



Up Close

with JOSEPH J. PIZZIMENTI, OD, FAAO

What drew you to optometry?

I was a chemistry major planning on graduate school in that field. During the summer between my junior and senior years, I accompanied my mother to a visit with her optometrist, Salvatore J. Shakir, OD. I enjoyed observing him complete a comprehensive eye exam on my mom, which led to a prompt and accurate diagnosis of glaucoma. A doctor of optometry was instrumental in saving my mom's sight. Needless to say, this made an impression on me.

Who are your mentors?

I've been fortunate to have several. In addition to Dr. Shakir, there were Daniel K. Roberts, OD, PhD; and Susan A. Cotter, OD, my professors at Illinois College of Optometry; and Randall Jose, OD; Kia B. Eldred, OD; and Nick Holdeman, OD, MD, my residency supervisors at the University of Houston. These are just a few.

What do you like most about being a professor at the University of the Incarnate Word Rosenberg School of Optometry? Have you learned anything from your students?

Oh yes! My experience with optometry students has taught me that effective teaching involves more than becoming a subject matter expert. Teachers at all levels need to develop and expand their knowledge in the field of teaching and learning, including developing effective instructional strategies, reaching today's optometry students, and taking advantage of technology. Collaborating with interns and residents brings me much fulfillment and keeps me enthused.

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

Moving with my family to Poland in 2006 to complete a Fellowship

awarded to me by the World Council of Optometry. I taught at the optometry school in Poznan, Poland, and evaluated other optometry programs in the Czech Republic.

You created the first US optometry CE meeting devoted exclusively to OCT. What led you to this idea?

OCT has become an integral part of optometric care. The technology has exploded in its capabilities with the recent emergence of OCT angiography and multimodal imaging. My friend and colleague James L. Fanelli, OD, and I realized that clinicians could benefit from a distinctive program of CE that focused on all aspects of OCT: everything from image interpretation to clinical applications of OCT in anterior and posterior segment disease, glaucoma, neuro-ophthalmic disease, and even specialty contact lens design. The inaugural All Things OCT Conference took place in March 2018 during the annual Eye Ski Week in Park City, Utah. We recently completed our third annual All Things OCT.

You are a past president of the Optometric Retina Society, coauthored a book chapter on diabetic retinopathy, and completed research in several areas related to retina. How did you develop an interest in this subspecialty?

As an optometry student I attended my first academy lecture by William L. Jones, OD, the first president of the Optometric Retina Society, who spoke about retinal degenerations, breaks, and detachments. I concurrently developed an interest in low vision rehabilitation. Congenital and acquired diseases of the retina are responsible for much of the world's blindness. I consider myself a primary care optometrist with a special

interest in posterior segment disease. It's wonderful to have so many colleagues expand their knowledge in this area and take on a proactive role in retinal care.

What is the legacy you hope to leave behind in the eye care profession?

As I mentioned, I was fortunate to have mentors who have helped me along the way; in fact, I still seek their advice, not just about optometry or career decisions, but in all aspects of life. Now I seek out opportunities to pay it forward by serving as a mentor for others. Sometimes it is just being generous with my time if a colleague needs assistance.

Where is your favorite place to travel? What is next on your bucket list?

Living in Central Europe for a time fueled my family's desire to see the world. My favorite place to visit is Sicily, although I'm a bit biased because of my Sicilian heritage. Sicily's geography is diverse, and each town has a unique history and personality. Its culture has been influenced by the many civilizations that lived on the island. Of course, the food and wine there are as good as it gets. Next on my list is a wine-centric visit to Tuscany. Ciao, ciao! ■

Join Dr. Pizzimenti for CE in Italy and Europe by visiting www.ceinitaly.com. Also, check www.allthingsoct.com for upcoming All Things OCT conferences.

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