

# THE POWER OF ONE

A National Post special interest supplement on unique retail establishments



Sight planners: Dr. Sheldon Herzog and his wife, Cherry Tabb, chief executive and co-founder, along with Dr. Herzog, of the Herzig Eye Institute.

## A vision for the future

### HERZIG EYE INSTITUTE

When city boosters proudly proclaim Toronto a world-class city, they usually back up their statements by offering examples such as the waterfront, the Raptors, Blue Jays and Maple Leafs or the CN Tower. What they usually overlook is the fact that Toronto has also gained a global reputation for excellence in another field — laser eye surgery.

Toronto's claim to excellence in laser vision correction is such that U.S. doctors come here to train in new techniques and people from all parts of the globe flock to Toronto to see their myopia or other eye misfortunes corrected.

"As an American, that was something I have never really understood," says Cherry Tabb, chief executive officer and co-founder, with her husband, Dr. Sheldon Herzog, of the Herzig Eye Institute.

"We have a world-famous community of eye surgeons in Toronto," Ms. Tabb says, "yet nobody seems to brag about it. Few even know about it."

Herzog is a prime example. In its six years in business, the institute has treated thousands of patients from 42 states and 23 countries.

They are drawn by referrals from physicians and the word-of-mouth reputation of its other co-founder and medical director, Dr. Herzog. Since 1990, he has pioneered laser eye surgery and now modestly admits to having performed more than 20,000 procedures.

That does not include other surgical operations such as cataract removal. They number in the thousands, too.

While cataract surgery covered by OHIP is performed by Dr. Herzog at Branson Hospital, he also provides the same treatment to foreign patients at the institute's clinic at 131 Bloor Street West in Toronto, in the Colonnade.

It is his remarkable skill and depth of experience that have drawn patients such as Dr. Roberta Bondar, Canada's first female astronaut, David Cronenberg, world-renowned film director and golfer Ian Leggatt, now a regular on the PGA Tour alongside the likes of Tiger Woods and David Duval.

An opportunity to study under Dr. Herzog also means budding laser eye surgeons come from across the continent to work with the practice.

"We have had scores of them," says Ms. Tabb. "They want to learn from the best, most experienced people in the practice so they come here."

The Herzig Eye Institute is a bit of an anomaly at a time when laser eye surgery seems to have taken a turn toward multiple outlet chains charging discounted prices. Herzog has one location, on the second level of the Colonnade, about 100 metres east of Bloor and University Avenue. Ms. Tabb explains why:

"We looked at acquiring a chain of about 10 other centres across Canada about three years ago, but after careful thought we decided that was not the way we wanted to go."

Their chief concern was the possibility they would not be able to maintain the high standards at the chain stores that the Herzig Eye Institute employs at its existing location, adds Dr. Herzog.

"Quality control is just too difficult to maintain in a chain operation," he says. "Here, you have the owners and

the medical director — me — always on site. With chains, there can be a tendency to let business decisions win out over medical ones. There is just no way we would support that."

The point he is making is that laser eye surgery is not a commodity to be sold at discount prices through chain operations. It is an invasive surgical operation that demands the highest standards of patient care, and qualifications and experience on the part of the medical staff performing the procedure.

Essentially, what Dr. Herzog and his two associates, Dr. John MacLeod, chief of surgery for Durham Region, and Dr. Theodore Rabinovitch, director of clinical research do, is use a high-powered beam of light to cut minute pieces of tissue off the surface of the cornea to reshape the surface of the eye's lens. By changing the shape of the lens, the doctors change the eye's focal length.

Most vision problems such as near and far sightedness occur when images are projected to a point either behind or in front of the retina because of a flaw in the shape of the cornea. Reshaping the curve of the

cornea with a laser, in effect, regrinds the eye's lens. The procedure is painless and speedy with time in the operating chair measured in minutes.

The two main procedures offered by Herzig are PRK (photorefractive keratectomy) and the more recently developed LASIK (laser assisted in situ keratomileusis). The former involves using the laser to reshape the outer surface of the cornea. The latter involves making a thin flap on the surface of the eye, reshaping the cornea under the flap and then replacing it once the procedure is complete.

LASIK is regarded as providing faster healing times and has generally replaced PRK as the standard operation for most patients.

"Both are effective," says Dr. Herzog. "But there may be situations where, because of the physical characteristics of the eye, PRK is indicated as providing the best results."

The same choice applies with the actual lasers that are used in the procedures. Herzig has two laser suites as well as three examination rooms and one cataract surgery room with a second about to be built.

"The chief difference between the

two lasers is that the VISX laser has an automatic tracking mechanism," Dr. Herzog says. "A small number of patients naturally move their eyes during surgery. The VISX system automatically tracks those minute movements and ensures the laser beam is always centred where it should be."

The advanced nature of the procedure has allowed Herzig to treat patients that have, in the past, been untreatable, particularly patients with large pupils. "The combination of proper patient selection and the ability to fit the right technology to the right patient has enabled Dr. Herzog to virtually eliminate night vision concerns for his patients," Ms. Tabb says.

Herzig has also become a centre for new laser technology, with manufacturers eager to have Dr. Herzog adopt the latest improvements to their equipment. A main reason is that a nod of approval from him can become a *de facto* seal of approval when it comes to persuading other surgeons across North America to adopt the technology.

While laser surgery may be the permanent answer to nature's mistakes for many people, not all are good candidates for the procedure, Dr. Herzog says. Of the 2,000 people who are examined by the institute's staff in an average year, perhaps only 1,200 to 1,500 are actually operated on.

"Laser corrective surgery is not suitable for people with collagen-related diseases like lupus," he says. "Nor for anyone who has uncontrolled conditions like diabetes. There are also sometimes eye characteristics that make people unsuitable. For example, larger-than-usual pupil size can create a risk of glare. Perhaps the cornea is too flat or too thin."

The only way to know for certain is to have a thorough eye exam, either at the institute itself or at one of its local affiliated offices.

The price, which includes a lifetime guarantee, is \$2,500 per eye, the same price Herzig has charged since it opened its doors.

"The best part of this job," Dr. Herzog says, "is that what we do here really makes a difference in people's lives. Not just by delivering clear vision for maybe the first time in their lives, but also in the great improvement in the quality of life the procedure brings. Knowing we have made that difference makes it all very worthwhile."



Eye toward excellence: Dr. Sheldon Herzog is recognized around the world for his work in laser eye surgery.