Eye Donation Message Reaches Many New Yorkers

THE EYE-BANK CONDUCTED SPECIAL EFFORTS COMMEMORATING NOVEMBER AS EYE DONATION MONTH, a nationwide observance to raise awareness about eye donation and corneal transplantation as identified by the Eye Bank Association of America (EBAA). This year, The Eye-Bank produced both English- and Spanish-language promotional campaign ads featuring Dominique Bethea, a donor family member who honored her father’s wishes to be an eye donor and restore the sight of two New Yorkers. Dominique is a program manager for Donate Life New York State and educates staff at New York State Department of Motor Vehicle offices throughout the Greater New York Metropolitan area about eye, organ and tissue donation and the importance of enrolling in the Donate Life Registry. Eye-Bank ads customized for Eye Donation Month were created for radio; newspaper; and digital platforms.

In addition, The Eye-Bank collaborated with several healthcare systems within our service area to promote eye donation in both internal health messaging as well as public-facing campaigns. Mount Sinai Health System’s co-branded Eye Donation Month campaign featured entire hospital units who champion eye donation and whose dedicated efforts are integral to the eye donation process. Results of some of Mount Sinai’s Instagram posts calling for support of eye donation showed nearly four times the engagement rate of The Eye-Bank’s average rate per post.

For NYU Langone Health, The Eye-Bank produced a 30-second video featuring Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology Himani Goyal, M.D., who is also chair of The Eye-Bank’s Medical Advisory Board, discussing

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The Eye-Bank Seeks Donor Tissue to Advance Research Studies

IN ADDITION TO HELPING RESTORE SIGHT BY PROVIDING DONOR TISSUE FOR APPROXIMATELY 1,200 SIGHT-SAVING CORNEAL TRANSPLANTS EACH YEAR, The Eye-Bank provides eye donor tissue vital to the future of curing various blinding eye diseases that do not affect the cornea yet rob many individuals of their eyesight. According to the National Eye Institute, the leading causes of central vision loss in individuals over age 50 are age-related macular degeneration (AMD), diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma. Under the direction of Research and Relationship Development Manager YoneJung Yoon, Ph.D., The Eye-Bank’s Ocular Research Program has grown to include the distribution of donor eye tissue to researchers for eye disease pathology studies as well as pharmacology research and the development of new drug therapies.

This past year, The Eye-Bank has been able to help advance important research into prevalent eye diseases by providing valuable donor eye tissue to various research projects being conducted at universities, and at biotechnology and therapeutic companies within the New York Metropolitan area and throughout the US.

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Apply Now for Eye-Bank Scholarships

On August 5, the Eye-Bank Hosted the 2023 Wing Chu, M.D. Cornea Fellow Day at its office location at 120 Wall Street in Manhattan. The one-day program began with a morning didactic session, which included a discussion of the importance of donor tissue selection; a presentation on techniques used for Descemet’s Membrane Endothelial Keratoplasty (DMEK) and Descemet’s Stripping Automated Endothelial Keratoplasty (DSAEK); and a surgeon’s perspective on the transition to DMEK procedures in eye banking. A wet lab following the session provided participants with in-person instruction on performing DMEK surgery, an advanced surgical procedure. In attendance were five physicians who are currently in cornea fellowships and one physician from Greece who is in the U.S. to study advanced transplant procedures.

The Eye-Bank’s Executive Director Patricia Dahl, Medical Director Michelle K. Rhee, M.D., Associate Medical Director Maayan E. Keshet, M.D. and Laboratory Manager Mudassir Razvi, CEBT were joined by The Eye-Bank’s Medical Advisory Board Chair Himani Goyal, M.D. and Member George J. Florakis, M.D. who served as faculty.

Named in memory of Wing Chu, M.D., The Eye-Bank’s medical director of more than 30 years, Cornea Fellow Day was first instituted in 2016 to provide an opportunity for physicians specializing in cornea to learn about the mission of eye banking and surgical techniques of corneal transplantation. The August 5th event was The Eye-Bank’s sixth Cornea Fellow Day since in-person sessions were suspended for two years during the Covid pandemic.

The Eye-Bank thanks manufacturer Zeiss US for providing additional microscopes for the wet lab.

The Eye-Bank Awards a Fellowship for Research

The Eye-Bank awarded the 2023 R. Townley Paton Fellowship to Lucy V. Cobbs, M.D., who is a Vitreoretinal Surgery Fellow at NYU Langone Health’s Department of Ophthalmology, where she is gaining experience in medical and surgical retina, inherited retinal dystrophies, uveitis and pediatric vitreoretinal disease. The Eye-Bank award, in the amount of $10,000, is given in support of Dr. Cobbs’ research projects. Dr. Cobbs’ submission was selected by the Fellowship Review Committee.

Her current work includes a case series with Lawrence Yanuzzi, M.D. on patients with spontaneous resolution of drusen and a study with Kenneth Wald, M.D. for a surgical retinal education textbook.

She has also been the driving force behind a collaborative study with Yasha Modi, M.D. and Vaidehi S. Dedania, M.D. in partnership with Wills Eye Hospital in Philadelphia on the impact of mask mandates on the rates of endophthalmitis after intravitreal anti-VEGF injections.

The deadline to apply for this year’s R. Townley Paton Fellowship is October 15, 2024. For more information, go to: www.EyeDonation.org/r-townley-paton-fellowship.
Cornea Transplant Recipient Celebrates Living Life Independently

By Isabelle Weiner

WESTCHESTER COUNTY RESIDENT
STAVROULA GIAGIAKOS prides herself on her independence, her cooking and her close-knit family’s Greek heritage. She loves walking to the grocery store on her own to purchase ingredients for Greek dishes that she makes for family and friends. She has a close bond with her daughter, Tina Moundroukas, who lives nearby. Today, Stavroula can see clearly and spends time with her family—but that was not always the case. There was a time recently when Tina was increasingly worried that her mother was going blind.

Stavroula had always enjoyed cooking. “I like to make Greek specialties like spanakopita,” she said. However, it had become increasingly difficult for Stavroula to enjoy not only her passion for cooking but also to perform daily tasks independently. Cooking, cleaning, walking to the store for groceries and watching television were all becoming hard for her. “She would always call me to assist her, and she was always frustrated with herself,” Tina said.

Stavroula underwent cataract surgery, but her vision did not improve from the procedure. She was then referred to an ophthalmologist who diagnosed her with Fuchs’ Dystrophy, a degenerative eye disease that causes the cornea to swell and thicken when cells in the cornea’s endothelial layer die off, causing fluid to build up in the cornea resulting in blurred vision. The only treatment for Fuchs’ Dystrophy is a corneal transplant; if she did not receive the surgery, then Stavroula’s vision would continue to deteriorate.

The gravity of the situation and the language barriers between her and medical staff made Stavroula nervous about the surgery. Tina said, “It petrified her and scared her because she didn’t know if she’d be able to have her vision fully restored.” However, she was relieved and excited when she was connected with corneal surgeon, George J. Florakis, M.D., who speaks fluent Greek and was able to put her at ease and answer her questions. Tina added, “He told her that there is hope, and it made her life a little brighter since she struggled with her vision for many years.”

Dr. Florakis successfully performed Stavroula’s first corneal transplant surgery in the fall of 2022 and her second in early 2023 at NewYork-Presbyterian/Columbia University Medical Center’s Harkness Eye Institute with donor tissue provided by The Eye-Bank for Sight Restoration.

Stavroula and her family have been deeply moved by the generosity of her two eye donors. “We recently lost a family member and we understand the pain of losing a loved one,” said Tina. Having lost Tina’s brother several years ago, they are especially appreciative and grateful for the generosity their donor family demonstrated in order to help someone in need.

Now Stavroula is back to cooking her traditional Greek meals for her family with her sight fully restored. She is grateful for her gift of sight and her improved quality of life. She can now go about her daily tasks independently, and Tina is overjoyed to see that her mother has her life back.

“I see clearly now in both eyes and thank God and thanks to those people who donate their eyes, God bless them. Now that I’ve had my corneal transplants, I can do everything. I can watch television, I can see clearly. The only thing I need glasses for is reading, but it’s excellent. I am so happy, God bless.”

Wanting others to learn about the importance of eye donation, Tina and Stavroula volunteered to be featured in The Eye-Bank’s latest testimonial video. Filmed at Croton Gorge Park in Westchester County, Eye-Bank Creative Specialist David Goodnight directed the shoot with assistance from Communications Manager Maria Chelko. To watch this loving mother and daughter tell their families’ sight restoration story, visit www.eyedonation.org/videos.

In Greek we say “Efcharistó polý gia to dóro pou mou ékanes kai tóra vlépo polý kalá.” That means “Thank you very much for the gift you gave me, and now I can see very well,” said Stavroula.
Leadership Council Goes Bowling for The Eye-Bank

ON NOVEMBER 15, THE EYE-BANK LEADERSHIP COUNCIL HOSTED BOWL FOR SIGHT AT BOWLEO CHELSEA PIERS IN MANHATTAN.

More than 30 attendees including Council members and friends had fun competing on the lanes while supporting The Eye-Bank. The competition was fierce, yet friendly, and ultimately Leadership Council Members Nicole Madison Chan and Rucha Pandit led their teams to victory with the highest score and most contributions raised, respectively.

In between bowling matches, attendees purchased raffle tickets for chances to win great prizes, including a brand new pickleball set and tickets for the Broadway show, Melissa Etheridge: My Window. The night was an action-packed, good time and raised more than $10,000 for The Eye-Bank’s sight-saving programs. Thank you to members of The Eye-Bank’s Board of Directors Courtney DiTullio, Manish Krishnan and Sruthi Madhavan for triple-matching the funds generated by the special event.

The Leadership Council comprises a group of mid-career professionals who promote The Eye-Bank’s mission through outreach and fundraising efforts aimed at increasing awareness of the need for and benefits of eye donation. Leadership Council Chair Patrick K. Corbett, Secretary Rucha Pandit and Immediate Past Chair Nathan Sheinfeld were elected at their meeting in September 2023 and form the Council’s executive team, which spearheads fundraising activities like Bowl for Sight.

For more information about joining the Leadership Council, visit www.eyedonation.org/leadership-council or email Robert Hankins, rghankins@ebsr.org.

Honor/Memorial Gifts from June 16, 2023 – December 31, 2023

Memorial and honor gifts are given to recognize loved ones or to mark a special occasion. To make a gift in honor or memory of someone, please use the enclosed envelope, visit www.eyedonation.org/give, or contact The Eye-Bank’s Development Department at 212-742-9000.

IN MEMORY OF...

Demetrios Arvanitis
Shamli Beeka
Conrad Berens, M.D.
Ann, Miriam and Murray Black
Arnold S. Breisky, M.D.
Burnett Brown
Genevieve L. Bruno
Betty Burns
Gaetano M. Caccavale
Jackie Caso
Norma Cohen
Cornea Donors
Phil and Jean Coticelli
Tibor L. Csapo
Deborah L. DeFrancis
Celestino DeLaurentis
Sean Timothy Devney
Joseph P. Duignan
Carmela M. Elmi
James Fabian, Esq.
Salvatrice Franco
Martha Gale
Leighton Gray

Ralph Gunner
Julius Harris
Fred Hart
William “Poppa” Haupercht
Brian M. Jackel
Carrie John
Michael Jones
Alan J. Jordan
Kevin Kelly
Ezra Linton
Penelope Maclusac
Robert Micari
Robert Mingione
Ann Moore
Dora Moschetta
Vincent Murano
Christopher Nordquist
Mary Jane O’Neill
Paul N. Orenstein
Sharon Orenstein
DeSerie A. Osborne
Frederick D. Pastor
Theresa Petitto
Julia Piegorgi

IN HONOR OF...

Peter (Pota) Arvanitis
Mrs. Eddie L. Bellamy
Mary T. Biolato
Murray Block
Scott J. Bushinger, O.D.
Richard Campora
Norma Cohen
Rosemarie Crofts
Joel Cymrot
Jack Seger
Don K. Shardlow’s mother
Gaeano Siggia
Bonne L. Sills
Irene and Sidney Silverman
Helen Spector
John A. Seedor, M.D.
Maya Shah
Elizabeth Smith
Latradure T. D. Sperber, M.D.
Leejee Han Suh, M.D.
Linda and Dennis Tarzian
Peter E. Wesley, M.D.
Gerald W. Zaidman, M.D.

Kevin O’Leary
Michele Powers
Gabriel Rand, M.D.
Mary Ann Reilly
Eugene A. Renna
Luciano G. Rusich
William Schiff, M.D.
Albert Schilling
John A. Seedor, M.D.
Maya Shah
Elizabeth Smith
Latradure T. D. Sperber, M.D.
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Betty Burns
Gaetano M. Caccavale
Jackie Caso
Norma Cohen
Cornea Donors
Phil and Jean Coticelli
Tibor L. Csapo
Deborah L. DeFrancis
Celestino DeLaurentis
Sean Timothy Devney
Joseph P. Duignan
Carmela M. Elmi
James Fabian, Esq.
Salvatrice Franco
Martha Gale
Leighton Gray

Ralph Gunner
Julius Harris
Fred Hart
William “Poppa” Haupercht
Brian M. Jackel
Carrie John
Michael Jones
Alan J. Jordan
Kevin Kelly
Ezra Linton
Penelope Maclusac
Robert Micari
Robert Mingione
Ann Moore
Dora Moschetta
Vincent Murano
Christopher Nordquist
Mary Jane O’Neill
Paul N. Orenstein
Sharon Orenstein
DeSerie A. Osborne
Frederick D. Pastor
Theresa Petitto
Julia Piegorgi

IN HONOR OF...

Peter (Pota) Arvanitis
Mrs. Eddie L. Bellamy
Mary T. Biolato
Murray Block
Scott J. Bushinger, O.D.
Richard Campora
Norma Cohen
Rosemarie Crofts
Joel Cymrot
Jack Seger
Don K. Shardlow’s mother
Gaeano Siggia
Bonne L. Sills
Irene and Sidney Silverman
Helen Spector
John A. Seedor, M.D.
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Eye-Bank Benefits from a Successful “Salsa Night for Sight”

THE EYE-BANK’S 2023 FALL BENEFIT TOOK PLACE AT THE BOHEMIAN BENEVOLENT AND LITERARY ASSOCIATION ON MANHATTAN’S UPPER EAST SIDE ON OCTOBER 17 and drew a crowd of approximately 275 friends and supporters. Salsa music, cocktails and flavorful fare was the order of the evening. Guests danced to a lively set by the popular Mambo of the Times Orchestra led by band leader Frankie Morales and followed by a fantastic demonstration by award-winning salsa dancers of the Yamuleé Dance Company who dazzled the crowd with their near-acrobatic performances.

Everyone enjoyed the variety of delicious, Latin-inspired cuisine paired with signature cocktails from México, Brazil and Spain provided by award-winning Chef Florian V. Hugo. Attendees also were enticed to visit the silent auction table and bid on fabulous prizes, including a golf outing at the historic Sleepy Hollow Country Club; tickets to Broadway shows Pal Joey and Melissa Etheridge: My Window and luxury goods such as cashmere accessories and unique jewelry, including a handmade “Gift of Sight” charm bracelet custom-designed for the benefit by Leadership Council Member Ileana Quinones Ruiz.

Thanks to our Speaking Program Sponsor, Dompé, and General Sponsor, Théa, as well as our generous supporters, the Salsa Night for Sight Fall Benefit generated more than $113,000 for Eye-Bank programs. A very special thank you goes to the entire Benefit Committee and this year’s Benefit Co-Chairs Eye-Bank Board Member Jeanne McCooey and Eye-Bank Medical Director Michelle K. Rhee, M.D. for their outstanding work toward making Salsa Night for Sight a tremendous success.
Heroes Wanted at the DMV!

THE EYE-BANK LAUNCHED ITS 2024 MULTI-MEDIA AD CAMPAIGN IN JANUARY WITH AN EMPHASIS ON RADIO AND DIGITAL PLACEMENT. The creative for the ads is a continuation of the messaging introduced last year, which encourages New Yorkers to enroll in the New York State Donate Life Registry when conducting transactions at the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV).

The ads remind New Yorkers to "check the Yes box" at the DMV and become heroes by signing up to become eye, organ and tissue donors. The message that highlights enrolling in the Donate Life Registry when getting a new or renewed driver’s license is supported by data collected by Donate Life New York State, which shows that more than 80 percent of all enrollments in the registry are completed through the state’s DMV portal.

According to Patricia Dahl, Executive Director and CEO of The Eye-Bank, “It makes sense for The Eye-Bank to coordinate our media campaign and resources in ways that expand on the effectiveness of the DMV to enroll New Yorkers in the state’s registry.”

Being enrolled in the Donate Life Registry is the best way to ensure that one’s wishes to help others through eye, organ and tissue donation are carried out. It is also recommended to share with family members that you have signed up in the registry to become a donor and give the gift of sight and life.

The Eye-Bank’s Creative Specialist David Goodnight is credited with creating the ad campaign’s various components that have been produced in both English and in Spanish. The Eye-Bank of New York’s 2024 ads will be aired on several popular New York Metropolitan radio stations, as well as appearing in El Diario and in digital ads on Facebook and Instagram throughout the year.

View The Eye-Bank’s Spanish-language website by visiting www.eyedonation.org/es or EBSR.org.

Heroes Wanted at the DMV!

View The Eye-Bank’s Spanish-language website by visiting www.eyedonation.org/es or EBSR.org.

The Eye-Bank’s Entire Website is Now Available in Spanish

THE EYE-BANK IS PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE that its entire website is now available on-line in Spanish as well as English. Previously, key sections were available, but now all information shared at eyedonation.org can also be accessed at eyedonation.org/es or EBSR.org. According to WNYC data, Spanish is the second most common language in New York City and used in about 25 percent of households. The Eye-Bank’s website contains extensive information about eye donation, cornea transplantation; and how to write to one’s donor family or to reach out to the recipient of a cornea donation. The website also includes easy access to the New York State Donate Life Registry.

The Eye-Bank’s current multi-media advertising campaign includes Spanish-language placements on radio, in print (El Diario) and on social media platforms. It is essential that anyone who sees or hears The Eye-Bank’s ad in Spanish be able to find more information, if needed, on The Eye-Bank’s website. Special thanks to The Eye-Bank’s Creative Specialist David Goodnight for creating the customized website and to Senior Hospital and Community Liaison Amanda Vesey-Askey for translating all the content into Spanish.

Eye Donation Month is Highlighted

cornea transplantation, which the health system shared on Instagram. NYU Langone Health also included Eye Donation Month in their December 2023 issue of the NYU Langone Transplant Institute’s newsletter.

NYC Health + Hospitals supported Eye Donation Month on social media by featuring hospital staff members reminding others to sign up in the Donate Life Registry. And NewYork-Presbyterian shared our co-branded messages across their social media, featuring toddler Austin Ureña whose cornea transplants were successfully performed by Danielle Trief, M.D. at NewYork-Presbyterian/Columbia University Medical Center’s Edward Harkness Eye Institute with donor tissue provided by The Eye-Bank.

The Eye-Bank appreciates all the support received during November to educate New Yorkers about the importance of giving the gift of sight and life.

(continued from page 1)
THE EYE-BANK IS PLEASED TO RECOGNIZE THE PALLIATIVE CARE UNIT AT MONTEFIORE-MOSES for its exemplary support of eye donation and timely collaboration with The Eye-Bank for Sight Restoration. Led by Program Director for Palliative Medicine Serife Eti, M.D., FAAFP, FAAHPM and Nurse Manager Doris Brown, MSN, RN, WCC, NEA–BC, the Palliative Care Unit staff provide compassionate end-of-life care and meaningful family support. The nursing staff invests this same diligence into its partnership with The Eye-Bank, assisting in determining the eligibility of potential donors and coordinating the timing of next-of-kin conversations.

The Palliative Care Unit’s attention to the option of eye donation has helped increase the hospital’s donation rate significantly in recent years and the unit’s donations represent nearly one third of the hospital’s total number of eye donors for 2023.

Dr. Eti’s leadership extends beyond the Palliative Care Unit as she also serves as Organ Donor Council Co-Chair for the Montefiore Health System. In her role as co-chair, she champions the importance of eye donation across Montefiore’s multiple campuses.

In 2023, 44 people received the gift of sight thanks to the generosity of eye donors at Montefiore-Moses. These gifts would not have been possible without the support of hospital unit staff. The Eye-Bank is grateful to all hospital staff and especially the Palliative Care team for their dedicated efforts as we all work together to help our fellow New Yorkers see again.

Young Ambassadors Express Their Gratitude Through Art

EACH NOVEMBER, THE EYE-BANK SEeks THE ORIGINAL ARTWORK OF A YOUNG CORNEA TRANSPLANT RECIPIENT TO HELP CREATE OUR ANNUAL THANKSGIVING CARD as part of our Young Ambassador Program. The Eye-Bank’s featured cover artist for 2023 is Reuben George, a twelve-year-old whose sight was restored with a corneal transplant. Reuben likes studying machines and how they function, and also spends time listening to music, creating his own slides with computer software and exploring nature.

This year, The Eye-Bank also distributed a digital Thanksgiving card, featuring the artwork of fourteen-year-old cornea recipient and Eye-Bank Young Ambassador Raeya Bryant. Raeya enjoys playing soccer as well as hockey and has been cast in the popular musicals, Frozen and Annie, at her high school. Raeya received her sight-restoring transplants when she was six years old.

Forever grateful for the gift of sight, both Reuben and Raeya are patients of Eye-Bank Medical Advisory Board Member Gerald W. Zaidman, M.D. who performed their sight-restoring transplants at Westchester Medical Center with donor tissue provided by The Eye-Bank for Sight Restoration.

Each year, The Eye-Bank’s Thanksgiving card is sent on behalf of all our corneal transplant recipients to thank our many generous contributors, corneal transplant surgeons, dedicated hospital workers and caring volunteers whose help makes the miracle of sight restoration possible.

The Eye-Bank Seeks Donor Tissue to Advance Research Studies

Research can be enabled tremendously with ocular tissue provided by eye donors who have been diagnosed with diseases and other conditions that are known to contribute to vision loss. According to Dr. Yoon, “Our collaborators are researching how metabolic diseases like diabetes and neurodegenerative diseases like dementia affect your eye health.”

The Eye-Bank encourages all New Yorkers to sign up in the New York State Donate Life Registry, and especially those who have eye diseases like AMD, diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma, so they can help others who suffer from these diseases.

NEW YORKERS WHO ARE OLDER THAN 75 YEARS who wish to be a donor for research purposes should be sure to let their next of kin know to call The Eye-Bank when a death occurs. Our staff will be able to obtain a telephone consent and expedite the donation once we receive the call. For more information, contact The Eye-Bank at info@ebsr.org or call 212-742-9000.
Of Interest...

THE EYE BANK ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA’S (EBAA) ANNUAL FALL LEADERSHIP MEETING was held in San Francisco on November 2 and was immediately followed by the Cornea and Eye Banking Forum, co-hosted by the EBAA and the Cornea Society, on November 3 as well as the annual meeting of the American Academy of Ophthalmology from November 3–6.

In attendance from The Eye-Bank were Director of Communications Noël Mick, who serves on the EBAA’s Board of Directors as Immediate Past Chair; Associate Director Edwin H. Roberts, who serves on the EBAA’s Medical Advisory Board; Medical Director Michelle K. Rhee, M.D., who serves on the EBAA’s Medical Advisory Board and Accreditation Board; Associate Medical Director Joann J. Kang, M.D., who serves on the EBAA’s Scientific Committee; Research and Relationship Development Manager YoneJung Yoon, Ph.D.; and Laboratory Technician Supervisor Angelica Egelandsdal, CEBT.

Two members of The Eye-Bank’s Medical Advisory Board, Drs. Viral V. Juthani and Joann J. Kang, serve on the Cornea and Eye Banking Forum’s Program Committee. This year’s program featured 26 scientific abstracts highlighting the latest research developments in cornea transplantation and innovations in eye banking.

CONGRATULATIONS TO EYE-BANK OCULAR LABORATORY TECHNICIAN DRESDEN REDFIELD who recently passed the Eye Bank Association of America’s (EBAA) Certified Eye Bank Technician (CEBT) exam. He is also approved for processing tissue for Descemet’s Membrane Endothelial Keratoplasty (DMEK) surgeries. The Eye-Bank’s laboratory technicians are required to meet EBAA Medical Standards consistently while providing quality ocular tissue for transplant. Dresden joined The Eye-Bank in October 2022 and holds an M.S. in Biomedical Sciences from Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine in Scranton, PA and a B.S. in Psychology of Human Health from the University of California, San Diego.