

visionary values

OPTOMETRY PRACTICE SERVES FAMILIES AND THE COMMUNITY

By Holli Moncrieff

The term “superwoman” could have been coined to describe Dr. Renée Phipps.

An optometrist and entrepreneur who owns three Prairie Eye Care locations with her husband, Dr. Nana Owusu, Phipps is also an author, an eyewear designer, and a busy mother of three.

This fall, she'll publish a book, *Harry the Bear and the Perfect Pair*, which teaches children about glasses and eye exams. And her line of eyeglass frames for children is in the prototype-testing phase. They're meant to be both affordable and durable, and her own kids will put them to the ultimate test.

“If the frames can endure the three of them, I'm hopeful they can last in any household,” she laughs.

A self-described “science nerd,” Phipps' fascination with physics, calculus, and biology drew her to optometry. It's also happens to be an ideal fit with her devotion to family, her patients and the community.

“Optometry has been a field that accommodates being a mother. It's given me the flexibility to be the mom that I want to be while being a doctor,” she says.

Phipps has a special interest in pediatrics, and her flexible schedule also allows her to give more quality time to her patients. She says the No. 1 complaint she hears from families who've frequented other practices is that they felt too rushed.

“We never want them to feel that way. The best part of my job is working with families. We're invited to soccer games and dance recitals, and we're honoured they made us a part of their lives. It's wonderful to watch these kids grow,” she says. “Our patients always tell us that we put them at ease and listen to their concerns.”

Phipps has treated babies as young as six months old. In one case, she discovered an infant had retinoblastoma, a rare form of cancer that develops from the immature cells of the retina.

“The mother noticed something was different with her child's eyes, and we were able to save the baby's life,” she says.

Many people don't realize that optometry is about a lot more than vision, she adds.

“The eyes are really closely tied to your overall health. If a patient is not managing their blood sugar properly, we see changes in the eye,” she says. “We've had patients who didn't realize they had diabetes or multiple sclerosis until they had their eyes checked.”

Prairie Eye Care works to meet the needs of the community in several ways. For example, dry eye clinics are available at each of its locations.

Phipps says dry eye disease has increased significantly, partly due to an upsurge in computer-screen use and our prairie climate.

The team also volunteers time and expertise to non-profit vision care organization OneSight, and for the past 10 years, Phipps and Owusu, who coaches a high school football team, have sponsored a scholarship for young athletes.

“One of our early recipients just got into med school,” she says. “It's really humbling to see our efforts are making a difference.”

Phipps and Owusu met when they were studying optometry in Chicago. Before settling in Winnipeg they practiced in Florida, where they were adjunct clinical instructors for the Illinois College of Optometry, and they continue to mentor optometry students in Winnipeg.

“We hope that our sense of community, strong clinical skills, and varied patient population will help to influence the next generation of doctors to be the best they can be.” ■

Prairie Eye Care locations in Winnipeg are at 1399 McPhillips St., 1020 Lorimer Blvd., and 1795 Henderson Hwy. Learn more at www.prairieeye.com.

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