

College celebrates milestone anniversary

THE AUSTRALIAN College of Optometry (ACO) is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year with a range of events and activities including a memory wall.

The diamond jubilee will highlight 75 years of preserving sight and preventing blindness achieved throughout decades of teaching optometry students, providing eye-care services to the public and continuing professional education to members, and undertaking research.

The ACO started in 1940 as an educational institution to provide a four-year university course in optometry, taught partly at the University of Melbourne. It commenced operations with four students—John Nathan, Tony Douglas, Vans Ovenden and Doug Allen—and one staff member, the secretary to council, William Gray.

Today it has more than 850 members, and about 150 staff including sessional and casual employees and 86 optometrists who deliver annually more than 75,000 eye-care services to disadvantaged Victorians.

Optometrists are invited to contribute to the memory wall by providing photos, recollections, anecdotes and stories about their association with the college and the Victorian Eyecare Service (VES), which is also celebrating its 30th anniversary.

The wall will comprise a physical display at the college and a website page.

The ACO hopes to gather perspectives from staff, students, stakeholders and members to be used in a film, newsletters, its annual report, website and other promotional material.

CEO Maureen O'Keefe said the organisation had evolved over the years.

'It is still heavily involved in the education of optometrists through the provision of clinical teaching to optometry students from across Australia and New Zealand, an expansive continuing professional development program including Australia's first online Certificate in Ocular Therapeutics, and an annual national conference.'

'The ACO now has two other important areas of activity: clinical service delivery and research into vision and eye health,' she said.

'The ACO delivers the Victorian Health and Human Services Department funded Victorian Eyecare Service, a public health eye-care program

which provides subsidised primary eye care and spectacles to people experiencing significant disadvantage.'

A network of optometrists in country Victoria delivers the rural service, which is in addition to services provided by six metropolitan Melbourne ACO clinics and an extensive outreach service.

'We provide more than 75,000 services to patients with health care or pension cards in low socio-economic areas, including people who are homeless, live in supported residential services, high-rised housing, people who are disabled, frail and elderly, Indigenous communities, refugees and some unfunded services to children attending disadvantaged schools,' Ms O'Keefe said.

The ACO also delivers services in partnership with major public hospitals, including the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital, provides low vision optometry services for Vision Australia and operates a mobile eye-care service for the Royal Flying Doctor Service Victoria.

It has affiliations with the University of Melbourne and the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital. A division of the college, the National Vision Research Institute, conducts research.

Festivities will include an afternoon tea and tour for ACO dignitaries and alumni, the annual general meetings of the ACO and the NVRI on 20 May at 7 pm, the annual national conference and an anniversary open day, both in October.

Email anecdotes or photos for the memory wall to abardsley@aco.org.au. The ACO anniversary webpage features a timeline and updates of anniversary events and activities.

Photo taken in 1961 of students undertaking the new four-year BAppSc optometry course, many of whom pursued stellar professional and academic careers.

(L-R front) Tony Adams, Ross Both, unknown, Stan Elwood, Donald Mitchell. (Second row) Lex Grocott, Miriam Strelinger, Anne Russell (nee Turnbull), unknown, Kerry, Gavin Bridgman. (Third row) Frank Denahy, Ian Bailey, Brien Holden, Ross Harris, Rod Watkins, Geoff Hardy-Smith (dec), Peter Skeates. (Rear) Alan Johnston, Brian Brown, Graham Hill, Peter Dwyer, Leon Garner, Bob Loutit, Frank Keogh, Brian Carney and Mr Hamer.

Photo: ACO



50-year reunion for Melbourne students stirs memories

FIFTEEN optometrists from the University of Melbourne graduating classes of 1963, 1964, 1965 and 1966 recalled happy memories when they attended their 50-year reunion.

One of the graduates, Professor Brien Holden, CEO of the Brien Holden Vision Institute, organised a dinner at The Baths Restaurant in Middle Brighton, Melbourne.

The students had all been taught by Professor Emeritus Barry Cole, Department of Optometry and Vision Sciences, University of Melbourne.

Many of them are pictured in their student days (below).

(L-R front) Ross Harris, DAA national president 1981-1984 who practised in Yarram and Croydon; Professor Brien Holden DAM, Scientia Professor of Optometry at the University of NSW and founder of the Brien Holden Vision Institute; Anne Russell (nee Turnbull) who practised optometry in Shepparton; Frank Keogh who practised optometry in Broadmeadows; and Dr Rod Watkins AM who got a PhD in optics and founded an ophthalmic instrument manufacturing business.

(L-R rear) Professor Brian Brown, who became Professor of Optometry at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and is renowned for his research leadership; John Cartwright who practised optometry in Bendigo; DCANZ founder Peter Dwyer DAM; Graham Hill DAM, former Australian College of Optometry president 1991-2003, chairman of the Optometrists Registration Board and a member of state and national executive councils; Professor Leon Garner OMNZ, foundation Professor of Optometry at the University of Auckland; Bob Loutit who practised optometry in Hastings; John Pettit, former ACO councillor, treasurer and honorary life member who practised optometry in Geelong; Frank Denahy who practises in Geelong; Dr Alan Johnston AM, who became University of Melbourne Associate Professor and a pioneering expert in low vision; and Ross Both who practised optometry in Horsham.



Royal Flying Doctors give rural students wings

OPTOMETRY students from country Victoria can receive financial assistance with a scholarship offered by the Royal Flying Doctor Service Victoria and Rural Health Workforce Australia.

The 'Give Them Wings' scholarships, valued at \$2,500 each, are for first-year nursing

and allied health students at Victorian universities.

Scott Chapman, CEO of the Royal Flying Doctor Service Victoria, said these scholarships, now in their fourth year, were designed to give country students a flying start at university. 'They also symbolise our commitment to tackle the

shortage of health professionals in rural areas,' he said.

Mr Chapman's counterpart at Rural Health Workforce Australia, Greg Mundy, said country students were a big part of the future of rural health.

Last year, rural Victorian student Natalie Dowling received a Give Them Wings scholarship

to cover the cost of her first-year studying optometry at Deakin University.

Natalie, from Yarrowonga on the Murray River, visited the Royal Flying Doctor Service base at Essendon as part of her scholarship.

She is planning to spend time with the RFDS's mobile eye-care

services that are based in Ouyen and run in conjunction with the Australian College of Optometry.

Applications for the 2015 'Give Them Wings' scholarships close on 31 March.

Further details, including the application form, are available at www.rhwa.org.au/GiveThemWings.