

the VISIONARY

A PUBLICATION FROM THE CENTRAL OHIO LIONS EYE BANK

Cornea Recipient Keith Smith Pitches for the Eye Bank

Pitching a baseball is no novelty to cornea transplant recipient Keith Smith of Canal Winchester; he's been doing that in various competitive leagues in the area for years. But this May was the first time he ever threw out the first pitch for the Columbus Clippers, and it wasn't an opportunity he anticipated before the Central Ohio Lions Eye Bank contacted him about doing just that, to commemorate the opening of the Fifth Annual Eye Bank Night at the Clippers.

It was in college when Keith began to notice the disturbances in his ability to play baseball and to read that led him to cornea specialist John Stechschulte, M.D. Dr. Stechschulte diagnosed Keith's problem as keratoconus, a disorder in which the cornea diverts from its usual rounded shape and becomes cone-like, causing significant distortion in vision. Keith was told about cornea transplants early on but there were other treatments that his doctor recommended he exhaust before turning to surgery.

So for a number of years, with his doctor telling him to be patient, Keith tried various corrective lenses and continued to play ball. He experienced dry eyes and began to notice that he was getting headaches; and whenever he found himself becoming ill, an aching in his left eye was an early sign.

Keith's doctor told him he'd know when it was time to have a cornea transplant.

"I came to the point where I couldn't play (ball) in the evening; I couldn't see when it became dusk." He compensated for the bad vision in his left eye by turning his head when he batted. He also saw too many lights when he was driving.

"I didn't want to give up softball. It was always my dream to continue to play and to have my son on the team," Keith said. But he couldn't wear contact lenses as they caused dryness in his eyes, and he didn't like to wear glasses – he found them too uncomfortable. So he and Dr. Stechschulte agreed that the time had come for a transplant.

"Having that surgery was one of my scariest moments ever," Keith says. He felt vulnerable. He left the surgery with a patch on his left eye, and then healed very quickly. "It was

amazing. I never could see people from a distance, and I had to explain it to them because they thought I was ignoring them." That problem disappeared after his transplant. He also marveled at the clarity of his new vision, and the colors he was able to see.

As a transplant recipient, Keith thought a lot about his donor. "You really appreciate what you have received, someone giving you that opportunity, giving part of themselves to make someone better." The doctor alluded to the donor as someone who had been young. Keith says that "tore me a little bit, really touched me, because someone



Before the pitch, cornea recipient Keith Smith stands behind daughter, Audrey; flanked by (from left): son Michael; daughter Madeline; wife Michelle; daughter Alexandra; and mother-in-law Norma Guevara.

made a tough decision" about eye donation in order to give him back his vision. He says he is a donor, and he's talked about it with his children, Madeline – 19, Alexandra – 17, Michael – 14 (dad coaches his softball team!), and Audrey – 12, as well as wife Michelle. And at the May 19th Clippers game, Keith's perfect pitch demonstrated the triumph of his own cornea donor's very special gift.

Gifts to the Eye Bank Make Progress Possible

A message from Phyllis McNabb, executive director, Central Ohio Lions Eye Bank

As always, our most recent contributors are listed in this edition of our newsletter, "The Visionary." We can't say "thank you" enough on behalf of the hundreds of patients who benefit each year from your thoughtfulness. Contributing to the Central Ohio Lions Eye Bank helps us make available the corneas needed for sight-restoring transplants, as well as the other eye tissues that we provide for various types of ocular surgeries. A gift to the Eye Bank also helps us to support eye research and continuing education for eye physicians, resulting in advancements in eye care.

The Eye Bank's Lions Board recently established the **Richard G. Lembach Eye Banking Education, Research, and Development Fund**, which honors our Medical Director and mentor. The gifts made to that Fund will be used to further the Eye Bank's ability to remain a state-of-the-art organization by ensuring access to the latest trainings; funding Eye Bank research projects; and expanding our capacity to serve the patients in our community by supporting innovation in eye banking.

Lions Clubs have given over \$24,000 to the Eye Bank this year. Those funds help purchase needed new and replacement

equipment, and provide the Donor Memorial Medallions that the Eye Bank sends to every eye donor's family to honor their loved ones' Gift of Sight. Our "needs" list is never blank. For example, now that we are cutting even thinner corneas to surgeons' specifications – which may vary from patient to patient – we are in need of equipment that will accurately measure thickness below 100 microns. The price tag on the ocular computed tomographer? About \$49,000.

We are grateful for the private contributions that come from patients, physicians, and other members of our community who (often) have a personal experience or connection that compels them to support the Eye Bank's mission. And we are also grateful to Old Trail Printing for donating the printing of our newsletters, and to Philip's Coney Island restaurant, where eye donation and the Central Ohio Lions Eye Bank receive regular and prominent support.

We again thank all of you who choose to contribute to the Central Ohio Lions Eye Bank. Each gift helps as we strive to achieve our vision, opening greater opportunities for sight restoration.

Phyllis

Eyes On Summer!

Summer brings strong cautions from eye health and eye safety organizations, urging the public to remember, while enjoying the many great and long-anticipated summer activities, to protect your eyes from sun damage, fireworks, unsafe toys, and potential sports hazards. Sunglasses with UV-A and UV-B protection along with hats can help reduce potential harm from the sun. Staying away from fireworks (even professional displays carry a degree of danger) and dart-type games, and inspecting toys for parts that could poke or become trajectories are other ways in which to avoid accidental eye injuries. Water and pool activities are said to be the second-most dangerous sports for eyes, and number one when it comes to children ages 0 – 14. Many sports are attended by recommendations to wear such items as safety goggles and special helmets. Age- and activity-appropriate supervision, awareness of possible dangers, and common sense are key to helping ensure a fun summer without eye damage. Web sites such as www.nei.nih.gov/sports and www.preventblindness.org publish information on avoiding eye damage and handling eye injuries. To "summer-eyes," the sites are worth a look when the weather is heating up.

Thanks to All Who Attended Eye Bank Night at the Clippers

With special thanks to the following friends:

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STAFF PROFILE

Hospital Education Coordinator – Cristina DeLaSerda

Cristina DeLaSerda may not yet have set a “five-year plan” when she began her work for the Eye Bank as an intern from OSU’s English department in 2007. But the positive qualities she brought to the Eye Bank were immediately and lastingly apparent, so, when she graduated with her BA in English, we convinced her to stay on. With her newborn son Benicio often in tow, she provided assistance to a range of other staff members, and through those activities became more familiar with – and more passionate about – the Eye Bank’s mission. When the former Education Coordinator retired two years ago, it was clear that Cristina was ready to step into that position. She has been the “face of the Eye Bank” in the 50 + hospitals with which she interacts ever since.



Cristina with son Benicio at the 2012 “Eye Bank Night at the Clippers” game.

Benicio is now five, and only accompanies his mom to work on occasion these days. Everyone in the office has a signed original piece of his artwork, created specifically for him/her while Cristina was going about her in-house duties. Needless to say, he’s a very popular visitor. As for his mother – Cristina has become a vital member of the Eye Bank’s staff and does an excellent job of representing and teaching about the Eye Bank in Eye Donor Program hospitals. She spends much of her time on the road presenting approved continuing education modules to nurses, chaplains, and social workers who make requests for eye donations. What stands out to her in her travels, she explains, is the fact that, “in the last year, I crossed paths with so many Designated Requestors that also had a personal connection to eye donation.” She felt gratified by “being able to provide some comfort and a more clear understanding to them about their loved one’s gift.”

Our hospital liaisons tell us she’s a welcome presence who is responsive to their educational and other needs related to eye donations. Cristina’s glass seems always to be half-full; her optimistic attitude and her enthusiasm for the Eye Bank’s mission come across in every class she teaches. Among her recent achievements, Cristina was a featured speaker at Riverside Methodist Hospital’s donor memorial service. When asked what makes her so positive about her work at the Eye Bank, Cristina responds that, “ultimately this entire process is all about helping others. In many ways, it’s a daily reminder that [in a sometimes harsh world] there IS some good left out there.”

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Fifth Annual Eye Bank Night at the Clippers



Friends of the Eye Bank who joined us at the ballpark, clockwise from top left: Pam & Mitch Opremcak, M.D.; John Stechschulte, M.D. with Anila and Kiran Sajja, M.D.; Karen Gallo and Grandson Tyler; PDG John and Carol Dilley; and John Stechschule, M.D., Lilane Fox, and Keith Smith.

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Be a part of the vision.

OUR MISSION | To restore, improve, and preserve vision by connecting eye donors and transplant recipients, educating physicians, and enhancing research through quality eye banking services.

Special thanks to: Old Trail Printing for donating the printing of The Visionary and Phillips Coney Island for promoting National Eye Donor Month in March

- Fifth Annual Eye Bank Night at the Clippers
- Eye Bank Staff Profile
- Tips for Summer Eye Protection



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