

President's Insights March 2022

Everyday optometrists have impact on our patient's lives. We all have stories about the two-year-old who, immediately upon putting on a pair of glasses, stops fussing and looks up and smiles at mom. Or the veteran whose eyes were damaged during his service and with scleral lenses can see 20/20 for the first time in decades. Or the young woman who has been having headaches for months and after visits to several health care professionals, comes to our office and we identify and get her treated for IHH. Through examples of professional care, we have all probably had young patients who have entered optometry as a career partially due to their experience in our offices. In our clinic, we have the honor and pleasure of precepting fourth year ICO students and contributing to their education making sure they are ready for real world optometry once they graduate. There are a few optometrists whose impact on optometry and eye care goes above and beyond and deserves being mentioned.

In my role as President, I was honored to represent VOSH/International at the 14th Mexican National Congress of Optometry of AMFECCO (Mexican Association of Faculties, Schools, Colleges and Councils of Optometry) hosted by the Universidad Autónoma de la Laguna (UAL) in Coahuila, Torreon. I gave a short presentation about VOSH, participated in a radio interview about the importance of optometry and discussed the importance of the equipment VOSH donated to the Torreon University General Hospital for a joint ophthalmology and optometry diabetes eye screening project. I was also fortunate to meet and spend time with Licensed Optometrist Beatriz Gomez Serna, the faculty adviser of our SVOSH chapter at UAL.

Beatriz Gomez, AKA Miss Betti around the university and to her students, graduated as an optometrist from UAL. When she and her husband Fernando started a family, she reluctantly set aside her optometry career to take care of their three children. Due to Fernando's job, they lived in Iowa for three years and their youngest child was born there. For various reasons, at that time, UAL had stopped offering optometry. As fate would have it, when they were ready to restart the program, UAL reached out to Miss Betti and she happily agreed to lead the new optometry program there. Fernando is very proud of his wife and is supportive of Beatriz and her position at UAL.

If ever there was a person who cared about optometry and her students, it is Miss Betti. I think her students come first and optometry a close second. On one of our breaks between presentations, I was chatting with six or seven students. I asked them what made them choose optometry. Of course, all of their stories were different. Some had family members in optometry. A couple had optometry at the top of the list of recommended careers after taking an aptitude test. One student barely missed getting into medical school. A few were undecided between optometry and other careers. But they all, without fail, said one thing. Once they spoke to Miss Betti, the decision was made. She reached out to parents and grandparents of several interested students to answer questions or doubts. The impact that Beatriz is having on these students' lives goes way beyond being a teacher. I truly believe that she is the fairy godmother of the new generation of optometrists in the region. In addition to her work as professor and Academic Coordinator of Optometry at UAL, Beatriz is the schools' representative at AMFECCO's Board,

and a member of the VOSH/International Latin America Advisory Committee. Licensed Optometrist Beatriz Gomez will have a lasting impact on optometry in Mexico through her work, her dedication to the optometry program at UAL and her unwavering support of the UAL optometry students.

The UAL optometry students are kind, smart and amazing. They are dedicated to UAL, to optometry and to supporting one another. I was particularly impressed by Jorge Cerna Ramirez, a third-year student who volunteered to help me during the Congress. It was a joy getting to know him and his girlfriend, Natalie Soto Chairez, a fellow optometry student. With tremendous enthusiasm, he helped me make sure my presentation was downloaded properly and sent to IT, made sure I made it to the many events, helped me remember people's names and gave me insight about people I should meet and programs I should look into.

Jorge worked as an interpreter for several VOSH South Dakota clinic trips to Gomez Palacio, Durango, Mexico following in the footsteps of his grandfather who was president of the Lions Club and who started, 44 years ago, an ongoing effort to help the community. His work with VOSH led him to begin his career in optometry as a student at UAL in 2020. He is looking forward to patient care and hopes to travel the world bringing eye care to those who need it. When Jorge and Natalie are not studying, or helping wayward gringos, they enjoy dancing, going to movies and playing flag football. I am sure they both have rewarding careers ahead of them.

Although I returned to Chicago a little sad to be leaving my new friends from Torreon, I was reinvigorated by the examples of dedication of all of UAL and in particular the leadership of Licensed Optometrist Beatriz Gomez and the vision of the future from student Jorge Cerna. They are further examples of the influence all of our VOSH volunteers have in individual's lives and on the profession of optometry globally.

Michael Ciszek, FVI, diplomate ABO
President
VOSH/International
ciszek@vosh.org