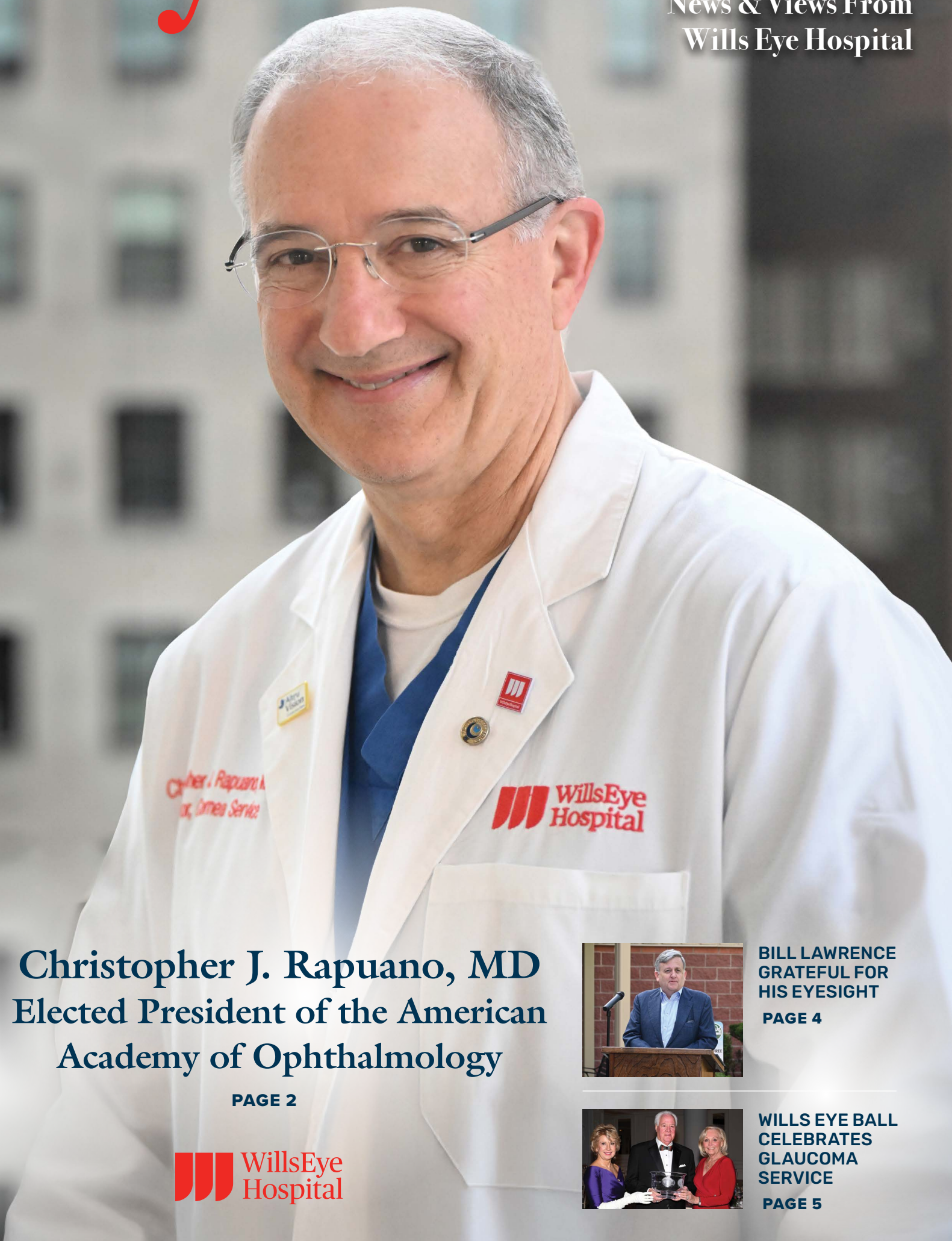


# Eye Level

SPRING 2026

News & Views From  
Wills Eye Hospital



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Elected President of the American  
Academy of Ophthalmology

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# From Our Leader

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**Julia A. Haller, MD**

Chief Executive Officer & Ophthalmologist-in-Chief



Welcome to the Spring 2026 issue of *Eye Level*. As we enter this season of renewal, I reflect on the myriad of accomplishments of this nearly 200-year-old institution. Founded in 1832 through a bequest to the City of Philadelphia by Quaker merchant James Wills to establish a hospital for the indigent blind, Wills has risen on the world stage to a level it would have been hard for him to imagine. There is no doubt that strong leadership has played a pivotal role in the dramatic impact of this premier specialty eye hospital.

That initial act of philanthropy set an example for all that would follow. And it is because of the generosity of donors, dedicated staff, and volunteers that we are able to remain focused on our mission to deliver the best eye care in the world.

Wills Eye Hospital is not only a global leader in cutting-edge medical care and innovation; our faculty and alumni are shining stars in the field of ophthalmology.

Our cover story (pages 2–4) features our very own Christopher J. Rapuano, MD, Cornea Service Chief and Peter and Ruth Laibson Cornea Service Chief Endowed Chair, who is now President of the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO).

Dr. Rapuano is a master clinician, educator and mentor nonpareil—recognized nationally and internationally as a leader in the cornea subspecialty. He has had a remarkable career including serving as a past President of the Cornea Society and as a board member of the Ophthalmic Mutual Insurance Company (OMIC). His pioneering talents were evident over 35 years ago, when as a resident, he and Mark Friedberg, MD, co-wrote the first edition of *The Wills Eye Manual*, now the bestselling ophthalmology book worldwide.

On page 1, meet Thomas Lamson, MD, who recently completed a Wills Eye Academic Global Fellowship and is now the Director of our Emergency Department and Ophthalmology Consult Service at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital.

Read the inspiring story of Bill Lawrence (page 4), a patient of Dr. Rapuano's who was so overwhelmed with his experience at Wills Eye that—without hesitation—he decided to support our Cornea Service renovation. The \$3.5 million project (page 5) has significantly expanded the footprint of the department. All of this would not be

possible without the generosity of multiple benefactors to whom we are deeply appreciative.

At the Wills Eye Ball (page 5), generosity of spirit was also on full display as grateful patients Jim and Sue Anderson announced a multimillion-dollar gift to establish an endowment fund to support operating needs at the hospital.

Nurturing leadership is integral to the training in our residency program, so it is not surprising that alumni make their mark around the globe. We tell applicants that we expect them to have consequential lives—with involvement, engagement, leadership. Some graduates chair departments, others become leaders in medical schools, academic and hospital settings, private practices, organizations.

The AAO Immediate Past President, Michael Repka, MD, a pediatric ophthalmologist at Johns Hopkins University, is a Wills Eye alumnus. During his AAO term, he made great strides with Medicare payment reform. And AAO President-Elect Stephanie Jones Marioneaux, MD, a Wills Eye alum and corneal specialist in private practice, has also made her mark. She serves on the Virginia Board of Medicine and is an inspiring role model for our specialty.

I also want to congratulate alumnus Stephen J. Gedde, MD, recently named as the next CEO of the American Board of Ophthalmology. What an accomplishment!

In January, the 50th Annual Atlantic Coast Retina Club & Macula Conference was held at Wills Eye and The Union League in Philadelphia (page 5). The gathering of over 500 physicians and guests celebrated the 65th anniversary of the Wills Eye Retina Service while also announcing the newly created *William E. Benson, MD – Julia A. Haller, MD Retina Research Fellowship*. To have my name linked with Dr. Benson's and to young people who are our future is the ultimate honor.

A big congratulations to Allen Ho, MD, and Nelle Shields, MD (back cover), who received the Humanitarian Service Award from the Pennsylvania Academy of Ophthalmology for expanding *Wills Eye on Diabetes Day* throughout the city and the Commonwealth. A truly amazing feat and a model for others!

Finally, a warm welcome to our Resident Class of 2030. I could not be more impressed, yet again, with this group of eight young physicians. They inspire me and make me confident in the future of ophthalmology! 🍷

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## Eye Level

NEWS & VIEWS FROM  
WILLS EYE HOSPITAL

SPRING 2026

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# A SIT-DOWN WITH THOMAS LAMSON, MD

*In August 2025, Dr. Lamson joined the faculty as the Director of the Wills Eye Emergency Department and Ophthalmology Consult Service at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital. Prior to this, he completed a Wills Eye Hospital fellowship in Academic Global Ophthalmology.*

*Dr. Lamson earned his medical degree from the Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook University with a scholarly concentration in Global Health, and an ophthalmology residency at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital & Washington Hospital Center.*



## **Q. What are your responsibilities as Director of the Emergency Department (known as the Wills Eye Emergency Room or WER) and the Ophthalmic Consult Service at Jefferson?**

**A.** I oversee the procedural operations of the WER from a physician standpoint. This involves frequent interfacing with Jefferson Emergency Medicine and Operations leadership to ensure that we provide safe and efficient eye care for our patients. We are continually evaluating our metrics and procedures to identify areas for improvement. Additionally, I often act as a liaison between Wills and Jefferson, receiving feedback and concerns from both institutions. My favorite part of the role is that I have the opportunity to serve as a clinician in the WER, working with the residents and nursing staff to provide care for every kind of ophthalmic emergency.

## **Q. You recently completed a fellowship in Academic Global Ophthalmology (AGO). Why did you choose Wills for your fellowship and what has that experience meant to you?**

**A.** I was drawn to Wills by the faculty of the AGO Fellowship. Drs. John Anhalt, Brent Finklea, and Doug Wisner have all been outstanding mentors at home and abroad. My experience helped hone my skills in the clinic and operating room (OR) and introduced me to many amazing people around the world. I have learned lessons from people from all walks of life that I apply to my patients every day in Philadelphia.

## **Q. What has been the most rewarding aspect of your new position? The most challenging?**

**A.** The most rewarding part of my job is having the opportunity to work closely with ophthalmology residents. I enjoy watching the first- and second-year residents grow as clinicians, and I love having the opportunity to teach surgery with the third-year residents in the OR.

## **Q. What are your goals for the WER?**

**A.** My biggest goal for the WER is to expand the available clinical space. The layout of the WER has been unchanged for decades, but the average patient volume has grown dramatically. Accomplishing this goal brings a host of challenges, but it is a project that would bring immense improvement for patients and staff.

## **Q. Can you share what led you to pursue a career in ophthalmology?**

**A.** I became interested in ophthalmology during my senior year of high school. I remember watching a video of a cataract outreach program. I was blown away by the difference that a single cataract surgery could make. Since that day, I have never considered another career. Throughout college, medical school, and residency, my love for ophthalmology has only grown.

## **Q. Can you share something about yourself that most people might not know?**

**A.** My grandparents started a dairy farm in upstate New York in the 1950s that is still family-run and operated. Their milk is primarily sold to Kraft and Chobani.

Throughout college, medical school, and most of residency, I only had my hair cut by my childhood barber in Tully, New York. This led to some frequently wild hairdos if I was away from home for longer than a few months. I now get my hair cut locally out of necessity, but I have yet to find somebody I can trust as much as Mrs. Usherwood.

## **Q. What makes Wills Eye so special?**

**A.** The people at Wills are what make this place so special. The employees are all passionate, hard-working, and committed to their jobs, regardless of title. It is easy to work hard when you enjoy the company of your co-workers, and I am so thankful that Wills employs so many kind and thoughtful people. ■■■

## FAST FACTS

### THOMAS LAMSON, MD

**Hobbies:** Soccer, skiing, attending concerts and comedy shows, watching sports.

**Favorite Pastime:** Walking through Philly with my girlfriend Indira and our dog.

**Favorite Restaurant in Philadelphia:** Kilimandjaro—amazing West African cuisine in West Philly!

**Favorite Music:** Whatever the residents are playing each day in the WER.

**Career Highlight (thus far):** Coming to Wills at the same time as two of my co-residents from Georgetown: Drs. Narmien Murdock and Bren Davis.



Christopher J. Rapuano, MD, right, and Nicholas Hadjokas, MD, examine a patient.

# Christopher J. Rapuano, MD Takes on National Leadership Role



The Wills Eye Cornea Service Chief and Peter and Ruth Laibson Cornea Service Chief Endowed Chair Elected President of the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO).



AMERICAN ACADEMY™ OF OPHTHALMOLOGY

Patient care and physician education have long been the driving forces behind the impactful career of Christopher J. Rapuano, MD. So, it may come as no surprise that he has been elected as AAO President by the global community of 32,000 ophthalmologists that comprise the academy.

The one-year term, which began January 1, 2026, will involve national and international outreach and the opportunity to effect change beyond the walls of Wills Eye Hospital. “I am honored to serve as President of AAO,” said Dr. Rapuano, whose career at Wills Eye has spanned more than 35 years. His term includes representing AAO at meetings across the country and abroad as well as leading an initiative based on an unmet need in the profession.

Consistently named as a “Top Doc” by *Philadelphia Magazine* and selected for the “Power List” of the 100 most influential ophthalmologists in the world in 2023, 2024, and 2026 by *The Ophthalmologist*, Dr. Rapuano has been Cornea Service Chief since 2009 and involved with AAO since the early 1990s. “One of my first projects was updating the Pro-Vision Interactive CD-ROM,” recalled Dr. Rapuano, who credits mentors Peter R. Laibson, MD, Cornea Service Director Emeritus and Elisabeth J. Cohen, MD, former Cornea Service Chief, with introducing him to AAO.

“Education is what makes me tick. I like teaching and most of the activities I’ve done with AAO have been in the education and quality-of-care arena,” said Dr. Rapuano, who has been on the AAO board since 2019. “Before serving as President-Elect last year, I was Senior Secretary for Clinical Education.”

Dr. Rapuano is also a board member of the Ophthalmic Mutual Insurance Company (OMIC), where he works to protect the interests of physicians while promoting quality care and patient safety.



**“I like teaching and most of the activities I’ve done with AAO have been in the education and quality-of-care arena.”**

—Christopher J. Rapuano, MD



▲ Christopher J. Rapuano, MD, with longtime mentor Peter R. Laibson, MD, at a Wills Eye conference.



Christopher J. Rapuano, MD, confers with Beeran Meghpara, MD, Cornea Service Co-Chief and Director, Refractive Surgery Department.

“One of my goals is to improve emergency room eye care services in hospitals across the country.”

—Christopher J. Rapuano, MD

## AAO Project

Every AAO president is asked to choose a project during their term. “One of my goals is to improve emergency room eye care services in hospitals across the country,” stated Dr. Rapuano, who has authored hundreds of research papers and received an array of awards and honors over the last three decades.

“Fewer and fewer doctors, nationally and internationally, want to do emergency care work. I’ve been involved with trauma and emergency room call since early in my career and although the timing can be disruptive, it is ultimately very gratifying to care for patients with emergent ocular issues. These patients have the greatest needs.”



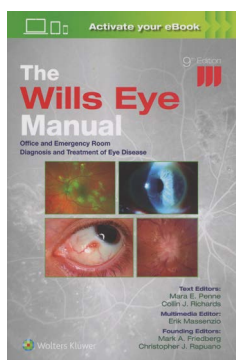
In addition to the fact that many ophthalmologists don’t want to work nights and weekends, Dr. Rapuano explained that too often

hospitals aren’t providing the necessary staff or equipment to evaluate patients with an eye problem. “I’d like to shine a light on this issue and find ways to alleviate some of the obstacles that are preventing physicians from taking on this critical role,” he said. “We’re trying to put together a “tool kit” of sorts so that ophthalmologists can be well prepared, gain confidence, and understand what they’ll need to take call.

“It is challenging because it’s a longstanding problem, and I have no illusions that I’ll be able to fix it short term. I’m hoping that more ophthalmologists will take call at their local hospitals because of what AAO has done.”

## The Wills Eye Manual

This wouldn’t be the first time that Dr. Rapuano has impacted his profession. As a first-year Wills Eye resident working in the emergency room, he recalled that there was no manual, no written, succinct information or protocol on how to treat eye conditions. Knowing that the following year junior residents would be approaching him with many of the same questions, he teamed with co-resident Mark A. Friedberg, MD, to co-create what would become *The Wills Eye Manual*, first published in 1990. “The original idea started with a list of about 20 diagnoses matched with work-up and treatment options and morphed into the text it is today,” remembered Dr. Rapuano.



The manual, now the best-selling book in ophthalmology worldwide, has evolved over the years. The 9th edition was published in the fall of 2025. “The core is identical to the original but today it’s much more comprehensive and includes color images,” said Dr. Rapuano, who has served as Senior Faculty Advisor since the 2nd edition.

## Patient Care a Priority

Patient care has always been extremely important to Dr. Rapuano, whether treating pathologies, infections, or performing corneal transplants. Some eye conditions have a genetic component, he explained. So, it’s not unusual to treat multiple generations in a family, an aspect of his practice that has been very rewarding.

## The Seeds of a Storied Career

Dr. Rapuano was raised in Ridgewood, New Jersey. “My father was a dentist, and he directed me more toward medicine,” shared Dr. Rapuano, who obtained his medical degree from Columbia University College of Physicians & Surgeons, followed by a residency at Wills Eye Hospital and a Corneal Fellowship at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics.

“At first, I was interested in general surgery,” remembered Dr. Rapuano, who ultimately chose ophthalmology because of the opportunity to build long-term relationships and have a direct impact on patients’ lives. “I was drawn to cornea as a subspecialty because when you look through a slit lamp, it is much easier to see this part of the eye.”

## Dramatic Advances in Ophthalmology

Much has changed in ophthalmology since Dr. Rapuano first started out. Some of the most dramatic advances have been with refractive surgeries and corneal transplants.

“As a resident, radial keratotomy (RK), an incisional eye surgery to correct nearsightedness, was coming back into popularity,” he said. “Mark Blecher, MD, now Chief Operating Officer and Assistant Ophthalmologist-in-Chief, and I got Wills Eye back into doing RK in the early 1990s. This was soon replaced with laser surgeries, which use focused light beams to perform highly precise procedures.”

Dr. Rapuano was also involved with FDA clinical trials conducted by VISX, Inc. for the use of excimer lasers to treat corneal pathologies, known as phototherapeutic keratectomy (PTK), and those to correct vision, known as photorefractive keratectomy (PRK). Both were approved by the FDA for patient use in the mid 1990s.

“This was a super interesting and exciting technology,” said Dr. Rapuano. “Later, the FDA approved LASIK surgeries to correct nearsightedness, farsightedness, and astigmatism. I still do many of these procedures today.”

Corneal transplants have also had multiple iterations. The most significant, Dr. Rapuano explained, was the

*Continued on page 4*

Continued from page 3

development over 25 years ago of a particular partial corneal transplant (endothelial keratoplasty). Prior to this, most patients underwent full thickness transplants, which were more invasive procedures with much longer recovery times. Today, the partial thickness transplant has significantly shifted how physicians care for patients.



Christopher J. Rapuano, MD, Patrick Rapuano, MD, and Sara Burns Rapuano.

## Family

Dr. Rapuano and his wife, Sara Burns Rapuano, have four adult children—Michael, Patrick, Daniel and Megan—and two grandchildren. Sara was an ophthalmology practice administrator, who is now retired. She managed Dr. Rapuano’s practice for many years. Interestingly, three out of their four children are in the medical field. Patrick was a Wills Eye resident from 2020–2023 and served as Co-Chief Resident during his senior year.

## Reflecting on an Impactful Career

In addition to the gratification from treating and healing a broad array of patients, teaching fellows and following their careers has been very rewarding. “Some go on to academic careers and become chairs of their departments; others have built busy practices,” said Dr. Rapuano. “Over the years, I’ve seen many former fellows and residents at meetings. They continue to communicate with us to discuss patient concerns and new techniques.

“It’s really wonderful when former residents and fellows tell me years later that they hear my voice in their head when they do a corneal transplant, or they remember how I treated patients and they try to emulate that,” he said. “It really warms my heart.” ❦



## BILL LAWRENCE:

# GRATEFUL FOR HIS EYESIGHT

In June 2025, William “Bill” H. Lawrence was about to give up hope of recovering his failing eyesight. After five months of visiting ophthalmologists and optometrists throughout South Florida with no diagnosis or path for improvement, he finally arrived at Wills Eye Hospital in the office of Christopher J. Rapuano, MD.

“It was like I was in complete darkness and Dr. Rapuano turned on the lights,” recalled Bill, describing his first appointment as truly remarkable. “He spent a lot of time with me, explained what was going on, was reassuring, and came up with a plan of action. He didn’t promise that my vision would get better but said he would try hard to make sure that it wouldn’t get worse.”

Bill’s entire experience—from the time he entered the hospital—was extremely positive. “Everyone I encountered was very friendly and warm,” he said. “They took the time to talk to me, and I was treated really well. This made a world of difference.”

Bill, 64, had shingles in 2019 and was suffering long-term effects with scarring to his left eye, impacting his vision and daily activities. In early 2025, his vision problems escalated. One physician in Florida suggested a corneal transplant even though there was no confirmed diagnosis.

“I was so frustrated. I couldn’t play golf, couldn’t read the scores on ESPN. I really couldn’t do anything,” he recalled. “When I was watching television, reading, or driving (particularly at night), everything was blurry. Lights were extremely bright and I had a lot of floaters.”

Fearful that he could lose his vision, he asked his local optometrist to make a referral to the best place he knew of. “He told me to go to Wills Eye and Dr. Christopher Rapuano,” said Bill, who was familiar with Philadelphia as he had attended The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and served on their board. And his late mother was treated at the hospital over a decade ago.

“Shingles can cause problems to the front or back of the eye at the time a person contracts the disease or many years later,” said Dr. Rapuano. “Bill had problems in the front of his eye that caused his cornea to become scarred and develop abnormal blood vessel growth. The blood vessels and scarring severely affected his vision.” Treatment, a stepwise approach, began with anti-viral pills, steroid drops, and a shot of medication around the front of the eye, with the goal of decreasing the amount of blood vessels and improving vision.

Bill, who retired in 2019 after serving as CEO for over 25 years of a hedge fund he founded, splits his time between Jupiter, Florida; Saratoga, New York; and Avalon, New Jersey. He’s been passionately involved for many years with thoroughbred horse racing and numerous charities, which he plans to continue. He is finally feeling optimistic about the future. “My vision has been getting better and better,” said Bill, who is grateful to return to daily activities.

So, when Bill learned that the Cornea Service was undergoing a \$3.5 million renovation—doubling the number of exam and testing rooms—and was asked if he would lend his support as a lead benefactor to bring the project over the finish line, he didn’t hesitate. “That was a very easy decision,” he said. “Dr. Rapuano and Wills Eye have done so much for me. I was more than happy to support the project.” ❦



Bill Lawrence addresses the crowd on June 13, 2025, at the Bethlehem YMCA, Delmar, New York. The dedication ceremony was held to honor his longtime support and service to the community organization.

**“It was like I was in complete darkness and Dr. Rapuano turned on the lights.”**

—Bill Lawrence



From left: Joseph Kelly; Hon. Mark F. Squilla; Julia A. Haller, MD; Meridith Gray; Ken Gray; Hon. Michael A. Nutter; Hon. Derek S. Green; Christopher J. Rapuano, MD; Dominic A. Sabatini; Hon. Jeffery Young Jr.



## CORNEA SERVICE RIBBON CUTTING

On January 21, Wills Eye Hospital held a ribbon cutting ceremony to mark the completion of a \$3.5 million renovation to the Cornea Service. The upgrade will allow the team of cornea specialists to see 10,000 more patients annually. The renovation has doubled the number of testing and exam rooms, increased the waiting room capacity, and added two new dedicated procedure rooms.

Special guests at the event included members of the Board of Directors of City Trusts and Wills Eye Committee, Philadelphia City Councilmembers, Colleen McAllister representing State Representative Mary Isaacson, and partners from Bittenbender Construction and D2 Groups. Peter R. Laibson, MD, Founder and Cornea Service Director Emeritus, and his wife Ruth Laibson were also in attendance.

The project was made possible through the generosity of the Gray Charitable Trust, William H. Lawrence, George and Ruth Harms Family, and funding from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program. ■■■



From left: Kirsten Myers; Jonathan S. Myers, MD, Chief, Glaucoma Service; Julia A. Haller, MD; Thomas W. Burns, Chairman and CEO of Glaukos; and Janet Burns.

## WILLS EYE BALL CELEBRATES THE GLAUCOMA SERVICE

The Wills Eye Ball took place on November 15, 2025, with over 250 guests in attendance at The Bellevue Hotel in Philadelphia. The event celebrated the innovation and achievements of the Glaucoma Service and its champions, including Thomas W. Burns, Chairman and CEO of Glaukos Corporation, and Jonathan S. Myers, MD, Glaucoma Service Chief. Proceeds support the establishment of an Endowed Chair in Glaucoma. Dr. Myers has been named the Inaugural Chair.



Jim and Sue Anderson

During the program, Julia A. Haller, MD, announced a landmark, multimillion-dollar gift by grateful patients James and Susan Anderson. They have established the James J. and Susan J. Anderson Strategic Initiatives Endowment Fund to support operating needs at Wills Eye. ■■■

## 50TH ANNUAL ATLANTIC COAST RETINA CLUB & MACULA CONFERENCE

More than 500 physicians gathered at The Union League of Philadelphia from January 8–10 for an educational forum to share insights into the diagnosis, management, and treatment of retinal diseases.

Celebrating the 65th anniversary of the Wills Eye Retina Service, the conference featured world-renowned speakers who shared the latest innovations in imaging, uveitis, tumors, retinal dystrophies, and pharmacologic and surgical therapies. Medical mystery cases were also presented by residents, fellows, and faculty.

At the awards dinner held at The Penn Museum on Friday evening, the creation of the William E. Benson, MD – Julia A. Haller, MD Retina Research Fellowship was announced. ■■■



At the awards dinner held at The Penn Museum (from left): Sunir J. Garg, MD; Julia A. Haller, MD; Carl D. Regillo, MD; William E. Benson, MD (holding Wills Eye Bowl award); Allen C. Ho, MD; Arunan Sivalingam, MD.



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**WILLS EYE ON DIABETES DAY**

**Allen C. Ho, MD, and Charlotte Nelle Shields, MD**

Receive Humanitarian Service Award from the Pennsylvania Academy of Ophthalmology (PAO) for creating a statewide diabetic eye screening program.

In 2022, when Charlotte Nelle Shields, MD, was a medical student, she was shadowing Allen C. Ho, MD, in clinic. He was treating a man in his early 20s with diabetic retinopathy. “The patient was legally blind in one eye,” remembered Dr. Shields, who questioned why people were first coming in with such advanced disease.



At the February 13 award presentation at Wills Eye Hospital (from left): Scott Goldstein, MD, Past President, PAO; Charlotte Nelle Shields, MD, Wills Eye Resident; Allen C. Ho, MD, Director of Retina Research and Retina Service Co-Director; Jeffrey D. Henderer, MD, President-Elect, PAO; Julia A. Haller, MD.

According to Dr. Ho, “It was Nelle’s question that inspired us to create a free diabetic eye screening program at Wills Eye.” Later that year, a team of retina specialists, Jefferson medical students, and community volunteers launched *Wills Eye on Diabetes Day*.

“Diabetes is the number one cause of blindness among working age Americans and highly prevalent in the Philadelphia region, low socioeconomic and rural areas, and wherever there is food scarcity,” said Dr. Ho.

In 2023, Philadelphia’s Scheie Eye Institute and Temple Ophthalmology joined the same-day effort. And in 2025, with strong support from the Pennsylvania Academy of Ophthalmology, screenings took place across the state.

This year, screenings will also be offered in Delaware, Maryland, New York, and New Jersey.

“We still have a lot to do,” said Dr. Ho. “We want to educate and raise awareness about this public health issue. Our moonshot goal is to eliminate diabetic blindness and expand our reach across the nation.”

**Wills Eye on Diabetes Day, Saturday, April 25**

Registration required: [tinyurl.com/2rh6d879](https://tinyurl.com/2rh6d879)  
willseye.org

