

# Eye Level

FALL 2024

News & Views From Wills Eye Hospital



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# From Our Leaders



**JULIA A. HALLER, MD**

*Ophthalmologist-in-Chief*

**JOSEPH P. BILSON**

*Chief Executive Officer*

Welcome to the Fall 2024 issue of *Eye Level*. The theme for this newsletter is Education, a topic that we at Wills Eye are passionate about.

With the academic year in full swing, this is an opportune time to shine a light on the Wills Eye Residency Program at Jefferson—ranked among the very best in the nation and the world. It’s a program of which we are incredibly proud and the one which has trained the most ophthalmologists in the United States and around the globe.

Every day, Wills Eye physicians give hope to patients facing an array of eye conditions—some more complex and challenging than others. Through our three pillars: education, research, and clinical care, we bring innovation to the forefront, offer breakthrough treatments, and save sight. None of this would be possible without the dedication of our physicians or the generosity of donors that fund programs, lectureships, renovations, and training facilities, such as the William Maul Measey Ophthalmic Surgical Training (MOST) Lab. This state-of-the-art lab, which enables physicians to simulate surgeries, was made possible through a \$1 million leadership grant from the Benjamin and Mary Siddons Measey Foundation, the Wills Eye Alumni Society, and private gifts. We are beyond grateful!

Each year, our residency program welcomes eight physicians—the best and the brightest. But we seek more than strong academic grades. Our Resident Selection Committee, comprised of dedicated ophthalmologists, also places high priority on choosing individuals who model teamwork and possess character, warmth, and compassion. Our residents are not only the brightest, they are genuine and empathetic. This makes a world of difference to patients.

Our cover story, pages 2 through 7, takes you behind the scenes with first-hand accounts of the mentor/mentee structure of the residency. Collin Richards, MD, Co-Chief Resident, shares insight on why he wanted to be part of the Wills Eye Residency program and how the nonpareil training is preparing him for the next chapter of his career.

We are also inspired by resident Kaitlyn “Katie” Brettin, MD, who balances an intensive training schedule with raising two young children. Dr. Brettin is not alone. Ophthalmology has increasingly become an attractive field

for women, reflected in the makeup of our residency classes over the last several years.

Passing the torch of knowledge from one generation to the next is the cornerstone of our residency, an aspect that truly distinguishes Wills from many other programs.

Wills Eye also has an incredibly strong alumni network. Our alumni are outstanding leaders in the field of ophthalmology worldwide, yet remain committed to the place that made it possible.

On page 7, Sanford Ullman, MD, Class of 1975, shares why he gives back through the hospital’s Resident Fund. And on page 9, read about alumni-funded lectureships that will live on in perpetuity.

Patrick Flaharty, MD, led a fundraising effort among fellow alumni to endow a visiting professor lectureship to honor mentor and longtime oculoplastic surgeon Joseph Flanagan, MD. The inaugural lecture took place this past May.

Joel Porter, MD, Class of 1970, and his wife, Roberta Porter, were also inspired to enhance education at Wills. The inaugural Joel and Roberta Porter Visiting Professor Lecture in Cataract and Primary Eye Care will take place in March 2025.

As this issue goes to print, the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) is gearing up for its annual meeting October 18 through 21 in Chicago. The largest gathering of ophthalmologists in the nation, Wills Eye faculty and alumni play a key role in presentations and leadership.

The 2024 AAO president, Jane C. Edmond, MD, is a Wills Eye alumna. She will pass the leadership reins in 2025 to fellow alumnus Michael Repka, MD.

And we are beaming with pride that Wills Eye fellow Michael D. Yu, MD, will be the recipient of the Ronald G. Michels Fellowship Foundation Award.

As our faculty and alumni attest, being part of the Wills Eye family lasts a lifetime.

As leaders of this amazing institution, we are committed to that legacy and providing excellence in care for every patient that walks through our doors.

All the best of health! 🍷

## Eye Level

NEWS & VIEWS FROM  
WILLS EYE HOSPITAL  
FALL 2024  
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# SIT-DOWN WITH WILLIAM E. BENSON, MD

*Dr. Benson has been affiliated with Wills Eye Hospital for over four decades and was Chief of the Retina Service from 1992 to 2000. Professor in the Department of Ophthalmology at Sidney Kimmel Medical College at Thomas Jefferson University, he co-teaches a weekly course to residents on retinal diagnosis with former Wills Eye faculty member Tamara Vrabec, MD, of Geisinger Medical Center.*



From left: former Retina Research fellow Hana Mansour, MD, William E. Benson, MD, and residents Mara Penne, MD, and Hannah Garrigan, MD.

**Q. When did you first become affiliated with Wills Eye Hospital?**

**A.** My first ophthalmology job was in 1975 at Penn’s Scheie Eye Institute. Two years later, in 1977, Dr. William Tasman, who later became Ophthalmologist-in-Chief at Wills Eye (from 1985 until 2007) invited me to join him in private practice. Bill was an internationally renowned retinal specialist, a giant in the field of ophthalmology. He was president or chairman of just about every major ophthalmology organization. Interestingly, our very own Dr. Julia Haller, Wills Ophthalmologist-in-Chief, holds the distinguished William Tasman, MD Endowed Chair.

When I initially joined Bill Tasman, there were several independent retinal practices in the region. Much later, under the leadership of Drs. Jim Vander, Arunan Sivalingam, and the late Joe Maguire, those practices merged into what is now Mid Atlantic Retina.

Coming to Wills Eye was one of the best things that ever happened to me. The best was meeting my wife, Linda, who I married in 1966.

**Q. What is rewarding about teaching residents and fellows?**

**A.** Our residents and fellows are all very smart and enjoy learning. We encourage them to ask questions and, if they disagree with something, to speak up. This keeps us all on our toes. The education truly goes both ways. A day doesn’t go by without learning something from our residents and fellows. It’s also very rewarding to see those that I’ve helped train go on to become great doctors and leaders in the field.

**Q. What is unique about education at Wills Eye?**

**A.** Aside from the residents and fellows, it’s the world-class staff! One learns rather quickly that there is no one way to treat patients or to perform a surgery. A fellow or resident will relate what they saw another attending do and pass it on, so we all keep learning. It’s really remarkable.

**Q. Why do you think the Wills Eye residency program is rated among the best in the country?**

**A.** The huge volume of patients with complicated conditions provides an abundance of material for teaching. Residents and fellows are treated with respect and are given responsibility for patient care. The large staff provides immediate back-up for something a resident has not previously seen or doesn’t know how to treat.

**Q. You are a member of the Resident Selection Committee. What are the qualities that you look for when selecting a resident?**

**A.** I look for smarts and curiosity. People who are interested in knowing the capital of Laos are also interested in knowing all the intricacies of ophthalmology.

**Q. Why have you stayed with Wills Eye for all these years?**

**A.** I have loved Wills from Day One. Wills has given me much and has truly made my career. I will always be a Wills Eye patriot and will pay it back as long as I can be of service. Also, teaching our bright residents and fellows keeps brain rot at bay.

**Q. Why would a potential resident choose Wills Eye?**

**A.** If there is a better place to learn ophthalmology, I don’t know of it. ■■■

## FAST FACTS

### WILLIAM E. BENSON, MD

**Favorite Hobbies:** Tennis, biking, pumping iron, reading.

**Favorite Ritual:** Making my decaf coffee in the morning.

**Career Highlight:** Becoming Chairman of the American Board of Ophthalmology. From my residency days, my main career goal was to walk into an ophthalmology meeting and have people know who I was.

**Something someone may be surprised to find out about you:** I was a French major in college and am currently working to regain my lost fluency.



# Wills Eye

## RESIDENCY PROGRAM

### at Jefferson

Unparalleled Training, World-Class Care

**When you are a patient at Wills Eye, you not only benefit from the physician who is treating you, but from the generations that came before, many of whom are leaders in ophthalmology throughout the world.**

The mission of the Wills Eye Residency Program at Jefferson is to train future leaders in ophthalmology and foster excellence in clinical care, research, and education.

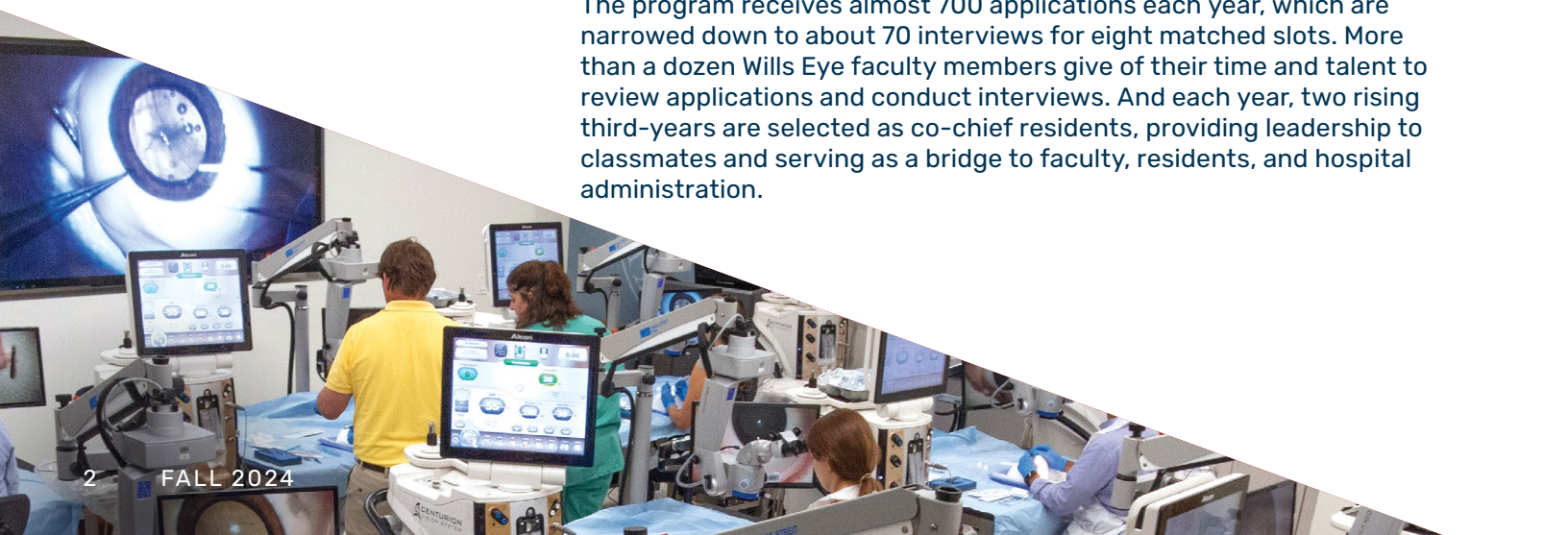
After medical school graduation, the highly coveted program begins with a one-year internal medicine internship at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital, followed by three years of intensive training at Wills Eye Hospital including rotations in the Emergency Department and In-Patient Consult Service, Ocular Pathology, Neuro-Ophthalmology, Oculoplastic & Orbital Surgery, Retina, Cornea, Glaucoma, Ocular Oncology, and Pediatric Services.

Patient clinics are resident-run with attending physician oversight. Due to our long history, top-ranked care, and reputation, clinics are high-volume and patients seek care for a wide variety of ophthalmic conditions, leading to a comprehensive learning experience.

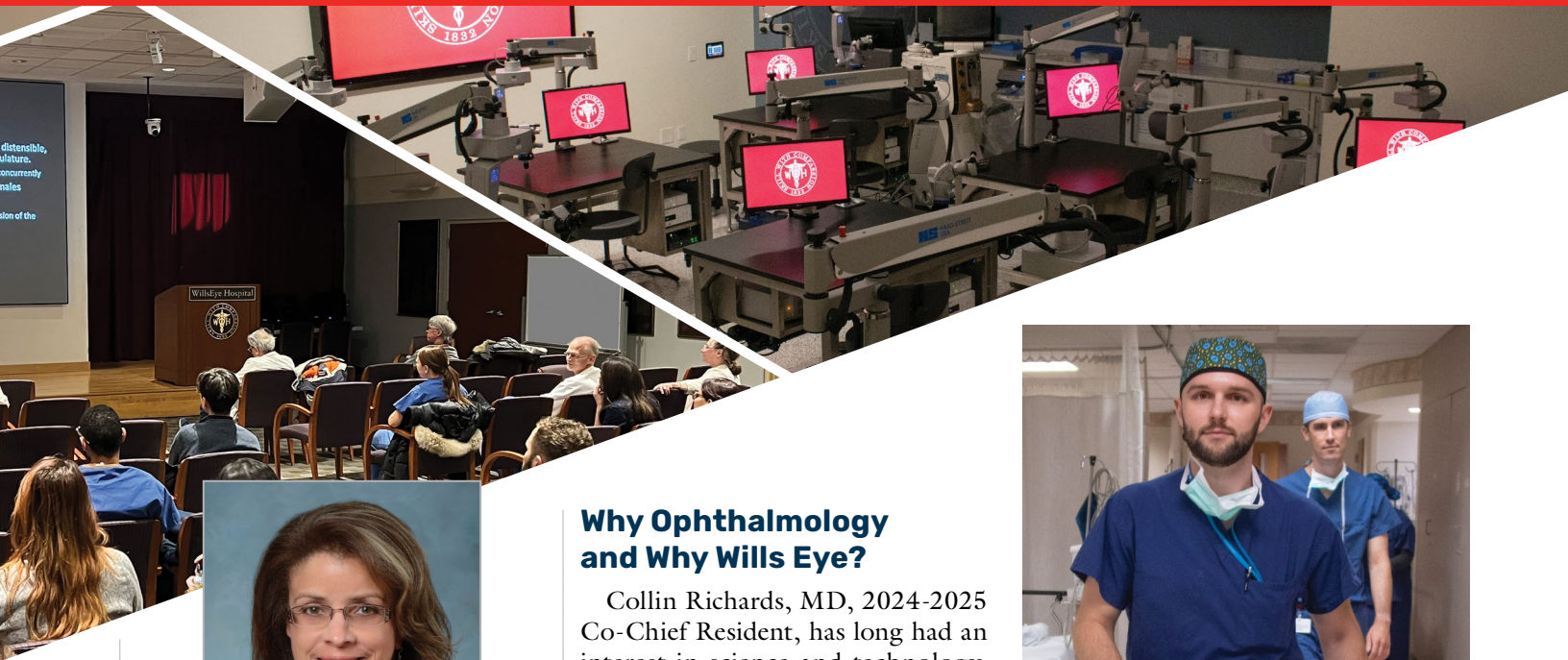
During their third year, residents advance to intensive training in the operating room. They operate alongside comprehensive and subspecialty attendings on a variety of surgical cases.

A critical component of the residency is the mentoring that takes place and the lasting bonds that develop. Not only do attending physicians serve as mentors to residents, but seniors become mentors to junior residents.

The program receives almost 700 applications each year, which are narrowed down to about 70 interviews for eight matched slots. More than a dozen Wills Eye faculty members give of their time and talent to review applications and conduct interviews. And each year, two rising third-years are selected as co-chief residents, providing leadership to classmates and serving as a bridge to faculty, residents, and hospital administration.







Leslie Brown, MD

### Far-Reaching Impact

Leslie Brown, MD, a comprehensive ophthalmologist, completed her Wills Eye residency in 1991, but its impact has stayed with her for more than 30 years. “The training was amazing and there’s nothing quite like being part of the Wills Eye family,” said Dr. Brown who chooses to give back by serving on the Resident Selection Committee and being a surgical and clinical mentor to residents. “I love the teaching and mentoring,” she said.

Naturally, the selection committee seeks academically strong candidates with good medical school grades, explained Dr. Brown, but it’s about much more. “We look for docs that are compassionate, caring, empathetic, humble, concerned, down-to-earth, community-minded,” she said. “We think about whether this person will fit with the Wills family and work well with others. It truly makes a difference when it comes to patient care.”

Diversity is another key component. “It’s not just diversity from a racial standpoint, but cultural, economic, gender identity, rural versus urban,” she said. “When you have a diverse group of residents who get along well, it’s really a win-win.”

The Wills Eye track record speaks for itself. Patients, from near and far, travel to the premier specialty hospital to seek care.

“Our residents are trained by world-renowned physicians, the best and the brightest, who are also genuinely caring individuals,” said Dr. Brown.

### Why Ophthalmology and Why Wills Eye?

Collin Richards, MD, 2024-2025 Co-Chief Resident, has long had an interest in science and technology. Raised in Traverse City, Michigan, he majored in chemical engineering at Michigan State University and decided to pursue medicine because he wanted to do something surgical that would have a direct impact on people’s lives. In medical school at Wayne State University in Detroit, Dr. Richards was drawn to ophthalmology. “You get to do pretty cool things in microsurgery and there’s a deep connection between technology and innovation,” said Dr. Richards. “You can develop long-term relationships with patients and outcomes are often very good. People really care about their eyesight.”

When it came time to apply for residencies, Wills Eye stood out. “The program has a really good reputation for training surgeons and a strong clinical focus,” he said. “There’s a high volume of patients but also a strong tie to clinical research. Wills Eye is on the cutting edge of innovation because of their relationship with industry and you get to see how people operate in the real world, in private practice settings.”

The residency has been all he expected and more. His days are busy with about 60 percent of his time with surgeries and 40 percent seeing patients in clinic. Many mornings begin with educational lectures at 6:45 a.m. or Chiefs Rounds on Fridays at 7 a.m. — a unique program where the tables are turned and residents present mystery medical cases to attending physicians. The interactive sessions are livestreamed around the globe.

Dr. Richards routinely performs cataract procedures. A surgical attending is always close by, integral to the mentor/mentee program structure. Resident training, he explained, encompasses rotating through every subspecialty, so we become well versed in all aspects of ophthalmology.



▲ Collin Richards, MD, Co-Chief Resident and Michael Abendroth, MD, attending physician.

▼ Collin Richards, MD, and Michael Abendroth, MD, perform a cataract surgery.



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## “The quality of surgical training at Wills is truly unparalleled; it’s top-tier.”

—Collin Richards, MD, Co-Chief Resident

“In our first two years, we do mostly pediatric procedures, such as correcting strabismus or misaligned eyes, and oculoplastics procedures,” said Dr. Richards. “In our third year, surgeries run the gamut. In addition to cataract procedures, we will do glaucoma surgeries, such as tube shunts, full and lamellar corneal transplants, secondary intraocular lenses, and many others.”

“The quality of surgical training at Wills is truly unparalleled; it’s top-tier. We operate and work closely with many attendings, so we are involved with complex, difficult cases.”

And although cataract surgery is a routine procedure, Dr. Richards said there are a myriad of ways a physician can achieve the same result. “Learning how to do a procedure from 10 to 15 attendings, you will learn at least that many ways to do the surgery,” he said. “It’s all about expanding your surgical tool kit. By working with multiple teachers, you will find the most efficient, safest way that works for you.”

One such teacher is Bruce Markovitz, MD, Director of Undergraduate Medical Education at Sidney Kimmel Medical College at Thomas Jefferson University, who introduces second-year residents to cataract surgery and works closely with third-years as their caseload increases. Dr. Markovitz has been a surgical mentor for two decades, a role he finds extremely rewarding. He supervises about 300 cataract surgeries every year.

Dr. Markovitz is a fantastic surgical mentor for all of us,” said Dr. Richards. “The Wills residents are extraordinary, the cream of the crop,” said Dr. Markovitz. “They are so talented, bright, and easy to train. They are genuinely nice people and great to work with.”

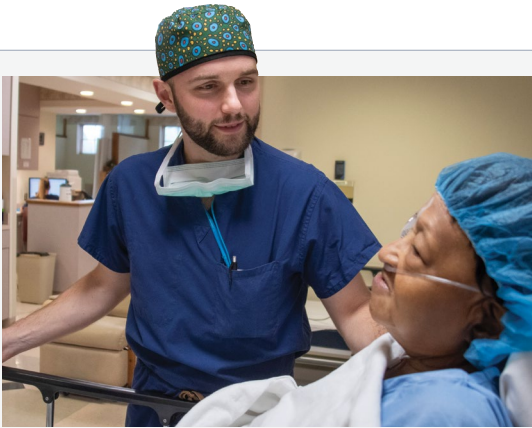
Dr. Markovitz underscored that it can be challenging as residents learn to grasp all the surgical steps. “But when I see that light bulb go on, I know that the resident gets it.”



▲ Left: Bruce Markovitz, MD. Right: In the operating room with former resident Cathy Zhang, MD.

## “Wills residents are extraordinary, the cream of the crop. They are so talented, bright, and easy to train. They are genuinely nice people and great to work with.”

—Bruce Markovitz, MD



▲ Collin Richards, MD, speaks with patient Pearl Brisco after her cataract surgery.

### Smarts and Bedside Manner A Winning Combination

About three years ago, Pearl Brisco noticed that her vision seemed cloudy, not as clear as it once had been. “It was still not so clear after I had new glasses,” recalled the 77-year-old Philadelphia resident. “My eyes were often dry, itchy, and irritated.”



▲ Pearl Brisco

Pearl would use warm compresses to alleviate the discomfort. Yet the symptoms persisted. Her optometrist told her that she needed cataract surgery. But Pearl was fearful of the unknown.

Pearl works part-time at a Philadelphia senior citizens center where she serves coffee, tea, and refreshments to area residents. The issue with her eyes was starting to impact her routine.

“A couple of the ladies at the center had cataract surgery,” said Pearl. One of the women had her procedure at the Wills Eye Surgical Center in South Philadelphia and raved about the outcome. This gave Pearl the courage to make an appointment.

Dr. Richards examined Pearl at her initial appointment in August 2024 and explained that she had very dense cataracts in both eyes.

“Dr. Richards was very patient and kind, which gave me confidence,” said Pearl, who scheduled the procedure on her right eye for the following week.

One day after the surgery, Pearl was beaming about the outcome and the care she received. During her post-op visit, she reported that everything looked much brighter, clearer. “I was scared at first, but everyone was so nice, so down to earth—all the nurses and doctors,” she said. “They asked if I needed a warm blanket.”

Pearl was so pleased with the outcome that she will soon undergo the same surgery on her left eye. “I feel wonderful. I am so relieved,” she said.



▲ Examining a patient in the ER, clockwise, from bottom left: resident Martin Calotti, MD, resident Sunidhi Ramesh, MD, and Richard Liberio, MD, Jefferson Emergency Medicine resident.

### The Wills Eye Emergency Department

Dr. Richards calls the Wills Eye Emergency Department (ER) the shining star of the residency program. “It really shapes Wills residents into very competent and adept clinical ophthalmologists,” he said. “You go in there knowing nothing and come out feeling very comfortable with every ophthalmic problem that could present on a daily basis.”

The ER receives referrals from throughout the surrounding region and beyond. “When someone has an urgent or emergent eye problem, they are referred to the ER,” noted Dr. Richards. “We have access to all the subspecialties and advanced imaging like MRIs and CT scans.”

First-and second-year residents spend a lot of time in the ER, integral to their training. It’s one of a few ERs in the nation dedicated solely to eyes. Being exposed to so many subspecialties often leads residents to hone in on an area they want to further pursue. For Dr. Richards that’s retina. He’s applying for a two-year vitreoretinal fellowship.

**“You go in there knowing nothing and come out feeling very comfortable with every ophthalmic problem that could present on a daily basis.”**

—Collin Richards, MD, Co-Chief Resident

### The Wills Eye Family

Leslie Brown, MD, knows firsthand about the power of collaboration and camaraderie that develops when spending three very intense years with co-residents. “The residents will become lifelong friends,” said Dr. Brown, who has maintained close friendships with those from her residency class. And she is not alone in that sentiment. “A Wills alum may live far from Philadelphia, but if they want to discuss a complicated case or seek another opinion, a former classmate is just a phone call away,” she said.

*Continued on page 6*



▲ Residents and attending physicians from the Cataract and Primary Eye Care Service enjoy a 2024 Phillies game.



▲ Residents from the Class of 2022, 2023, and 2024 bond as they carve pumpkins for Halloween.



▲ Leslie Brown, MD, right, in operating room with Leo Hall, MD, Co-Chief Resident.

**“A Wills alum may live far from Philadelphia, but if they want to discuss a complicated case or seek another opinion, a former classmate is just a phone call away.”**

— Leslie Brown, MD





▲ Wills Eye attendings work with residents as they begin surgical training through simulation in the MOST Lab.

MOST Lab Prepares Residents

Before Dr. Brown or any mentor works with residents in the operating room, they attend courses and practice simulated surgery in the William Maul Measey Ophthalmic Training (MOST) Lab. Located on the 8th-floor of the hospital, the completely renovated, reimagined lab debuted in 2019.

“It is arguably the best ophthalmic surgical training lab in the world,” said Douglas M. Wisner, MD, Chief of the Cataract and Primary Eye Care Service.

Each of the nine stations is equipped with a microscope integrated into a high-definition smart screen with recording capabilities. The stations are ergonomically designed to improve posture and reduce fatigue, helping to lessen the risk of strain and injury for surgeons.

The lab, made possible by a leadership grant from the Benjamin and Mary Siddons Measey Foundation, along with funding from the Wills Eye Alumni Society and private philanthropy, provides extensive training in basic and advanced surgical skills, including various techniques to remove cataracts, corneoscleral suturing, and corneal transplantation.

“When a resident enters the operating room, I expect that they’ll know their instruments, their machines, and the surgical steps,” said

Dr. Brown. “The MOST lab really prepares them.” In fact, simulation has long been recognized as a pillar of high-quality surgical training across numerous subspecialties.

Dr. Brown spends a lot of one-on-one time with third-year residents as they prepare for the next chapter of their career. “They have a lot of autonomy in the clinic managing patient care, she said. “And in the OR, there’s a chance to talk and review the intricacies of cataract surgeries. I advise residents to take their time, to always have the patient’s best interests in mind.”

“Early in the academic year, I tend to give more guidance and sit at the scope with the resident,” she continued. “By year’s end, they still require an attending to be on the case, but most residents do the surgery independently.”

And because residents are exposed to such a wide variety of clinical situations, Dr. Brown said they are well prepared when they enter the real world. “Wills Eye residents turn out to be excellent surgeons,” she said.

“It is arguably the best ophthalmic surgical training lab in the world.”

—Douglas M. Wisner, MD, Chief of the Cataract and Primary Eye Care Service.



▲ Attending physicians, fellows, and residents gather at a Women of Wills Outward Bound event.

A Great Field for Women

“Ophthalmology is a great field for women,” stated Dr. Brown, who managed a private practice while raising two children. “When my kids were in high school, I was able to tailor my schedule so I could attend their after-school sports activities. And there’s not a lot of middle of the night call.”

Over the last few years, residency classes have been comprised of about half women. It hasn’t always been this way. Dr. Brown often speaks to women about their professional journeys. “I had inspiring mentors, and I like to do the same for residents,” she said.



**Kaitlyn Brettin, MD**  
**Balancing Residency and Family**

Third-year resident Kaitlyn “Katie” Brettin, MD, knows about juggling career and family. At about 6:30 a.m. on a recent weekday morning, Dr. Brettin was packing her children’s backpacks for school and daycare. A mother of two, ages 5 and 3, she is grateful that her husband, Jorrie, a software engineer, is able to work from home—offering support and flexibility to get them through their busy days and nights. “My husband is a superstar; I couldn’t get through the residency without him,” she said.

Once the kids have been dropped off to their daily activities, Dr. Brettin rides the train from New Jersey to Philadelphia, then walks a few minutes to Wills Eye Hospital. She will be in the operating room from about 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., with six cataract surgeries on her schedule. She’ll be working side-by-side with a surgical attending physician—all part of the residency experience. On other days, she’ll be seeing patients in clinic and attending lectures and programs. “When we’re in the OR, some attendings will allow us to do the entire surgery,” said Dr. Brettin. “Some are hand over hand guiding you.”

Third-year residents perform upwards of 250 cataract surgeries during the academic year—September through June. “There are lots of faculty members, thus lots of teachers and surgical mentors,” said Dr. Brettin who describes her experience at Wills Eye as challenging, intensive, and genuinely joyful.

Raised in Minot, North Dakota, Dr. Brettin always aspired to be a physician. “Medicine appealed to me because it’s a field where the application of science can improve

**“Ophthalmology has great surgeries that are life-changing for patients.”**

—Katie Brettin, MD

lives,” she said. As a student at Harvard Medical School, she realized that she loved surgery. “Ophthalmology has great surgeries that are life-changing for patients,” said Dr. Brettin. “You have the opportunity for long-term patient relationships.”

During her first two years of residency, the extensive hours in the ER enriched her learning. “It’s an intensive environment with a lot of collaboration,” said Dr. Brettin. “It’s super high volume with all kinds of cases that I wouldn’t have seen elsewhere. It gets incredibly busy, and it can be overwhelming, but you learn and grow from the experience. And all the residents become really close.”

Dr. Brettin is applying for a one-year glaucoma fellowship and plans to return to North Dakota in 2026 to join a group practice. In the meantime, the camaraderie with her co-residents continues to fuel her waking hours. “It takes incredible teamwork to get through it all. I feel really fortunate,” she said.



▲ Katie Brettin, MD, examines a patient during a post-op exam.



▲ Elizabeth Derham, MD, attending physician, and Katie Brettin, MD.

**Wills Eye Alumni – A Strong Global Network**

Many former residents and fellows are leaders in the field and stay connected to Wills Eye long after they have completed training. Some launch educational initiatives and provide funding for lectures and the residency program.

► At the 2023 American Academy of Ophthalmology Meeting in San Francisco (from left): John Anhalt, MD, Samir Patel, MD, Christine Chung, MD, Sanika Udyaver, MD, Pauline Dmitriev, MD, Theo Bowe, MD, Mark S. Pyfer, MD.



**Alumni Spotlight: Sanford Ullman, MD**

Sanford Ullman, MD, completed his residency in 1975, yet the education he received at Wills Eye has translated into a lifelong affiliation.

“The residency was at a world-class level,” said Dr. Ullman, who retired in 2020 from private practice, but remains connected with Wills Eye. He and his wife, Barbara, split their time between Hudson, New York and Scottsdale, Arizona.

“I was trained by many of the giants in the field,” said Dr. Ullman. He is referring to such luminaries as George Spaeth, MD, Peter Laibson, MD, Jerry Shields, MD, Joseph Flanagan, MD, the late William Tasman, MD, and the late Gerard Shannon, MD, to name a few.

As a result of his gratitude and passion for Wills Eye, several years ago, Dr. Ullman began contributing to the hospital’s Resident Fund through the Ullman Family Charitable Foundation. “The money is used to enhance education for residents; for example, providing funds for research efforts or to attend or travel to a meeting,” he said.

Dr. Ullman credits his mentors for helping him hone his surgical skills, but also with guidance on building and running a private practice. After training, Dr. Ullman settled in Hudson, a rural area across the river from the Catskills. “When I arrived, I was the only full-time surgical ophthalmologist in the county,” said Dr. Ullman who established a thriving practice and started a modern eye surgery service at Columbia Memorial Hospital.



▲ Sanford Ullman, MD

Over the years, it was not unusual for the physician to pick up the phone and call one of his mentors for an opinion about a diagnosis or treatment plan. And Dr. Ullman returned to Wills Eye whenever possible to attend a lecture or observe an innovative surgical procedure. “Because of the extended Wills family, you were always welcome to come and learn,” he said. ■■■



# GRADUATION AT WILLS EYE HOSPITAL

The 2024 Wills Eye Graduation was held on June 28 at the hospital. Family, friends, faculty, staff, and alumni celebrated the eight residents and 28 clinical and research fellows.

Julia A. Haller, MD, thanked the graduates for their ongoing commitment to excellence and the Wills Eye motto: skill with compassion. “The practice of medicine is not a business, but rather—a calling,” said Dr. Haller. “As physicians and citizens of the world, you are our hope for the future. We are very confident that we are in good hands.”

The Resident Class of 2024 expressed their appreciation for attendings, fellows, and colleagues by honoring

them with awards. The Golden Apple Award was presented to Jurij Bilyk, MD, Edward A. Jaeger and John B. Jeffries Citizenship Award to Aditya Kaneshathasan, MD, Residency Advocacy Award to Christine Chung, MD, William Tasman Outstanding Fellow Award to Christian Ponder, MD, and Service and Appreciation Award to Hollie Walbrandt, COA, and Kiki Miller, COA.

Other presentations to residents included the Luo Family Distinguished Service Award, Katherine G. Gold Resident Award, Co-Chief Resident Presentation, and Service and Appreciation Award. ■■■



## Luo Family Distinguished Service Award

From left: Marius J. Heersink, MD, Julia A. Haller, MD, Sunidhi Ramesh, MD, Saif Hamdan, MD.



## Co-Chief Resident Presentation

Collin Richards, MD, 2024-2025 Co-Chief Resident (center), presents recognition certificates to Mark S. Pyfer, MD (left), and Theo Bowe, MD, 2023-2024 Co-Chief Residents.



## Resident Class of 2024 with Service and Appreciation Award Recipients

Front row, from left: Pauline Dmitriev, MD, Talia Shoshany, MD, Hollie Walbrandt, COA, award recipient, Kiki Miller, COA, award recipient, Sanika Udyaver, MD, Kaylene Carter, MD

Back row, from left: Mark S. Pyfer, MD, Collin Rozanski, MD, Theo Bowe, MD, Marius Heersink, MD.



**Congratulations to Julia A. Haller, MD,** for being inducted into *The Ophthalmologist's* Power List Hall of Fame. She joins other Wills Eye physicians, Carol L. Shields, MD, Chief, Ocular Oncology Service, and George L. Spaeth, MD, Director Emeritus, Glaucoma Service, in this honor. The Hall of Fame recognizes ophthalmologists and scientists whose impact on their field will last beyond their lifetimes. ■■■

## JOIN US FOR THE

*Edward A. Jaeger, MD*  
ENDOWED LECTURE

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2024**

Sara & Noel Simmonds Auditorium  
8th Floor, Wills Eye Hospital



Featuring  
**Reginald Sanders, MD**

Co-Chief Resident, Class of 1989

Partner, Retina Group of Washington

Past President, American Society  
of Retina Specialists

Clinical Professor of Ophthalmology,  
Georgetown University School of Medicine

To register, email [Giving@Willseye.org](mailto:Giving@Willseye.org) or call **215-440-3154**



# MENTORSHIP INSPIRES CREATION OF JOSEPH CHARLES FLANAGAN VISITING PROFESSOR LECTURE

Wills Eye alumnus Patrick Flaharty, MD, was so inspired by his mentor, Joseph Flanagan, MD, that he led a fundraising effort to create an endowed lecture in his name. Joined by more than two dozen donors in making this gift—mostly alumni of the Wills Eye residency program as well as fellows—the inaugural **Joseph Charles Flanagan Visiting Professor Lecture in Oculoplastic Surgery** was held at the hospital on May 8, 2024. The guest lecturer was Andrea Lora Kossler, MD, of Stanford University.

“Dr. Flanagan was an amazing mentor and the reason I chose oculoplastics,” said Dr. Flaharty, Class of 1990. “The Wills Eye residency provided a remarkable education and foundation that has served me well in my 30-plus year career.”

The impact that Dr. Flanagan has had on Wills Eye residents and fellows cannot be overstated. Dr. Flaharty explained that the creation of the lecture reflects a shared commitment to honor their mentor’s long, distinguished career and his dedication to training future ophthalmologists.

For years to come, the lecture will also showcase the collaborative spirit of the residency program and the hospital’s commitment to excellence in oculoplastic surgery and the advancement of education, research, and lifelong learning. ■■■

“Dr. Flanagan was an amazing mentor and the reason I chose oculoplastics.”

—Patrick Flaharty, MD



▲ At the inaugural lecture (from left): Robert B. Penne, MD, Chief, Oculoplastics Service, Guest Lecturer Andrea Lora Kossler, MD, Joseph C. Flanagan, MD, former Chief, Oculoplastics Service (1981-2007), and Julia A. Haller, MD.

# JOEL AND ROBERTA PORTER FUND LECTURE TO ENHANCE EDUCATION

When Joel Porter, MD, learned that one of his mentors, Cornea Service Director Emeritus Peter Laibson, MD, and his wife, Ruth, had funded an endowed lecture in 2022, he was compelled to also give back to Wills Eye.

Dr. Porter had previously made a gift through the Wills Eye Alumni Society to name a five-year Visiting Professor Lecture in Pediatric Ophthalmology. But he and his wife, Roberta, wanted to go further and provide support with enduring impact. Their \$100,000 endowed gift will fund a named lecture in perpetuity. The inaugural **Joel and Roberta Porter Visiting Professor in Cataract and Primary Eye Care** will take place March 26, 2025, with guest lecturer Shameema Sikder, MD, FACS.

Dr. Porter recently reflected on his early years and the serendipitous events that led to his career as a comprehensive ophthalmologist.

As a mathematics major at Temple University in 1959, there were no cell phones or internet. The world was a dramatically different place. Yet, one thing has not changed in more than six decades: Dr. Porter’s passion for Wills Eye Hospital—long ago ignited after knocking on the door of a university office that posted summer jobs. He applied to be a switchboard operator/receptionist for the emergency room, clinics, and pharmacy at the hospital’s

former location at 16th and Spring Garden Streets.

“When I accepted that job, I had no idea about ophthalmology,” said Dr. Porter, who quickly became well versed in the field. After graduating from Temple, he attended the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, followed by a residency at Wills Eye Hospital, Class of 1970.

Although Dr. Porter is retired, he stays involved by attending AAO meetings, Wills Eye educational programs, and as a volunteer lecturer to Jefferson medical students.

“If I hadn’t knocked on that door at Temple all those years ago, I never would have found my life’s calling,” said Dr. Porter. ■■■



▲ Joel and Roberta Porter



▲ Joel Porter, MD, gathers with residents at an educational lecture. With him, from left: Eric Kim, MD, Katie Brettin, MD, Hannah Garrigan, MD, Bryce Hwang, MD, Leo Hall, MD, Co-Chief Resident, and Mara Penne, MD.

“If I hadn’t knocked on that door at Temple all those years ago, I never would have found my life’s calling.”

—Joel Porter, MD





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Welcome Residency Class of 2027



▲ From left: Henry Bair, MD, Turner Wibbelsman, MD, Sandy Samuel, MD, Tiffany Cheng, MD, C. Nelle Shields, MD, Martin Calotti, MD, Ugochi Aguwa, MD, Mak Djulbegovic, MD, MSc.

HELP PRESERVE AND RESTORE VISION!

Please consider making your gift before December 31, 2024.

It is our loyal donors who help advance the Wills Eye mission. Your gift to the Fund for Vision provides the financial resources to train the next generation of ophthalmologists, uncover groundbreaking discoveries, and provide superior patient care.

Thank you for partnering with us to preserve and restore vision.

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