



# Up Close

with BARBARA L. HORN, OD

## What drew you to optometry?

I was introduced to optometry in elementary school, watching my brother go through his vision therapy sessions. Later, in my first week of optometry school, our practice management educator asked us to present on any topic of our choosing. I chose “the alphabet soup of optometry” starting with AAO, AOA, AOSA, ARBO, and many others. (Those are just the A’s.) I soon realized that, while all of the alphabet soup is critical to the functioning of optometry, only one safeguards, advances, and continues to represent and protect us all—the AOA. Early on, I recognized the important role the optometric profession plays in our society by providing high-quality eye and vision care that helps make a difference in the lives of patients and our communities each and every day.

## How did you become President of the American Optometric Association (AOA)?

I knew from the first week in optometry school that I would not only practice as an optometrist, but that I would also be someone who volunteered in any way I could to help continue to fight and advocate for our profession. Although I did not set out with a goal of rising through executive positions in the AOA, I was proud and happy to take on opportunities that would challenge me clinically, professionally, and personally. Today, I am honored to be one of the growing number of women who are shaping the face of eye health and vision care and leading to improve the health of the nation.

## What do you hope to accomplish during your term as President?

Through the #2020EyeExam initiative, we are spotlighting optometry’s

essential and expanding role in health care, and we aim to leverage the collective power of the AOA’s doctor and student members to educate the public about the importance of comprehensive eye exams. The campaign encourages Americans to make 2020 the year they schedule an in-person, comprehensive eye exam with an AOA doctor of optometry and make it a part of their annual health care routine.

As President, I also plan to advance laws to help ensure that doctors are able to practice contemporary optometry. With doctors of optometry in more than 10,000 communities across the country, we are a critical key to primary eye health care for all Americans, and we could make access a reality for 99% of our nation’s patients.

Another goal of mine is to support the continued advancement of the practice and profession of optometry through membership growth. AOA membership is a major focus, and our United in Possibilities nationwide membership campaign is garnering the attention not only of prospective members, but also of industry leaders who recognize the AOA’s campaign for excellence, innovation, and achievement. Collaborations between the AOA and state associations employ a fully integrated, multichannel plan for demonstrating the value of membership to millennial doctors of optometry within 10 years of graduation. Partnering with participating affiliates is how we are able to make this campaign a success.

## Is it hard juggling your role with the AOA and your practice at Indigo Vision Center in South Carolina?

I am in a very busy, high-tech practice with one other doctor, and the rule of thumb is that the AOA President typically travels 140 days per year. Having

to accommodate the travel schedule and other commitments required as president can be challenging, but, fortunately, I have terrific family support.

It does take a lot of sacrifice, but I’m always intentional about blocking time to spend with my husband, Patrick, and two amazing children, Brooke and Mick. They were born into the family of optometry and support the profession with their time, energy, and passion. In our spare time, we love to walk on the beach and play darts and pool. My personal favorite activity is rollerblading.

## What lessons has your work taught you?

The biggest lesson I have learned throughout my career is the importance and value of membership. By supporting the AOA, you support your own livelihood. That is why I am passionate about invigorating students and young ODs and keeping them involved in organized optometry. We need more women and men to aspire to be leaders and to start by volunteering any way that they can in a local, state, or national committee. There is an opportunity to get them informed to help increase public awareness and contribute to the overall standing of the profession.

## What book or books have left a lasting impression on you?

It has been a while since I have had time to read anything but emails, but my favorite books were *The Da Vinci Code* and its prequel and sequels.

## What three words best describe you?

Passionate, caring, and determined. ■

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- Financial disclosure: President (AOA)