LIFE notes

From Vision to Victory!

Our Eye-Opening Visit to Bascom Palmer

September 2, 2025

Dear Friends:

One of the truly wonderful songs in the 1938 Broadway musical Knickerbocker Holiday is a tune we might better recall as a huge hit for the supergroup Earth, Wind & Fire: the "September Song."

If you're like me, the lyrics "Do you remember the nights in September" evoke many memorable times. For me, and for all of you who used to live up north, September means the leaves on the trees are just starting to turn the autumnal colors of orange, burnt ocher, yellow, and brown.

September is also a time for new beginnings – the onset of another school year for our children and grandchildren, the first games on the college and professional football schedule, the arrival of the fall harvest season and apple picking (September 29 is Johnny Appleseed Day), and the fall equinox, among others. Wonderful memories, to be sure.

Unfortunately, for those with vision problems like Macular Degeneration, those wonderful memories are just that – memories. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated 19.8 million Americans aged 40 and older have this disease. Those suffering from MD experience blurred and distorted central vision; they have difficulty seeing in low light; they have blind spots and wavy, curved lines in their eyes. They have trouble reading and difficulty recognizing faces.

How do I know all this, you might ask. Simple – my mother suffered with the disease for many years before she died. And as devastating as it was for her, it was also distressing for me, watching as the disease progressed, sapping her will and quality of life.

I knew then that I wanted – indeed, needed – to do something to find a cure and more successful treatments for Macular Degeneration. So, in 2020, I made a $12 million donation to the Bascom Palmer Eye Institute – the number one-ranked eye hospital in the entire country – to establish a Center for Retinal and Macular Degeneration Research at its Palm Beach Gardens campus.

Lois and her daughter Michele recently visited the Bascom Palmer Eye Institute's Lois Pope Center for Retinal and Macular Degeneration Research, a 21,000-square-foot facility dedicated to ending blinding retinal diseases.

Michele Ritter, Dr. Eduardo Alfonso and Lois Pope at the Lois Pope Center for Retinal and Macular Degeneration Research.

A few weeks ago, my daughter Michele and I took the day to tour the center and learn about all the exciting progress being made. During our walk through the facility, as well as the laboratory for research into the inflammatory disease called Uveitis, the Ocular Oncology suite, and the Imaging center on the first floor, we were amazed by the state-of-the-art diagnostic equipment used for patient care. It was noted that patients also benefit from a wide array of the latest clinical trials for treatment of both wet and dry Macular Degeneration.

While moving from the first to the second floor, we learned of the team's latest research project involving AI, artificial intelligence, to predict which patients may develop Macular Degeneration and to determine optimal treatment options for those diagnosed with the disease. Bascom Palmer, which maintains the largest collection of retinal images in the country, utilizes these resources to categorize disease stages represented in each retinal image.

My dear friend Dr. Eduardo Alfonso, the internationally renowned expert on cornea and ocular infectious diseases who is director of Bascom Palmer, emphasized that the Lois Pope Research Center serves as a hub for Bascom Palmer's retinal research program. Since its opening five years ago, the center in Palm Beach Gardens has doubled the capacity for patient care and research. Of great significance, there have been 87,000 patient visits. The center is also at the heart of Bascom Palmer's "moonshot" – a multi-disciplinary endeavor to develop the world's first whole eye transplant!

All in all, the visit was – pardon the pun – an "eye-opening" experience for Michele and me, being able to see first-hand how my donation is making a difference in so many people's lives.

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It's the same goal that we all strive to achieve with LIFE's Annual Lady in Red Gala. As you are likely aware, the 32nd Lady in Red is scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 7, 2026, at The Breakers Palm Beach. We are blessed to have as our headline entertainment the legendary Motown group, The Temptations, and comedienne extraordinaire, Rita Rudner.

We are also blessed, though, to know that through our generous support of the gala – buying tables and tickets and being sponsors – we are saving and transforming so many lives: veterans disabled by the physical and psychological wounds of war, through the Pups4Patriots program at American Humane Society; hungry children in need of healthy, nutritious meals, through the Lois' Food4Kids initiative at Palm Beach County Food Bank; dogs, cats and other pets displaced by extreme weather events or victimized by severe abuse situations, through the Lois Pope Pet Center at Tri-County Animal Rescue; and children whose vision problems prevent them from learning and reading, through the Lois' Vision4Kids program at Bascom Palmer.

Just as Michele and I had the opportunity to do with our visit to Bascom Palmer, I invite you to experience first-hand the fruits of your beneficence by seeing these programs in action. My office can help arrange these visits for you – and perhaps I will even be able to join you there!

In the meantime, I look forward to seeing you at the Lady in Red on Feb. 7. And I thank you in advance for your continued support.

With love always,

Lois

Breaking Ground in Vision Research:
Frank Hogsed's Journey with Bascom Palmer Eye Institute

"For the first time in years, I could see the faces of my family, walk on my own, and watch television," Frank shares. "I feel fortunate to be working with some of the best ophthalmologists in the world at such a top-notch institute."

Frank Hogsed understands better than most how life-changing leading-edge vision research can be.

At just six years old, Frank was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa (RP), a rare inherited disease that causes progressive vision loss. Over the years, his eyesight steadily declined, but with corrective and implant lenses, he was able to maintain his independence for many years.

Frank built a successful career as a computer programmer, working until age 55 when his worsening vision forced him to retire on disability. Knowing there was no cure, he never stopped searching for new therapies that could improve his eyesight.

RP is the most common form of inherited retinal diseases (IRDs), caused by genetic mutations affecting millions of people worldwide. The condition leads to gradual retinal degeneration and vision loss—and currently, there is no approved treatment.

That's why Frank was hopeful when he learned about a clinical trial at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute. After extensive testing, he was accepted into the study and began receiving multiple injections in one eye. The results were remarkable.

"For the first time in years, I could see the faces of my family, walk on my own, and watch television," Frank shares. "I feel fortunate to be working with some of the best ophthalmologists in the world at such a top-notch institute."

Frank remains optimistic that his participation in this groundbreaking study will not only improve his own vision but also pave the way for advancements in RP therapies that could benefit patients everywhere.

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LIFE'S 32ND ANNUAL

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