



ONE TO WATCH

LARAE ZIMPRICH, OD, FAAO

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Please share with us your background.

I grew up on a farm outside of Hazel, South Dakota, with my parents and older brother. Most of my childhood consisted of playing sports, spending time at the lake, and helping around the farm. I earned a basketball scholarship from the University of Sioux Falls and graduated with a degree in biology. I went on to optometry school at Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences and graduated in 2019. Eventually, I made my way back to the Midwest to complete my residency at Vance Thompson Vision in South Dakota.

Describe your current position.

I am a full-time associate at Vance Thompson Vision in Sioux Falls. It is an OD/MD practice, and I specialize in managing anterior segment surgical care, including cataract, corneal disease, glaucoma, and refractive surgeries. The fast pace and complexity of cases keeps me on my toes!

Who are your mentors?

The optometrists and ophthalmologists at Vance Thompson Vision have been instrumental in the development of my clinical abilities. They are such a passionate group who genuinely care about my aspirations. Each doctor is always willing to share with me their experiences and unique perspectives, and this has helped me thrive early in my career.

As a student going through my rotations, I had the pleasure of training

under Tom Arnold, OD, in Sugar Land, Texas. I learned many invaluable lessons, such as the ins and outs of running a successful clinic and the intricacies of fitting scleral lenses, and I broadened my interest in treating the anterior segment.

My future husband, Jacob Diedrich, OD, is also one of my greatest mentors. We first met in optometry school, and then moved to South Dakota following graduation. He has been my constant support system and continues to motivate me to improve every day.

What has been the most memorable experience of your career thus far?

From a young age, I had a desire to help others, which was a big reason why I chose optometry. I was fortunate enough to go on a Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity mission trip to Nicaragua to provide eye exams for the local community. Our group saw more than 4,000 patients in 4 days. Restoring sight to those who are less fortunate was a remarkable experience.

What are some new technological advances that you find particularly exciting? Which advances in the pipeline are you most enthusiastic or curious about?

We are in the clinical trials for descemetorhexis without endothelial keratoplasty. Patients do not need donor tissue; therefore, there is no risk of rejection, no air bubble or laying on their back post surgery, and

no long-term steroid drops. The results have been very promising thus far.

Describe a typical day in your life. What keeps you busy, fulfilled, and passionate?

I love to get a workout or cycle class in before the day starts. After some morning coffee, I head to work to see patients. I enjoy a busy schedule and every day can be a little different. Our practice is largely referral-based, so you never know what could walk through the door. It could be a patient who got hit in the eye with a firework, or a patient with glaucoma who is progressing and needs a procedure with the Omni Surgical System (Sight Sciences). At the end of the day, I like to relax by reading, working on home-projects, and spending time with family, friends, and my chocolate lab, Maggie.

What advice can you offer to individuals who are just now choosing their career paths after finishing optometry school or a residency?

Never forget your core reasons for choosing this profession. Make the most of your opportunities, don't be afraid to take risks, trust your gut, and you will eventually be rewarded in the end. ■

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