

# VISION

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## 'FOCUS ON INDEPENDENCE'

### PROGRAM AIMED AT QUADRIPLÉGICS MAKES LIFE EASIER FOR LOS ANGELES WOMAN

For most people the simple act of using an index finger to push their eyeglasses back up when they slip down their nose is reflexive. It's done without a thought.

But Tisa Casas couldn't be bothered with glasses. They're too difficult to manage. That's because in the summer of 1985, when Ms. Casas was home from U.C. Berkeley, where she was a grad student in educational psychology and education, she was injured in a five-car accident on the Pasadena Freeway.

The accident left her paralyzed. Even though Ms. Casas has extremely limited use of her hands and arms, she nevertheless is considered a quadriplegic. Since then Ms. Casas has been forced to struggle with routine exertions that are known all too well by the estimated 125,000 to 200,000 quadriplegics in the United States.

"When my vision began to change a few years ago I tried reading glasses. But they were so inconvenient. I just abandoned them," Ms. Casas said. "They were more trouble than they were worth."

#### **Eyestrain Headaches Every Workday**

Her decision had consequences. She was forced to squint to read the small print of college catalogs and student transcripts she deals with daily in her job as an academic counselor at El Camino College in Torrance, Calif.

"Every afternoon I'd go home with a headache from eyestrain," she said.



*Tisa Casas*

Finally, Ms. Casas mentioned her problem to her doctor, Dr. Peter Galier of Santa Monica. Dr. Galier referred her to the Maloney Vision Institute to be evaluated for vision correction surgery such as Lasik or Photorefractive Keratectomy, also known as PRK.

After her first visit in January, Dr. Farid Eghbali, one of the institute's doctors, approached her with a question. He explained that Dr. Robert Maloney, the institute's director, had started a new vision correction program for quadriplegics at no charge.

"Dr. Eghbali asked whether that was something I would be interested in. Of course, I said, 'yes.'"

#### **Reading Small Type Again**

Because Dr. Maloney determined that Ms. Casas' corneas were too thin for LASIK, he corrected her vision with PRK. The procedure went perfectly, she said, adding that she's amazed at the improvement in her vision.

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## DISCARDED EYEGASSES MAKE AN AFRICAN JOURNEY; THE GIFT OF SIGHT TO THE POOR

It's a liberating feeling to toss away your eyeglasses after undergoing a vision correction procedure. And to prove it there's a big bowl of discarded glasses in the lobby of the Maloney Vision Institute.

But what happens to those eyeglasses? You'll be pleased to know they're recycled; they're given to impoverished people all over the world.

Recently, hundreds of pairs of glasses collected by the Maloney Vision Institute – where technicians spent hours testing and tagging them with their prescriptive values – were delivered by Los Angeles eye surgeon Dr. Richard Hulquist to a free eye clinic in the poor West African nation of Cameroon.

Dr. Hulquist, an old friend and colleague of Dr. Robert Maloney, flew to that nation's capital city of Yaounde

where he presented the eyeglasses to Presbyterian Eye Services – which operates out of the back of a large church.

"Eyeglasses we take for granted are much-appreciated by people in the under-developed world," said Dr. Hulquist. "About half of Cameroon's 16.4 million people are too poor to afford medical care. So this charitable effort makes an enormous difference in the quality of life for so many."

Cameroon is slightly larger than California. It is one of the most prosperous countries in sub-Saharan Africa and still its per capita gross domestic product is only \$1,900 annually. The median age in the former British and French colony is 18 years old and the unemployment rate is about 30 percent.

Dr. Hulquist said the poorly equipped clinic was in a Sunday school behind a large wood-framed church. When he arrived about 30 people were waiting to be seen by a technician, who is responsible for the diagnostics and treatment. A trained ophthalmologist visits the clinic a few days each month to treat the serious cases, Dr. Hulquist said.

"It is truly gratifying to know that – just as unaided eyesight is so liberating to people with the means to take advantage of the latest medical care – these eyeglasses are even more important to people who could never have them otherwise," Dr. Hulquist said.

## TAX-FREE FLEX PLANS PROVIDE REIMBURSEMENT FOR LASIK SURGERY

Make LASIK surgery one of your New Year's Resolutions with your flex plan account in 2005.

Health-care reimbursement accounts, or flex-plans, enable you to set aside up to \$4,000 a year tax-free from your gross income to pay for medical expenses not covered by your medical insurance plan. The key is that you have to use the money during the calendar year.

Don't have a flex-plan? The Maloney Vision Institute staff can advise you on how to set one up. Remember, its tax-free money. If smarter financial planning also is one of your goals for 2006, this is a win-win deal!



## ‘FOCUS ON INDEPENDENCE’

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“I have no trouble reading college catalogues. I’m able to read 4-point type easily. It’s a dramatic change for me,” she said.

Ms. Casas was the first patient to undergo Laser vision correction under what is being called Focus on Independence, a nationwide program for which Dr. Maloney in conjunction with Dr. Dan Durrie has recruited some 15 doctors all over the United States.

Last August, a story about the program was published in *New Mobility*, a magazine aimed at people with physical disabilities. Tim Gilmer, the magazine’s editor, says the National Spinal Cord Injury Association estimates that every day some 15 people become quadriplegics through injuries.

### Program Goes Nationwide

Ryan Delaney, the program’s coordinator at the Maloney Vision Institute, said the magazine article triggered dozens of calls from interested people nationwide.

“Through personal relationships that Drs. Maloney and Durrie have with colleagues all over the country, they’ve recruited specialists in virtually every big city to help: Chicago, Miami, New York, Washington, D.C., Portland, San Francisco, Houston, Dallas and Albuquerque. We’ve even got an eye surgeon in Claremont, N.H. The program’s really grown. And it’s quite exciting,” Mr. Delaney said.

Ms. Casas’ corrected vision has made the world of difference to her in her life and her work.

“Before starting at El Camino College in 2000 I worked as an advocate for the Westside Center for Independent Living, which is part of a nationwide program. But this job is what I’ve wanted since college,” she said. “It’s everything I hoped it would be and more. Thanks to Dr. Maloney, my quality of life has greatly improved.”

## EYE THREATS POSED BY SOME TOYS, WATCHDOG GROUP WARNS

Four of this year’s 10 most dangerous toys could cause serious eye injuries, according to the group World Against Toys Causing Harm in its annual pre-holiday survey.

Toys earning W.A.T.C.H.’s ignominious “10 Worst Toys” rating as threats to the eyes are:

- The Camouflage Water Bomb Fun Kit from Pioneer Worldwide is a slingshot capable of forcefully firing water bombs;
- The Splatmatic Pistol Spat Paintball Shooter, which fires paint balls at high velocity;
- Star Wars – Revenge of the Sith Energy Beam Blaster by Hasbro comes with pressurized “energy beam string canisters;”
- The Lord of the Rings – Return of the King Uruk-Hai Crossbow set, which catapults arrows at high velocity.

Regardless of where eye dangers are found, Dr. Farid Eghbali of the Maloney Vision Institute says people should know how to act in case of an eye injury by a blow, cut, burn or chemical exposure.

Symptoms to look for include:

- Decreased vision
- Eye redness
- Laceration on the eyelids or eyeball
- Double vision
- Irregular or unequal pupils
- Pain or discomfort

In case of a chemical spill in the eye, the eye should be washed immediately and for at least 30 minutes prior to seeking help from an eye care professional, Dr. Eghbali said. He adds that an eye doctor should evaluate any eye injury regardless of whether any symptoms are present.

W.A.T.C.H. has been issuing annual dangerous toys warnings since 1973. The group’s work has been called “helpful” by the Toy Industry Association, whose spokeswoman said parents should follow age guidelines on toy packaging and be especially vigilant of gifts their children receive at the holidays.

To learn about other toys seen as potentially harmful, check websites for W.A.T.C.H., the New York Public Interest Research Group and the Consumer Product Safety Commission.



# VISION



## SKI GOGGLES: A VITAL PIECE OF GEAR FOR WINTER FUN

When you're on the slopes this winter a pair of quality ski or snowboarding goggles should be an essential piece of your equipment. A good pair of goggles will protect your eyes against the bands of invisible ultraviolet radiation that – when combined with cold wind and snow – can easily cause snow blindness or worse depending on the length of exposure.

Even for cloudy days 95% ultraviolet light protection is a must-have to guard against UV-A and UV-B rays, the two bands of UV light that reach the earth's surface.

Short-term exposure to UV rays can cause snow blindness or photokeratitis, which is a painful sunburn on your eyes. Long-term exposure to UV rays can cause permanent eye damage and may lead to cataracts and other eye ailments.

Polarized lenses block bright, reflected glare but because they're usually made with a

darker tint they become less effective in the long shadows of late afternoon.

Some goggles have interchangeable lenses. Make sure to choose the lens tint for the right conditions.

Yellow, gold or amber for low light and fog.

Rose for low light, overcast days.

Green or other dark tints for sunshine.

There are many excellent choices in ski and snowboarding goggles on the market this season. The key is making sure the pair you buy provides comfort and the best protection for your eyes when you're shushing the slopes.

- Get a comfortable fit with a strap that's easily adjustable. If you wear eyeglasses, make sure the goggles fit over them.

- Shop before you hit the slopes. You'll save money and have a larger selection from which to choose if you shop before leaving for the mountains.

- Try on as many brands and models as possible before you buy. Get the clerk's permission to wear them outside the store to see how well the lenses work in natural light. Some brands have warranties.

- Anti-fogging is important. Check out the ventilation system. Because goggles easily fog up, you want a ventilation system that allows air into the goggles. Some have double lenses to discourage condensation as well as vents to allow warm air to escape.

- Look for peripheral vision. The more the better. One company boasts that its lenses offer 224 degrees of peripheral vision.

- Safety is a priority. Most goggles have hard polycarbonate lenses. The more flexibility in the frame and lens, the less likely the lens will break or pop out in a fall.

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