

Eye Level

News & Views From Wills Eye Hospital

SPRING 2025



50th Annual Wills Eye Ophthalmology Review Course

PAGE 2



HON. MICHAEL
A. NUTTER
NEW BOARD
PRESIDENT

PAGE 1



STORIES
OF GRATITUDE

PAGES 4 & 5

From Our Leaders



JULIA A. HALLER, MD

Ophthalmologist-in-Chief

JOSEPH P. BILSON

Chief Executive Officer

Welcome to the Spring 2025 issue of *Eye Level*. As we move from one season to the next and relish the warmer weather and baseball season, we reflect on the many accomplishments at Wills Eye Hospital and our pride in leading this premier institution.

In addition to our loyal staff that works tirelessly to fulfill our mission to preserve and restore vision, Wills Eye Hospital is led by the very dedicated Board of Directors of City Trusts. For the past four years, Bernard W. Smalley, Esq., has served as President of the Board. We want to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Smalley who has been a wonderful supporter of the hospital. He has championed the expansion of our medical staff, research efforts, community initiatives, and renovations. Some of the many examples include the annual *Give Kids Sight Day*, *Wills Eye on Diabetes Day*, and the reimaging of the Glaucoma Service in 2022 to better serve patients. Mr. Smalley has been an articulate, even-handed spokesperson for Wills Eye and never missed a beat as a relentless advocate for access, care, and community outreach.

As one door closes, we open another with a warm welcome to the Hon. Michael A. Nutter, the new Board President. The former mayor of Philadelphia (2008 – 2016) was installed in January, and we look forward to working together. Mayor Nutter has served on the Board since 2001 and as Vice President since 2023. His civic leadership, extensive network, and passion for the City of Philadelphia and its great institutions will be a win-win as we chart a path forward. On the adjacent page, Mayor Nutter shares some of his priorities, passions, and goals for Wills Eye.

Thanks to the foresight and philanthropy of our leadership, supporters, and generous donors, we continue to be at the forefront in research, innovation, and education.

This issue’s cover story (pages 2 and 3) shines a spotlight on the 50th Annual Wills Eye Hospital Review Course

that showcases all aspects of this leadership. For the past 30 years, Ralph C. Eagle Jr., MD, Chief of Ophthalmic Pathology, has served as Director of this comprehensive course as well as Director of the hospital’s Continuing Medical Education Department.

And in early March, the 77th Annual Wills Eye Conference (page 4), another highlight of the academic year, took place here in Philadelphia. Hundreds of participants from across the nation and around the globe attended. Sponsored by the Wills Eye Alumni Society, the conference focused on cutting-edge, thought-provoking updates across ophthalmology subspecialties, with carefully crafted symposia for physicians, researchers, administrators, and technicians.

“Thanks to the foresight and philanthropy of our leadership, supporters, and generous donors, we continue to be at the forefront in research, innovation, and education.”

This newsletter would not be complete without the sharing of success stories. On pages 4 and 5, read the inspiring accounts of two patients who are grateful for the extraordinary care they received at Wills Eye. We are deeply touched when we see the real-life impact of those we serve.

In closing, we welcome the Wills Eye Hospital at Jefferson Residency Class of 2029! These eight talented physicians will begin their post-medical school training in July. This inspiring group of remarkable, brilliant young people exemplifies the best that medicine has to offer and gives us confidence that the future of ophthalmology has never been brighter and more promising. ■■■

Eye Level

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WILLS EYE HOSPITAL
SPRING 2025
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On the Cover: Clockwise, from bottom left: Ralph C. Eagle Jr., MD, Chief of Ophthalmic Pathology; Mitchell S. Fineman, MD, Retina Service; Aditya Kanasa-thasan, MD, Cornea Service; Review Course attendees.

A SIT-DOWN WITH THE HON. MICHAEL A. NUTTER

The former Philadelphia mayor (2008 to 2016) became President of the Board of Directors of City Trusts on January 1, 2025. A lifelong Philadelphia resident, Mayor Nutter has served on the Board since 2001 and succeeds Bernard W. Smalley, Esq., as President, who continues to serve on the Board and has now been designated as President Emeritus.



Q. What does it mean to you to be elected President and what are your top priorities in this role?

A. It is a tremendous honor to serve, and an enormous responsibility to oversee funds and assets that have been bequeathed to the City of Philadelphia. The Board manages significant resources, including Wills Eye Hospital, Girard College, and Girard Estate, which is comprised of real estate holdings across Pennsylvania and the country.

To be elected by my colleagues is humbling and exciting. We live in challenging times and people depend upon us. Think about the reputation of this incredible institution: the medical school students, doctors, fellows, and of course, most importantly, the patients. All are beneficiaries of the generosity of James Wills. I intend to build on that tradition.

Q. Can you share your early plans or approach to Board oversight?

A. As president, my main responsibility is to listen, learn, and get the best information from the people who are doing the work, such as Dr. Julia Haller, Joe Bilson, and so many others. Our education program, clinical care, research, and innovation are all top-notch. Other hospitals and professionals look to us for leadership. I want to maintain, grow, and exceed expectations. My philosophy is simple: I want excellence.

Q. Do you think that the Board plays a role in helping to improve the daily lives of Pennsylvanians? If so, are there ways to expand the Board’s leadership in this area?

A. Absolutely. The hospital, which has many great people—from the front desk to the Executive Suite—is impacting lives throughout the Commonwealth, the country, and the world. As Board members, we’re not in the trenches. Our role is oversight. We have to ensure financial stability so that Wills Eye has the resources to continue to be the best eye hospital in the world!

Q. After a career in public service, can you share a little about the work you’re doing today outside of your Board service?

A. I’m the Inaugural David N. Dinkins Professor of Practice at Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs, an Executive Fellow at the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Social Policy and Practice, a faculty advisor for several student organizations at Columbia, and Chair of the Senior Advisory Committee for the Institute of Politics at the Harvard Kennedy School. I have my own public policy consulting business and serve on several boards.

Q. You are a familiar name throughout the region. Can you share something about yourself that people may not be aware of?

A. After graduating from the University of Pennsylvania Wharton School in 1979, I worked for Xerox. After 21 months, I didn’t feel there was an opportunity for advancement to become a Senior Vice President at the age of 24, so I resigned. At the time, I was also working for the Bynum family in their restaurant business, including as a DJ at one of their clubs. In the course of this work, I met Bill Gray, Marian Tasco, Dwight Evans, and John White Jr. That’s how I became interested in politics. I worked on the 1983 re-election campaign of City Councilman John C. Anderson, and I learned so much.

Q. What was your proudest moment?

A. There have been many proud moments. Incredibly and unexpectedly winning the mayoral race in 2007 is certainly one of them.

My parents instilled in my sister and me a responsibility to give back to the neighborhood, the community. I’m a public servant. There are a variety of ways to serve the public, not necessarily by holding office. A lot of people invested a lot in me, so if I can help others, that’s what I’m going to do. I live by the philosophy: “To whom much is given, much is required.” ■■■

FAST FACTS

Hon. Michael A. Nutter

Age: 67

Wife: Lisa

Children: Christian and Olivia

Favorite Food: Pasta

Career Highlight: Throwing out the first pitch (a strike) at the Phillies home opener, March 31, 2008, before a crowd of 43,000, and hosting Pope Francis in September 2015.

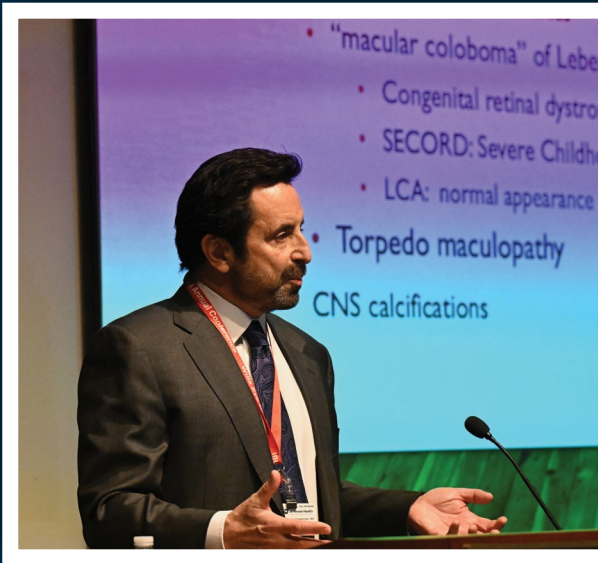
Favorite movies: “The Godfather” and “Casablanca”

Book that impacted your life: “Profiles in Courage” by John F. Kennedy

Favorite music: Disco and Jazz

50TH ANNUAL Wills Eye Ophthalmology Review Course

*Met With Rave Reviews for its
Intensive, Relevant Content*



▲ *Barry N. Wasserman, MD, Pediatric Ophthalmology and Adult Strabismus Service.*



▲ *Hermann D. Schubert, MD, guest faculty.*



▲ *David L. Guyton, MD, guest faculty, Professor of Ophthalmology, Wilmer Eye Institute-Johns Hopkins Hospital, with course attendees (left) and Kristina Irsch, PhD, guest faculty, Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology, Wilmer Eye Institute (right).*

Engaging, comprehensive, enlightening, informative! These were just a few of the comments from attendees at the 50th Annual Wills Eye Ophthalmology Review Course that took place at the hospital from February 22 through 26.

The course, geared towards residents, fellows, and practicing ophthalmologists, is taught by world-renowned guest lecturers (including Wills Eye alumni) and faculty. One of many educational initiatives offered at the premier independent eye hospital, topics ran the gamut: anatomy, corneal diseases, eyelid, glaucoma, imaging, immunology, neuro-ophthalmology, oncology, orbit, ocular pathology, pediatrics, pharmacology, physiology, optics, refraction, and retina.

“The sessions provide an intensive overview of the entire specialty of ophthalmology,” explained Ralph C. Eagle Jr., MD, Chief of Ophthalmic Pathology, who also serves as Director of Continuing Medical Education and Director of the Wills Eye Institutional Review Board. “The course not only prepares residents for their board exam, but participants can also earn up to 45 continuing medical education credits. There’s also the option to register for an online course, which was introduced during the COVID pandemic and has remained very popular.”

Dr. Eagle has served as the Course Director since 1995. This year, the ophthalmic pathologist taught two morning sessions and is proud to have recruited a talented line-up of guest faculty, including Wills Eye alumnus Rod Foroozan, MD, Professor of Neuro-ophthalmology at Baylor College of Medicine and Hermann D. Schubert, MD, Professor of Clinical Ophthalmology and Pathology at Columbia University, a former Wills Eye Retina Fellow.

The course, elaborated Dr. Eagle, is just one example of the myriad of offerings—in person and livestream—that Wills Eye offers. The Knowledge Portal, for example, encompasses a comprehensive listing of courses, named lectures, and specialized training such as Chiefs Rounds and Saturday Morning Updates. Many of the programs are free-of-charge and open to anyone. “I’m continually amazed at the breadth and depth of the programs we offer,” he said.

“It was an excellent way to get a front-to-back, top-to-bottom review of everything in the specialty.”

—John M. Fornarotto, MD, Holland, Michigan, course attendee.

The hospital’s commitment to excellence in clinical care, research, and education attracts physicians from residencies and practices across the country and the globe. This year, physicians came from 24 residency programs and multiple regions and countries, including Puerto Rico, Sweden, France, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, Canada, Peru, and Portugal.



Visit the **Wills Eye Knowledge Portal** to register for the latest in continuing medical education, conferences, lectures, and more.
willseye.cloud-cme.com/



▲ Rod Foroozan, MD, guest faculty, and Mitchell S. Fineman, MD, Retina Service.

▼ Ralph C. Eagle Jr., MD, Course Director.



“I’m continually amazed at the breadth and depth of the programs we offer.”

—Ralph C. Eagle Jr., MD

John M. Fornarotto, MD, a general/cataract ophthalmologist from Holland, Michigan, who had a private practice for 30 years, was a first-time attendee. “My board certification was lifetime,” explained Dr. Fornarotto, who hadn’t enrolled in any type of review course for as long as he can remember. “It was an excellent way to get a front-to-back, top-to-bottom review of everything in the specialty. All of the speakers were excellent and the venue was nice. The ancillary Wills Eye staff were friendly, helpful, and on top of everything.”

Elefteria Dhima, MD, an ophthalmologist/consultant specializing in macular and retina, traveled from Sweden. Dr. Dhima registered for the course because of Wills Eye’s reputation for providing world-class care. “I truly enjoyed the depth of information and knowledge shared,” she said. ■■■



▲ Jordan D. Deaner, MD, Retina Service.



▲ Attendees confer on a course topic.

Saturday Morning Updates 8:30 a.m. – noon

Each of these sessions (in-person, virtual, and on demand) has a relevant clinical and practical topic presented as a lecture or symposium by Wills Eye staff. “I’m always impressed at how great they are,” said Dr. Eagle.

Chiefs Rounds Fridays 7 – 8 a.m.

This uniquely structured program (in-person, virtual, and on demand) turns the tables as residents present a mystery medical case to attending physicians. A lively exchange of dialogue takes place between residents and a multidisciplinary team of attending physicians.

To learn more or to register, visit willseye.org/education

Ralph C. Eagle Jr., MD, joined the Wills Eye Hospital staff in 1986 as the Chief of Pathology. “I’m a visual pattern recognizer,” said the ophthalmic pathologist, who is also passionate about photography. His commitment to ophthalmology, photography, and visual arts has been a lifelong pursuit. “My grandfather was actually an ophthalmologist on staff at Wills Eye,” explained Dr. Eagle. “He graduated from the University of Pennsylvania Medical School in 1908. He was also a photographer and definitely influenced my career path.”

When Dr. Eagle is not scrutinizing images under a microscope or on the computer screen, he can often be found traveling to various locations imparting his expertise. He recently returned from presenting an eye pathology course in Puerto Rico and basic science classes at the Cleveland Clinic and Columbia University.

Dr. Eagle’s immersion in photography for some 50 years has resulted in thousands of images of the eye. “I take ‘gross’ photographs of the eye,” said the physician, who has transformed many of these images on to neckties, integral to his daily wardrobe. A conversation starter, for sure. ■■■

77TH ANNUAL WILLS EYE CONFERENCE

The conference took place March 6 through 8 at the Philadelphia Marriott Old City. Sponsored by the Wills Eye Alumni Society and chaired by Zeba A. Syed, MD, hundreds of ophthalmologists and industry professionals from across the country and the globe attended. The annual gathering featured presentations on the latest clinical, diagnostic, and therapeutic approaches to eye conditions in all ophthalmic subspecialties. ■■■



▲ Mark F. Pyfer, MD (center), recipient of the Silver Tray Award, with his wife Barbara Pyfer (left) and son Mark S. Pyfer, MD (right).



▲ From left: Kammi B. Gunton, MD; Alexandra Benavente, MCOptom, PhD; Terri I. Young, MD, MBA; Leslie G. Hyman, PhD; Lisa Ostrin OD, PhD; Zeba A. Syed, MD.



▲ Turner Wibbelsman, MD (left), Class of 2027, recipient of the James S. Shipman Award for best scientific presentation by a resident and Ari August, BA (Pathology Fellow), recipient of the P. Robb McDonald Award for best scientific paper by a fellow.



▲ From left: Julia A. Haller, MD; Edward H. Bedrossian Jr., MD; E. Howard Bedrossian Lecturer Suzanne Freitag, MD; Robert B. Penne, MD; Zeba A. Syed, MD.

DUPONT, PA RESIDENT SHARES LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE

“It’s the best decision I ever made,” said Christine Rafalko, reflecting on her experience at Wills Eye Hospital with Reza Razeghinejad, MD (aka Dr. Reza), and Jordan D. Deaner, MD.

Christine’s challenges began in 2013 when during a routine exam with an optometrist her eye pressures were “sky high,” resulting in a glaucoma diagnosis. Soon after, the Dupont, Pennsylvania resident underwent laser surgeries to both eyes. But her pressures did not come down.

The now 71-year-old sought multiple opinions. One physician recommended cataract surgery to both eyes. This too did not lower the pressures.

Christine was given a series of eye drops and underwent additional laser procedures without success. Every specialist



Reza Razeghinejad, MD

“I am so pleased with Dr. Reza and Dr. Deaner. They were outstanding. Wills Eye Hospital is the best in the world!”

—Christine Rafalko



she consulted could not offer a viable solution nor were they willing to perform surgery.

“I knew it was time to go to Wills Eye,” recalled Christine, where she had surgeries on both of her eyes in the summer of 2023. Dr. Reza explained that Christine suffered from bilateral aqueous misdirection (malignant glaucoma), where the lens shifted forward, blurring vision and shallowing the anterior part of the eye. “Due to the severity of the glaucoma, I placed a tube in the back of the eye, unlike the usual anterior placement,” he said. “And Dr. Deaner and his team removed the vitreous gel from the back of her eye.” After surgery, Christine’s lens repositioned, and both her vision and eye pressure improved. She now requires just one eye drop compared to the four she was using before.

“I am so pleased with Dr. Reza and Dr. Deaner,” she said. “They were outstanding. Wills Eye Hospital is the best in the world.” ■■■

FATHER & SON GRATEFUL FOR WILLS EYE

More than a year ago, Thomas Capizzi Jr., now 14, of Lititz, Pennsylvania, was having difficulty concentrating in school. He was also rubbing his eyes frequently. His parents, Thomas and Heather Capizzi, owners of Thom’s Bread, brought him to a Lancaster area optometrist for an eye exam. He suspected that the teenager might have a condition known as keratoconus. To be certain, the family was referred to Wills Eye Hospital.

Christopher J. Rapuano, MD, Cornea Service Chief, examined Thomas Jr. in March 2024 and confirmed the diagnosis in both eyes. “Keratoconus is an uncommon condition that typically first occurs between age 10 to 20,” said Dr. Rapuano. “The cornea gets thin and a little protruded. If left untreated, it ultimately impacts vision. It may often go unnoticed because vision in one eye may not have been affected.”

Luckily for Thomas Jr., who competes on the swim team at Manheim Township High School, it was caught early. “Dr. Rapuano presented us with several options to treat his right eye and we chose cross-linking,” said dad Thomas.

The outpatient procedure, with about a 95 percent success rate, was approved by the FDA in 2016. “It is much less invasive than a cornea transplant,” explained Dr. Rapuano. “We remove



Thomas Capizzi and Thomas Capizzi Jr.

the surface layer of the cornea and place riboflavin drops and then shine an ultraviolet light on the eye. This creates stronger bonds in the cornea and stops the progression of the disease.”

Both father and son were incredibly pleased with their experience at Wills Eye. “We are very fortunate and grateful,” said dad Thomas. ■■



“Keratoconus is an uncommon condition that typically first occurs between age 10 to 20... If left untreated, it ultimately impacts vision.”

—Christopher J. Rapuano, MD
Peter and Ruth Laibson Cornea Service Chief Endowed Chair

From the Desk of Suzanne Beers, Chief Development Officer, Wills Eye Foundation

A LASTING LEGACY

Join the James Wills Society and help us secure a brighter future.

At Wills Eye, our commitment to advancing eye care is built on lasting relationships that extend far beyond today. For nearly 200 years, Wills Eye Hospital has helped preserve and restore sight to countless patients. A key part of this enduring commitment is the dedicated support of those who include Wills Eye in their estate plans.

The James Wills Society recognizes visionary individuals who, like our founder James Wills Jr., ensure Wills Eye’s mission will thrive for generations. Through bequests, endowments, charitable trusts, insurance, and gift annuities, members of this distinguished group leave a legacy that guarantees the future success of Wills Eye.

Why Estate Giving Matters: Including Wills Eye in your estate plan is not just a financial gift—it is a long-term partnership and an acknowledgment of the vital role Wills Eye plays in advancing eye care and the preservation of sight. You are helping to ensure that Wills Eye remains at the forefront of world-class care, medical research, and ophthalmic education.

We Want to Thank You: If you have already included Wills Eye in your estate plans, please let us know! By sharing your intentions, we can thank you personally and ensure that your generous gift has the impact you envision.

We are deeply grateful for your unwavering support and for being a part of the Wills Eye family.

RESIDENCY CLASS OF 1974 CELEBRATES 50TH ANNIVERSARY



From left: Richard Goodwin, MD, James Carty, MD, Julia A. Haller, MD, John Negrey, MD, Richard Getnick, MD, Charles Letocha, MD. Not pictured: Richard Barr, MD.

Recently, we had the honor of welcoming back members of the **Wills Eye Residency Class of 1974** to celebrate their 50th anniversary. Their commitment to Wills Eye, including endowed lectures and long-term annual giving, exemplifies the enduring bond that forms between Wills Eye and its supporters. Just as these dedicated alumni have encouraged the next generation of Wills Eye physicians, students, and clinician-scientists, you too can create a lasting impact through philanthropy.



To learn more about estate giving or to notify us of your intentions, please contact **Suzanne Beers**, Chief Development Officer, **(215) 440-3153** or **sbeers@willseye.org**. For additional resources, such as sample bequest language and charitable gift annuity illustrations, please visit **willseye.planmygift.org**.



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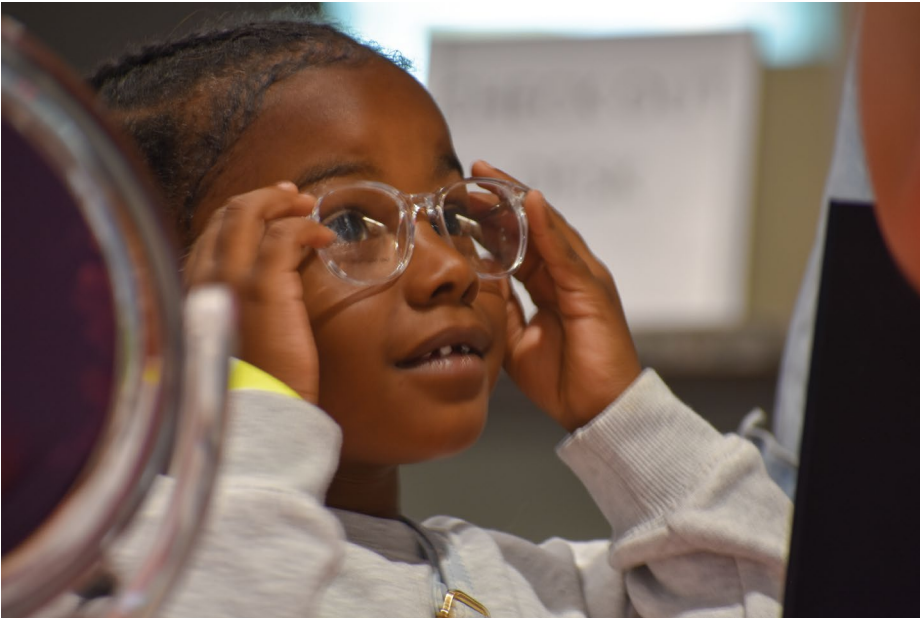
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*Wills Eye Committee Member

Give Kids Sight Day



On September 28, 2024, Wills Eye Hospital held its 15th Annual Give Kids Sight Day, where hundreds of Philadelphia area children received free vision screenings. Those who needed glasses returned to the hospital in early November where they received two free pairs, compliments of OneSight EssilorLuxottica Foundation.

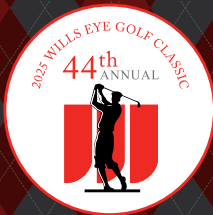
SAVE THE DATE 2025

Graduation
June 27

Give Kids Sight Day
October 4

Jaeger Lecture
November 14

Wills Eye Ball
November 15



Swing for the
Gift of Sight

JUNE 9, 2025

Whitemarsh Valley Country Club
For information, contact Linda Mancini
LMancini@willseye.org or 215-440-3154.