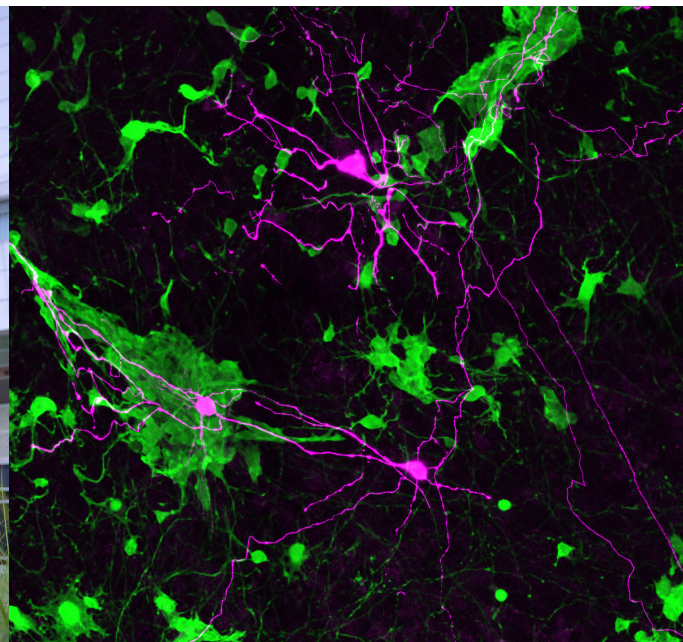




CASEY EYE
Institute



Donors Aid Quest to Stop “Silent Thief of Sight”

Glaucoma is a merciless enemy – a leading cause of irreversible blindness that often strikes without warning. At Casey Eye Institute, a dedicated battalion of researchers is fighting glaucoma on multiple fronts, their efforts fueled by a steady stream of funding from generous donors.

“We have made advances in treating glaucoma, but we need more basic research to truly understand and overcome this disease,” says Casey researcher Kate Keller, Ph.D. New drugs and surgical techniques can slow the progression of the disease, but the root cause of glaucoma is still not completely understood.

Basic glaucoma research is essential

That’s why basic cell and genetic studies are so crucial in glaucoma research. “We look at cells

derived from normal and glaucomatous human eyes to identify the key differences between them,” explains Keller. Using cultured cells and eye bank tissues, Casey’s glaucoma researchers analyze proteins, genes, and structures altered by glaucoma.

Other Casey research teams utilize animal models to study glaucoma. Continuing to use these models and conduct research at the molecular level is key to ultimately understanding – and interrupting – changes at the genetic and protein levels.

Casey Eye Institute has a decades-long history of innovative glaucoma research. Longtime supporters know John Morrison, M.D., Ted Acott, Ph.D., Mary Kelley, Ph.D., and other leaders in clinical and basic research have advanced the field to develop today’s clinical improvements.

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Donors, from page 1

Today, Casey continues to recruit top glaucoma researchers – and donor support makes this possible, as director of research David Huang, M.D., Ph.D., explains. “Each time we recruit a new faculty member, we support them with philanthropic funding for approximately three years. This allows them to get their research endeavors



▲ Like many faculty members at OHSU, Dr. Ted Acott’s innovative glaucoma research has been funded by philanthropy.

well under way at Casey, so they can apply for external grant funding.” Philanthropic support also allows established faculty to test new ideas in the laboratory before they become fully fledged research endeavors.

From Cells to Clinics: A Lengthy Journey

Transforming basic research insights into actual treatments for patients is an arduous, multi-stage process taking years or decades. While government grants from the National Institutes of Health and groups like Research to Prevent Blindness provide critical funding, these awards have cyclic gaps between funding periods. “Donor funding provides

a ‘bridge’ while researchers wait for new or renewed funding,” Dr. Keller explains.

“To keep our research continuous, excellent, and innovative, we need donor support,” says Dr. Huang. As an example, with initial results generated in part from the support of donor funds, Dr. Keller was able to secure three major NIH grants totaling \$2 million and take a lead role on a prestigious T32 training grant that supports two graduate students and a post-doctoral glaucoma researcher, helping launch the next generation of glaucoma researchers.

Donor funding also allowed Casey to support the clinical research of Aiyin Chen, M.D., a glaucoma specialist now developing an outreach and screening program that has the potential to help thousands of patients across the region and eventually, millions more.

“Dr. Chen is analyzing electronic health records (EHRs) to identify people who might need glaucoma screening,” Dr. Huang says. “We may be able to gather enough information from health records to know who needs to be screened with optical coherence tomography (OCT)” – a quick, precise and highly cost-effective imaging technology that Dr. Huang co-developed, and for which he has received many awards.

“Identified patients would be called in for an OCT scan and an eye pressure check,” Dr. Huang explains. “If the risk of glaucoma in the screened population is high enough, the cost of screening – which is very low with OCT – will be worthwhile.”

This donor-supported outreach program is “very important,” says Dr. Huang, for providing service to underserved patients and in supporting research. “The often-cited statistic that half the people with glaucoma don’t know they have it is still largely true. We have never managed to justify population-based glaucoma screening, so it is simply not done, and the disease damages eyesight before people ever know they have it. But this method could provide accurate screening at a low cost. It could have a major impact” – thanks to philanthropic support.

Finally, Dr. Keller notes that donor funds pay for cutting-edge equipment that accelerates research progress. “We can test new hypotheses or get results much faster with specialized instruments, which are so expensive that grant funding rarely covers them,” she explains.

A Relay Race Against Blindness

From basic lab studies on cells and tissues, to animal models, to clinical trials in patients, the race to develop better glaucoma solutions requires an interdisciplinary team effort. Casey’s unique strength is its ability to unite basic researchers with clinician-scientists under one roof.

“It’s really helpful to have that link between the lab and patient care,” says Dr. Keller. “Most institutions don’t have clinicians and basic scientists connected as closely as we do at Casey and OHSU.” Dr. Huang recently organized a cross-departmental retreat to bring together OHSU and Casey researchers and clinicians in glaucoma, neuro-ophthalmology, and neurology, sharing information and laying the groundwork for future research collaborations. This ensures a clear path for translating fundamental discoveries into potential new drugs, devices, or vision-preserving therapies that can be further developed and tested.

“When we get a new glaucoma treatment to patients, it’s thanks to a combination of support from the donor community, NIH, industry partners, and many others,” Dr. Keller says. “It takes a tremendous village working together tirelessly.”

After centuries of leaving glaucoma’s disabling impacts virtually untreated, modern medicine is finally beginning to shed light on this “silent thief of sight.” With sustained philanthropic support bolstering the efforts of brilliant minds at Casey Eye Institute, there is hope for revolutionary progress in detecting, preventing, and curing this age-old scourge of blindness. ■



▲ Dr. Joe Robertson has been a strong supporter of outreach programs in Oregon and abroad, including welcoming international visitors to OHSU.

Illuminating the World, One Pair of Eyes at a Time

In the realm of medical philanthropy, some stories touch our hearts and inspire us to make a difference. The establishment of the Tebbets Professorship at OHSU Casey Eye Institute is one of these stories, weaving together family bonds, Depression-era resilience, and a vision for a brighter future.

Former OHSU president and OHSU Casey Eye Institute chair Joe Robertson, M.D., M.B.A., is the catalyst behind this endowment. He has a deeply personal connection to Sterling and Annie Tebbets: Sterling is a distant cousin of Dr. Robertson, and the families built a strong bond that would span generations and ultimately benefit countless people facing vision challenges worldwide.

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Care, wisdom, and concern for others

Sterling and Annie Tebbets' life story exemplifies the power of frugality and wise investing. Despite Sterling's success as an investor, the couple maintained an incredibly thrifty lifestyle, shaped by their Depression-era experiences. This approach allowed them to accumulate significant wealth over their lifetime, which they chose to use for the greater good.

Dr. Robertson remained close to the Tebbets, taking his children C.J. and Katie to visit their Corvallis home in the Tebbets' later years. They grew close to the children, and their awareness of Dr. Robertson's work at Casey Eye Institute inspired their bequest to further his ophthalmology work. "They would be delighted to know that this professorship was funded—supporting a cause dear to me and also in a realm that had captured the interest of my daughter, creating cross cultural ties," shared Dr. Robertson. Dr. Robertson and Patricia Fisher Robertson completed funding of the professorship with matching funds from The Ford Family Foundation in Roseburg, OR, where Joe serves as a board member.

Today, we are thrilled to announce that the inaugural Tebbets Professorship is held by Mitchell Brinks, M.D., M.P.H. This appointment celebrates Dr. Brinks' exceptional skills and unwavering commitment to serving others. As the director of Casey Eye Institute's outreach programs, Dr. Brinks is leading the charge to eliminate preventable blindness in Oregon and beyond.

A global reach for eye care

Dr. Brinks' work embodies the spirit of the Tebbets Professorship, extending world-class vision care to those who need it most. His efforts are transforming eye care delivery through innovative approaches like the Oregon Vision Health Network (OVHN). This groundbreaking initiative combines telehealth,

community health workers, and mobile units to provide better eye care more quickly to more Oregonians.

"Six in ten cases of common eye disease are not found until after damage to the eye has already caused early vision loss," says Dr. Brinks. The OVHN aims to change this by bringing better tools for screening and care directly to communities. This will remove many common barriers to care and allow doctors to detect and treat eye diseases early, when they are most treatable.

Dr. Brinks' impact extends beyond Oregon's borders, including working with Casey faculty and local partners in American Samoa. Now, the underserved U.S. territory has a high-quality pediatric screening program as well as improved equipment and training for adult eye care and surgery. This collaboration is bringing sight-saving care to one of the most remote corners of the United States.

"Joe's guidance continues to elevate Casey's outreach programs," says Brinks. "He challenges us to extend our vision far, far into the future and take a broader view of what our programs are capable of. Whether we're addressing needs locally or globally, the same strategies can work wherever help is needed."

As we look to the future, we are filled with optimism. The Tebbets Professorship, through Dr. Brinks' leadership, will drive innovation in eye care, grow our outreach efforts, and bring the gift of sight to more people in need. This gift is a powerful reminder of how strategic philanthropy can create ripples of positive change that reach far and wide.

To our donors, supporters, and friends: thank you for being part of this journey. Your belief in our mission and your generous support makes stories like this possible. Together, we are not just funding a professorship—we are illuminating the world, one pair of eyes at a time, while honoring the legacy of Sterling and Annie Tebbets. ■

2024 Global Ophthalmology Summit Unites Experts to Advance Eye Health Worldwide

The 3rd Annual Global Ophthalmology Summit attracted over 360 attendees to Portland in August at one of the largest global ophthalmology gatherings to date. Since its inception at OHSU Casey Eye Institute in 2009, the conference has grown significantly to become a prominent annual event to advance eye health and reduce vision loss worldwide through education, research, collaboration, and public health advocacy.

This year the summit was chaired by Mitchell V. Brinks, M.D., MPH, Tebbetts Professor of Ophthalmology at OHSU Casey Eye Institute and one of the meeting's founders. It is co-hosted by the American Academy of Ophthalmology and a consortium of 15 academic medical centers across the country.

“By unifying strong and committed universities and partners in the field, we are now ready to elevate global eye health to the national stage and contribute more fully to sight saving work across the world,” said Brinks. “We believe this could lead to groundbreaking opportunities in education, research, and service – ultimately improving eye health.”

Hosting the summit in Portland provided a unique opportunity for Casey Eye Institute's faculty, residents, alumni, and OHSU medical students to contribute to, and be inspired by, the summit.



▲ As summit chair and host, Dr. Mitchell V. Brinks welcomed visitors from around the world to the annual event.

Bringing the best minds in global ophthalmology together with the high-powered faculty in Oregon will lead to even greater contributions to shaping the future of global ophthalmology research, patient care and training worldwide.

The U.S. academic ophthalmology community is uniquely positioned to engage in collaborative global eye health research, innovation, education, and capacity building with international partners. “By pooling our resources and expertise, we can drive growth across institutions and continents, ultimately leading to significant advancements in eye care both at home and abroad.” Brinks added. ■

BY THE NUMBERS | Fiscal Year 2024 (July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024)



158,000

patient visits



8,330

surgeries



2,500

emergency and inpatient consults



68

ongoing clinical trials

Casey Community Outreach Program in 2023

882 participants screened

600 glasses given

341% increase in telehealth screenings

158 community health workers trained

A Vision of Hope: Oregon Elks Celebrate 75-Years Advancing Children's Eye Health

For 75 years, the Oregon State Elks Association has been a beacon of hope for children's eye health in Oregon. What began in 1949 with a \$2,000 donation has blossomed into a decades-long partnership with the Oregon Elks Children's Eye Clinic, a division of OHSU Casey Eye Institute, that has transformed pediatric ophthalmology in the state.

From the early days of supporting research into retinopathy of prematurity to the creation of the nation's first freestanding children's eye clinic, the Elks have been there every step of the way. Their unwavering commitment has funded groundbreaking research, state-of-the-art equipment, and innovative programs like the Elks Preschool Vision Screening initiative, which screens thousands of children annually.

"We are proud of our association with the Casey Eye Institute and now the Oregon Elks Children's Eye Clinic," says Lanny Schulze, President of the Elks Youth Eye Service. "We are honored to continue



We wish to recognize Joanna Vaughan, M.B.A., who has served many years as liaison to the Oregon State Elks Association and director of the

Elks Preschool Vision Screening Program. The program has been nothing short of transformative under her visionary leadership, ensuring that countless Oregon children benefit from early detection and treatment for common vision-threatening conditions. Please help us wish Joanna the best of luck in her retirement.



▲ Members of the Oregon State Elks Association visit the Elks Children's Eye Clinic in Bend, Ore.

the legacy that started with Oregon City Lodge member Judge Robert Mulvey, and proud of our accomplishments over these 75 years."

The Elks' impact extends far beyond financial support. Their members have volunteered countless hours and crafted hundreds of comforting quilts for young patients. They were also instrumental in Casey Eye Institute's ability to expand care to more children with a new clinic in Bend, Ore., in 2023.

In 2020, the Elks' partnership reached new heights with the opening of the Oregon Elks Children's Eye Clinic. This state-of-the-art facility was made possible by a \$20 million pledge from the Elks, and houses many important programs and clinics.

"The Oregon State Elks Association's support has enabled us to push the boundaries of pediatric eye and vision care," says Dr. Andreas Lauer, Margaret Thiele-Petti and August Petti Endowed Chair and director of the Casey Eye Institute. "This partnership is not just about funding; it's about a shared vision of ensuring every child in Oregon has access to world-class eye care."

The Oregon State Elks Association's generosity and steadfast dedication to children's eye health has built an enduring legacy. Together, we continue to pioneer advancements in pediatric ophthalmology, improving lives across Oregon and beyond. ■

David Huang, M.D., Ph.D., named 2024 Oregon History Maker

Oregon Health & Science University ophthalmologist and scientist David Huang, M.D., Ph.D., has been named a 2024 Oregon History Maker by the Oregon Historical Society. Since 2009, the society has bestowed the award onto individuals and organizations that are “positively shaping the history, culture, and landscape of Oregon.”



▲ David Huang, M.D., Ph.D.

Huang co-invented the ground-breaking biomedical imaging technology known as optical coherence tomography, or OCT, in the early 1990s, when he was an M.D./Ph.D. student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University. The

technology has transformed the way physicians detect and manage eye diseases, and is also increasingly used for conditions of the heart, skin, esophagus and more.

“I am deeply humbled and honored to be recognized as a 2024 Oregon History Maker. I am excited to continue advancing biomedical imaging and optics research, and proud to contribute to Oregon’s leadership in science and health care.”

Huang is the Wold Family Chair in Ophthalmic Imaging, associate director and director of research at the OHSU Casey Eye Institute. He is also a professor of ophthalmology and biomedical engineering in the OHSU School of Medicine. Huang continues to improve OCT through research at the Center for Ophthalmic Optics and Lasers at OHSU Casey Eye Institute. ■

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