

Ophthalmologist nation’s first with new lens implant

By **LARRY EVANS**
SUN CORRESPONDENT

Dr. Dee Stephenson opened her Venice ophthalmology practice 29 years ago.

Some people start thinking about retirement 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 came that day to the office building of Stephenson Eye Associates, a renovated 1926 Italian Renaissance home at 200 Palermo Place, on the island of Venice. She works there with two technicians 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 exam rooms, where Stephenson and her technicians use up-to-date 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, an international company that is a leader in the field of eye health.

Bausch & Lomb recently announced that Stephenson was the first ophthalmologist in the world to implant a new acrylic lens that improves the vision of patients while also easing the recovery period following surgery.

The lens is called the enVista MX60E and features AccuSet technology, which provides stability.

Stephenson said the new lens is a slight modification of previous technology. The new lens is more stable and the lens opens and closes more quickly, she said.

Patients also experience better visual clarity.

Stephenson implanted



PHOTOS BY LARRY EVANS

“Eye” art adds enjoyment to a visit to the ophthalmologist.

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 she is, as well.

She performs her surgeries one day a week at the Surgery Center of St. Andrews,

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

Stephenson, when asked why she was chosen 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 CRST, a professional journal.

Stephenson has spoken at international and national conferences, and written numerous

articles for professional journals.

She is an associate professor of ophthalmology 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 Medical Center at the University of Connecticut and was

a resident in ophthalmology at the University of South Carolina.

Stephenson said she decided in medical school to go into the field of ophthalmology.

“I just really loved it,” said Stephenson, who throughout her career has stayed involved in clinical research and studies.

“The technology associated with ophthalmology is one of the fastest-growing areas

of medicine. It’s a great specialty worldwide.”

Advances in technology in recent years are making it possible for ophthalmologists to even better provide treatment for their patients, she said. For example, Stephenson and other surgeons can now treat cataracts and astigmatism with one procedure; patients whose astigmatism

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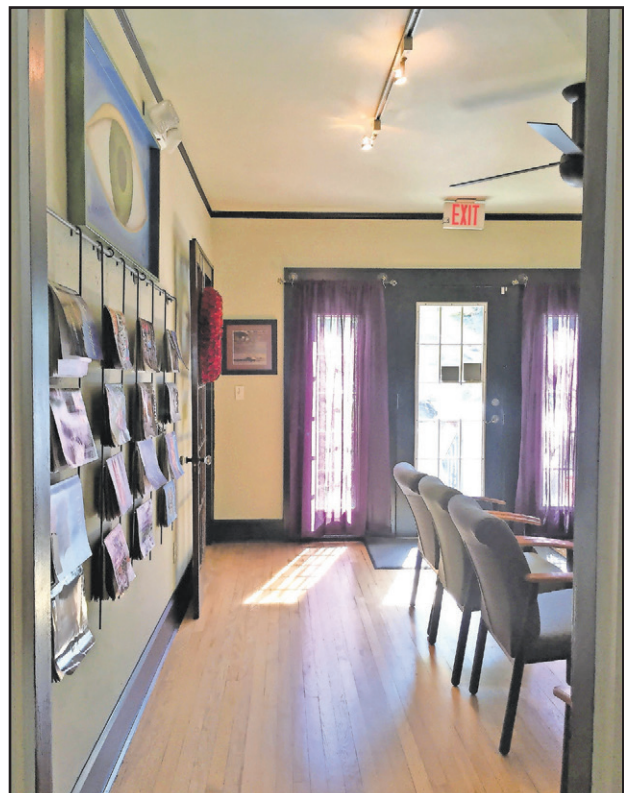
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necessitate wearing eyeglasses for decades can now receive corrective lenses implanted.

The cost of eye surgery varies from patient to patient, depending on individual needs, Stephenson said.

Stephenson keeps up with the advances in her field, but she is something of a throw-back 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."



PHOTOS BY LARRY EVANS

Light streams into the waiting room.



"Eye" art looks out across the waiting room.



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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 starting back at them. The eyes are everywhere.

"It has been fun



Stephenson Eye Associates, at 200 Palmero Place, is in a renovated historic home.



Curtains on the wall of one office have an “eye” theme, too.

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.



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