rachel Laibson, Rebecca Popell.



At the May 2024 Peter R. and Ruth Laibson Endowed Cornea Lecture (from left): Matthew Santos, MD, Peter R. Laibson, MD, Laibson lecturer Fasika A. Woreta, MD, MPH, Zeba A. Syed, MD, and Christopher J. Rapuano, MD.

Eye Ball Honorees

Dr. Laibson is incredibly proud of his successors: Elisabeth J. Cohen, MD, former Cornea Service Director, and currently Professor of Ophthalmology and Vice Chair for Academic Affairs at NYU Grossman School of Medicine, and Christopher J. Rapuano, MD, Director. He noted that both were Wills Eye residents. “Elisabeth was only the second or third woman in the residency program,” said Dr. Laibson, who encouraged her to train with his mentor, Dr. Dohlman. And Dr. Rapuano had a fellowship at the University of Iowa under the leadership of Dr. Laibson’s former fellow, Jay Krachmer, MD.

All three leaders were honored at the 2023 Wills Eye Ball. At the event, the Laibsons announced a family gift to fund the Peter and Ruth Laibson Cornea Service Chief Endowed Chair. Dr. Rapuano was named inaugural chairholder and was officially installed in May 2024.

The age-old Jewish adage—*l’dor v’dor* (from generation to generation) is a value that Peter and Ruth Laibson hold dear and a concept that drives them. “Education is critical in helping the hospital maintain its leadership around the country and the world,” said the Laibsons. “Creating the endowed chair will enable corneal education to continue for future generations.”



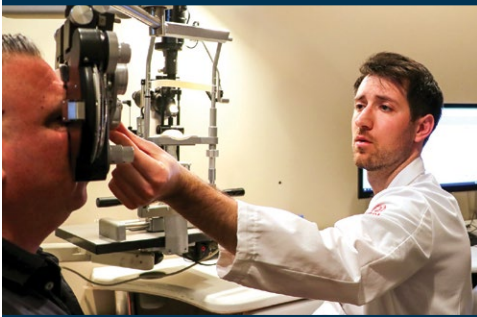
▲ At the 2023 Wills Eye Ball (from left): Julia A. Haller, MD, Peter R. Laibson, MD, Christopher J. Rapuano, MD, Elisabeth J. Cohen, MD, and Joseph P. Bilson.



◀ In May 2024, Christopher J. Rapuano, MD (right), was installed as the inaugural recipient of the Peter and Ruth Laibson Cornea Service Chief Endowed Chair. With him, bestowing the honor, are Peter R. Laibson, MD, and Ruth Laibson.

Dr. Laibson’s contribution to ophthalmology—the true embodiment of a legacy.

In the News



Wills Eye Hospital Introduces Light Adjustable Lens Technology

For patients undergoing cataract surgery, this revolutionary technology will allow physicians to make post-surgical adjustments to prescriptions, limit side effects, and maximize impact on vision improvement. This option takes the most successful surgery in medicine from good to great. willseye.org/light-adjustable-lens

◀ Nick Hadjokas, MD, examines a patient during a post-operative visit.

Six Wills Eye Physicians Named to The Ophthalmologist’s 2024 Power List Recognized for Excellence and Impact

- | | |
|---|--|
| Brandon D. Ayres, MD
Co-Director
Cornea Fellowship Program | Christopher J. Rapuano, MD
Chief, Cornea Service |
| Julia A. Haller, MD
Ophthalmologist-in-Chief | Carl D. Regillo, MD, FACS, FASRS
Chief, Retina Service |
| Allen C. Ho, MD
Director, Retina Research
Co-Director, Retina Service | Joel S. Schuman, MD, FACS
Vice Chair for Research Innovation
Co-Director, Glaucoma Service |

Hall of Famers

In August 2023, *The Ophthalmologist* named Carol L. Shields, MD, Chief, Ocular Oncology Service, and George L. Spaeth, MD, Director Emeritus, Glaucoma Service, to its Hall of Fame. This honor recognizes ophthalmologists and scientists whose impact on the field will last beyond their lifetimes.

Congratulations to Wills Eye alumnus Reginald Sanders, MD, FASRS, for being named President of the American Society of Retina Specialists (ASRS). Dr. Sanders, affiliated with the Retina Group of Washington and PRISM Vision, is the first African American and first PRISM-affiliated physician to serve as President of the ASRS.

Wills Eye on Diabetes Day 2024



Allen C. Ho, MD (second from left), led a team of volunteers (some pictured here) on April 20 to provide free diabetic eye screenings to community members. Multiple people were diagnosed with diabetic retinopathy and other conditions. They were then referred for follow-up care.

76TH ANNUAL WILLS EYE CONFERENCE

Colleagues from across the country gathered at the Philadelphia Marriott Old City from March 7 through 9 for the 76th Annual Wills Eye Conference. The event, co-chaired by Sunir J. Garg, MD, FACS, and Zeba A. Syed, MD, included five named lectures and a free paper session. The conference also featured a new Research Symposium and an Innovation Panel.

Named lecturers included Wills Eye alumni J. William Harbour, MD, Rod Foroozan, MD, and Richard S. Davidson, MD. Rounding out the presentations were Joan W. Miller, MD, and Janey L. Wiggs, MD, both of Massachusetts Eye and Ear.

More than 200 people attended the Wills Eye Alumni Dinner Dance at the Ritz-Carlton Philadelphia. ■■■

► **Wesam Shalaby, MD (Glaucoma Fellow),** recipient of the **P. Robb McDonald Award** for best scientific paper by a fellow and **Sunidhi Ramesh, MD, Class of 2026,** recipient of the **James S. Shipman Award** for best scientific presentation by a resident.



▲ The Silver Tray Award was presented to longtime Wills Eye faculty member **Allen C. Ho, MD** (third from right). With him (from left): **Zeba A. Syed, MD, Christopher J. Rapuano, MD, Sunir J. Garg, MD, FACS, Carl D. Regillo, MD, FACS, and Julia A. Haller, MD.**



▲ From left: **Ralph C. Eagle Jr., MD, Carol L. Shields, MD, Zeba A. Syed, MD, J. William Harbour, MD, Sunir J. Garg, MD, FACS, and Julia A. Haller, MD.**

DONOR SPOTLIGHT GIVING BACK THROUGH ESTATE PLANNING

Over a decade ago, Joseph and Barbara Betz visited Wills Eye for the first time. A friend recommended they seek care at the hospital after Joe received an alarmingly high pressure reading and a diagnosis of glaucoma during an eye exam in Boston.

Soon after, the Betzes, both retired banking executives and enthusiastic nature photographers, met with Jonathan Myers, MD, now Chief of the Glaucoma Service. Following a thorough exam, Dr. Myers performed a trabeculectomy in each of Joe’s eyes. The procedure involves cutting a tiny flap into the white of the eye to drain fluid and reduce pressure, which can save a patient’s vision.

Since the procedure, Joe’s eye pressure has remained normal, and the couple have been enjoying their retirement in Willow Street, Pennsylvania, where their appreciation for nature, travel, and the outdoors are top priorities—and for which good eyesight is essential.

Generous donors in support of the hospital and other causes, Joe and Barbara have expressed their gratitude through ongoing philanthropy. “Barbara and I have been fortunate to have had successful careers,” said Joe. “We feel

that it’s important for us to pay back for the greater good.” They have also included Wills Eye in their estate plans, establishing the **Joseph C. and Barbara J. Betz Fund for Ophthalmic Education and Research**. The fund supports training for fellows, ongoing education, and research, particularly in ocular diseases and disorders related to the optic nerve and macula.

“We’ve been so impressed with the doctors at Wills,” said Joe. “They come from around the world, and what they learn here they take back into the world. Training is an expensive proposition, and if we can help a bit with our support, we are very happy, proud, and humbled to do so.”

Barbara agreed: “These physicians are so knowledgeable, so impressive, and so dedicated. Supporting them and their futures gives us a wonderful feeling.” ■■■

Wills Eye is grateful to the Betz Family for supporting the hospital’s mission for future generations.



Joseph and Barbara Betz

PAUL TRIOLO, MD GRATEFUL TO REGAIN BINOCULAR VISION

From the time Paul Triolo, MD, was a little boy, he had what he calls a lazy eye. “When I would get tired, my right eye would become fatigued and drift outward,” he recalled. “By the time I woke up, my eyes were back to normal.” In early adulthood, the condition was diagnosed as intermittent exotropia, a form of strabismus or eye misalignment. But it never interfered with his daily life. Yet, as a child, he often wondered why he couldn’t hit a baseball.

“Intermittent exotropia typically presents in early childhood with one eye drifting outward, or squinting one eye in sunlight,” explained Kammi B. Gunton, MD, Chief of the Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus Service. “When the deviation is well controlled, it may only be seen when a child is daydreaming or very tired. However, there is a six percent decompensation rate per year, which can result in double vision with poor control. It is important to know that regardless of one’s age, it is not too late to get help with this condition.”



Paul Triolo, MD

he explained. “I couldn’t use my eyes together anymore. I lost my depth perception, critical to my job.” This sudden loss destroyed his ability to practice aesthetics. Not only was the situation frightening, it was impacting all aspects of his life, including his balance and ability to drive.

“Surgery was the last thing that I wanted, but it was a necessary risk,” said Dr. Triolo. “Even though I’m a physician, I am a therapeutic nihilist. I believe in first trying the natural way without aggressive treatments.”

The physician proceeded to do his research. As a graduate of Jefferson Medical College of Thomas Jefferson University, he knew of Wills Eye’s stature. He had even completed a medical rotation at the hospital. “It’s the oldest and best eye institute in the country and the world,” he said. “I wanted to be in the best hands.”

“When I saw Dr. Gunton’s credentials, I was impressed,” recalled Dr. Triolo. Following an initial consult, this past November Dr. Triolo underwent an outpatient procedure to correct the deviation.

“Right after the surgery, my alignment was perfect,” he said. “I regained my binocular vision.” His eye was red and irritated for a few days, but he recovered quickly. “I am seeing as well as when I was a child,” beamed Dr. Triolo, who is slowly returning to his facial aesthetics practice. Amazingly, he can now hit a baseball, but prefers exercising at the gym. His balance has also improved dramatically. “Before the surgery, I used to fall more,” said Dr. Triolo. “You use your vision and inner ear to determine where you are in space.”

He credits Dr. Gunton with turning his life around: “She is outstanding, compassionate, and has incredible skills. She is the physician that every physician should want to be.”

Yet, what struck Dr. Triolo the most and what he finds astounding, is that she helps so many children. “Dr. Gunton fixed my vision, which is a miracle and a gift,” he reflected. “But when I sat in her waiting room and saw all these young children, I was practically in tears. She is giving vision to children, which is such a gift to society.” ■■■

“Surgery was the last thing that I wanted, but it was a necessary risk...Dr. Gunton fixed my vision, which is a miracle and a gift.”

—Paul Triolo, MD

The 62-year-old Monmouth County, New Jersey resident was a longtime family practice physician. About 22 years ago, Dr. Triolo developed multiple sclerosis. Fortunately, it hasn’t progressed. After the diagnosis, the physician cut back significantly on his medical practice and transitioned to a facial aesthetics business. He performed an array of procedures for clients, including Botox®, Juvéderm®, injectables, and various fillers. “It’s very important for me to have perfect vision for the facial aesthetics,” he said.



Kammi B. Gunton, MD

“You’re dealing with millimeters, which is why you need fine hand-eye coordination.”

Several years ago, his vision changed—his right eye drifted outward and stayed that way. He could no longer control it. “I had double vision and used my left eye exclusively to see,”

Intermittent exotropia: an eye condition that affects binocular vision and causes episodic outward drift of the eye. It may present in childhood or decompensate during adulthood. Depending on the cause, restoration of binocularity is possible for children as well as adults.

Strabismus: any misalignment of the eyes, causing one eye to deviate inward (esotropia) or outward (exotropia), while the other eye remains focused.



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Eyes on Humanity Fund



▲ From left: Samira Mazloom, Alireza Hamidian Jahromi, MD, Dalena Nguyen, Julia A. Haller, MD, Joseph P. Bilson, Beeran Meghpara, MD, Raheleh Amiri, Meera Sivalingam, MD, and Golkoo Hosseini, MD.

During a special celebration in Philadelphia on April 30, hosted by Leo Holt and MeLinda DeNofa, Wills Eye Hospital announced the launch of the Eyes on Humanity Fund. The fund was inspired by Raheleh Amiri who shared her heartbreaking yet courageous story of being shot in the eye at close range during a Woman, Life, Freedom demonstration in Iran.

Following a year-long international search for care, Wills Eye physicians performed a complex cornea and retina surgery to restore Raheleh's vision.

Through the efforts of Dr. Alireza Hamidian Jahromi, patient advocates, and Wills Eye Hospital, the fund will provide ophthalmologic care to victims of violence throughout the world. ■■



▲ Leo Holt

To contribute to the fund: willseye.org/eyes-on-humanity/



The 1832 Society recognizes donors who have made an annual leadership gift of \$1,832.

These benefactors provide vital financial resources for Wills Eye to address its highest priority needs in research, medical education, and patient care.

Visit www.willseye.org/giving to make your gift today!