By Larry Evans

Dr. Dee Stephenson opened her Venice ophthalmology practice 29 years ago. Some people start thinking about their retire-
ment at that point in their careers. Not Stephenson.

“I’m at the top of my game. That’s a fun place to be,” Stephenson said on a recent afternoon during a short break she took to talk about her work.

As usual, dozens of patients were in the office building of Stephens Eye Associates, a renounced Italian Renaissance home at 260 Palermo Plaza, the island of Venice. She works there with two medical assistants and an office staff of four.

There is no television in the waiting room, and no irritating background music. A small sign on the wall tells clients to turn off their cellphones.

Natural light comes through windows in every room except the examination rooms, where Stephenson and her assistants use updated technology to look into the eyes of patients and prescribe eyeglasses, check for glaucoma and cataracts and determine which patients might be candidates for state-of-the-art lenses.

Stephenson has helped unveil for Bausch & Lomb a new acrylic lens that was in the world to implant in 50 patients. She said her patients are pleased with the results, so is she, as well.

She performed her surgeries one day a week at the St. Vincent’s Center of St. Andrews.

Bausch & Lomb said the Vitina MX60E lens will be available to other eye surgeons in early 2018.

Stephenson, when asked why she was cho-

en as the first ophthalmologist in the world to implant the new lens, simply said she has had a long relationship with the company. She has used the company’s technology throughout her career.

Information available on the website of Stephenson Eye Associates indicates Stephenson is also held in high regard by her peers in the field. Stephenson was president of the American College of Eye Surgeons for the past two years, 2015-2017. She has also served as secretary of that group. She has served on the board of directors of the American Board of Eye Surgeons, and is on the editorial board of a professional journal.

Stephenson has spoken at international and national conferences, and written numerous articles for professional journals.

She is an associate professor of ophthal-
mology at the University of South Florida.

A Florida native, Stephenson earned her bachelor of science degree at the University of Florida and medical degree at the University of South Florida. She did her internship at the St. Francis Memorial Hospital and the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

“Stability is the most important thing that is going to go from surgeons to patients while also eas-
sing the course of the patients after surgery. I have been fortunate enough to have a involved a long relationship with Bausch & Lomb, an international company that is a leader in this field of eye health.”

Bausch & Lomb recently announced that Stephenson was the first ophthalmologist in the world to implant an acrylic lens that improves the vision of patients and was also earning the recovery period of the surgery.

The lens is called the Visteon MX60E and features Accutec, a technology, which provides stability.

Stephenson said that the new lens is a slight modification of previous technology. The new lens is more stable and the lens expands and shrinks more quickly, she said. Patients have experienced better visual clarity.

Stephenson implanted the lenses for the first time Oct. 24. Through January, she had surgically implanted the lenses in 50 patients. She said her patients are pleased with the results, so is she, as well.

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Dr. Dee Stephenson, ophthalmologist.

PHOTOS BY LARRY EVANS

“I lost 180 pounds and the need for 16 pills a day.”

William’s diabetes got so bad he was about to need daily shots along with the pills he was already taking, he said enough is enough. He decided to have bariatric surgery and chose Venice Regional Bayfront Health because of its excellent reputation. The “doctors and nurses are by your side all the way,” he explained. “I lost 180 pounds, and the only pill I take now is a vitamin. I feel like a new man, like I’m back in my 40s.”
Stephenson keeps up with the advances in her field, but she is something of a throwback to the mid-20th century way doctors practiced medicine: She works alone as a sole practitioner rather than in a medical group with other partners. “I am by myself. That’s very unusual, but I prefer it that way.”

The meticulously restored 1926 home that is now the office building for Stephenson Eye Associates also merges the old with the new: Solar panels are installed on the roof. And so cutting-edge energy technology exists in a building where Stephenson and her friendly staff seek to maintain what Stephenson said is the warmth of a family home. Her employees, she said, tend to stay with Stephenson Eye Associates for a long time.

Clients, many of whom call Stephenson “Dr. Dee,” bring her “eye” art. Patients who look at the office walls can’t help but see eyeballs staring back at them. The eyes are everywhere. “It has been fun collecting eye art over the years,” Stephenson said. “Some pieces are from my patients.”

Cooking and art collecting are two of her hobbies. “I have an eclectic collection of art.” Most is from New Orleans.

Stephenson, who practiced ophthalmology on Florida’s East Coast for one year before moving to Venice in 1989, last spring co-authored for the journal Ophthalmology Management an article titled “Advice for MDs whose goal is their own clinic.” Stephenson wrote, “The number one thing I tell new ophthalmologists is to pick a place you want to live and that’s where you need to go. If you’re going to put down roots and have relationships with patients and their families, you can’t keep changing your mind every 12 months because you won’t put down those roots.”

How many patients does Stephenson have? “Thousands.” And she is still accepting new ones.