

In order to get to know your Vision Source® colleagues a little better, Vision Source® OD will include profiles of doctors in the network in this and future issues.

Driven to Succeed

New graduates take on business ownership; Vision Source® membership helps create vision

Sarah Berg, OD, began her optometry career as an associate doctor in Dallas, yet just a year later, her dream of becoming a business owner brought her to Austin. Dr. Berg and her husband and practice partner, Kyle Florio, OD, purchased an existing Vision Source® practice there, a former office of Vision Source® member Laurie Sorrenson, OD, FAAO. "We kept the practice the way it was and decided to stay with Vision Source®," Dr. Berg says. Over the



Dr. Berg, above, and Dr. Florio, at right, have seen consistent growth in their five-year-old practice.

next four years, Dr. Berg and Dr. Florio worked on building their practice, and soon they needed a larger space for the growth they were seeing. "We rented that first location, and we really wanted to be in control of where we were and what businesses were around us," she explains.

Dr. Berg and Dr. Florio looked to the outskirts of Austin, and about an hour away they found Dripping Springs, a rapidly growing community with just one optometrist in town. The partners purchased a plot of land, and construction began on a larger health care facility in which they rent their extra office space to other medical professionals.

Dr. Berg collaborated with EyeDesigns to bring her vision for a high-end clinic to life. Together with her designer, they analyzed every detail in the 3,100-square-foot space at

Vision Source® Dripping Springs and incorporated high ceilings and floor-to-ceiling windows, bringing natural light into the reception and optical areas to create a warm and welcoming feel.

The doctors kept their partnership with Vision Source® when they opened the new office. "We had to start all over, and it can be very expensive," Dr. Berg says. She wanted the office to incorporate high-technology equipment, and electronic medical records were essential since some of her office technology, such as the visual

field camera, can deliver data to patients' charts directly. And while there are still items on her wish list, she's thankful that their Vision Source® membership allowed for some purchases of brand-new instrumentation and for some of the best deals



they received on products for patients. "We get the biggest bang for our buck with the Vision Source® contact lens and frame vendors."

In the beginning at Dripping Springs, Dr. Berg and Dr. Florio answered phones, edged lenses and dispensed eyeglasses on their own, and even now with a full-time staff of two, they still remain very hands-on in many parts of the business, including medical billing. The doctors managed both of their offices until a few years ago, when the Dripping Springs office was able to support them full time. "We're now in our fifth year of being open, and we grow significantly every year," Dr. Berg says, adding that she would like to see the business hit the \$1 million mark in its future. She kept in

mind the practice's continual growth when designing the office, and just two of its four exam rooms are fully equipped. "Our goal is to continue to grow and get more patients and keep as many as we can," she says. "People appreciate how beautiful the clinic is, that our staff is really nice and that they can have a great experience without going all the way to Austin."

These happy patients often tell their friends and family about the customer service at Vision Source® Dripping Springs. "We have a very strong following," Dr. Berg says. ✓

OUTREACH IN A SMALL TOWN

Vision Source® Dripping Springs keeps connected with its patients via email or text messages to remind them of their preappointed annual exams, for surveys or to share office news and promotions. "Dripping Springs is a small town, and it's not like Austin where people drive by often. We are on a quiet road," Dr. Sarah Berg explains. So they rely on word-of-mouth referrals to draw in new faces, as well as the practice's participation on multiple insurance panels and some local advertising. "We are medically credentialed, and we take as many insurance plans as we can," she says. Dr. Berg plans to be more selective down the road, but not until the practice is bigger and more established in the community. ✓

Finding Ways to Keep Refreshing a 30-year-old Practice

Kevin Brown, OD, and Cynthia Johnson, OD, met in optometry school in Houston. When they graduated in 1983, they looked for a place to open a practice—small-town charm with big-town atmosphere. They found the perfect mix in Vermillion, S.D., with a population of 5,000 that swells to 10,000 when the University of South Dakota is in full swing.

They were determined to make a go of it, creating a practice that would allow them and their children—one now in high school and the other in pre-med studies in college—to participate fully in the community. Dr. Brown grew up in a town of 4,000 residents in Nebraska. Dr. Johnson grew up just an hour or so away from Vermillion, in a South Dakota town with 350 people. But opening a practice cold was no cakewalk. “On the first day we opened, I answered the one phone call and she saw the one patient. The second day, we switched roles,” Dr. Brown recalls, laughing. The couple spent their weekends refurbishing the basement of the building that housed their practice—and they lived there for three years.

By 2006, though, the practice was

going strong, and the owners relocated to a 6,000-square-foot facility with the latest in diagnostic equipment and electronic medical records. They had also joined

Vision Source® a few years before; in fact, they’ve just renewed their agreement for the next five years.



From supporting the high school teams to talking to students about their career options in health care, Dr. Brown and Dr. Johnson are deeply involved.



Dr. Brown notes that one of the challenges for doctors and staff working together for years is that they become a little set in their ways. It takes some energy to shake off the “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” mentality about practice procedures. But that’s just what they did about a year ago when they turned their handoff model upside down.

“We used to employ the traditional method where one technician does the pretesting, the doctor conducts the exam and another optician or technician works with contact lenses or eyeglasses selection. But what we found was that we were breaking up the communication. We didn’t know who said what to whom,” Dr. Brown says.

So they more fully cross-trained their staff and promoted them to be personal opticians. The personal optician now greets a specific patient upon entry and stays with that patient for every step of the visit. The optician conducts pretesting, serves as a scribe in the exam room, helps with the eyewear selection and makes the next appointment for that patient.

“Our staff costs went up 22 percent, which was big for a small practice,” says Dr. Brown. But the good news is that all the positive measures went up, too.

Last year, the practice netted its highest revenue ever, in a part of the country where the economy isn’t exactly booming. “Our patient reviews on Demandforce have improved, the patient experience is better and our per-patient revenues have increased,” Dr. Brown says.

He attributes that to his ability to spend his time with patients in face-to-face conversation, rather than having to turn to input data into the computer. The scribe takes care of that.

About eight staff members work the equivalent of five full-time positions, and the practice typically runs on a 1.5-doctor



Former University of South Dakota basketball star Ricardo Andreotti visited before starting his career in Austria.

THE VISION SOURCE® DIFFERENCE

After 10 years with Vision Source®, Dr. Kevin Brown and Dr. Cynthia Johnson decided to renew their agreement with the network because of the changing landscape of optometry. “We are excited about the possibility of being able to prosper under an accountable care organization or through the Affordable Care Act, but it’s nice to have that guidance that Vision Source® provides. We enjoy what we do, and the outlook is good.”

schedule. “We’ve always had it that way, and as a result, one of us has been able to make every baseball game, football game, performance or other school event,” he says. “We’ve been able to travel and we’ve been able to staff the concession stands,” he says. That comes back to the commitment to the family and community that brought the doctors to Vermillion in the first place.

HIGH-TECH AND PERSONAL

Dr. Kevin Brown says his demographics include two distinct groups: longtime, older residents, often farmers; and university students and professionals. Yet all of the practice’s patients appreciate being able to receive high-tech eye care in the community, rather than having to drive an hour north to Sioux Falls. “Just because it’s rural, doesn’t mean it’s not high-tech,” he says. That applies to communications, too. As the office was preparing for a frame show recently, the single biggest advertising push was through Facebook.