

A clear business vision

Woolfson Eye Institute reshapes eyes – and a business model

by Jill Von Wedel

LASIK – the procedure in which a laser is used to correct vision by reshaping the cornea – has helped millions of people see clearly again. More than 65,000 of those people have trusted their eyes to Dr. Jonathan Woolfson – founder of Woolfson Eye Institute. Headquartered in Lawrenceville, WEI has garnered the reputation as “the eye doctor’s doctor,” having performed the procedure on more than 300 optometrists and ophthalmologists – and even athletes from the Atlanta Falcons and Georgia Force.

So how did so many people come to trust their corneas to Dr. Woolfson? Simple – innovative technology in nine satellite locations in Georgia, the Carolinas and Tennessee.

“As the business grew, we decided to service the Southeast better with satellite locations,” Woolfson says. “We developed an innovative way of transporting the technology to the locations using a mobile laser.”

The mobile laser was developed to be moved to all WEI locations, which ensures that the surgeries can be performed by Dr. Woolfson himself and not other surgeons. “It ensures the same level of care with every patient,” he says. “The surgeries are performed by me, under my supervision. Everyone is held to the same safety standards.”

The mobile technology can also travel to metropolitan and growing areas alike. “It is difficult to have the mobile laser, but great to provide to larger and smaller cities,” says Debbie Raasch, chief operation officer of WEI. “We also have a mobile surgical team so that key people are there all the time.”

The company is also expanding to provide other areas of care. “We want to expand to different eye care and surgical areas, including treatment of cataracts, glaucoma and diabetes patients,” Woolfson says. **WEI also provides a corporate discount program to companies of any size that provide vision insurance to employees.**

And, of course, each office has a team to serve the locals. “Each office has a core team with doctors and a practice manager to make sure everyone is aware,” Raasch says. “They live in the community and are able to reach out to the residents.”

The company also knew it had to reach



Dr. Jonathan Woolfson – founder of Woolfson Eye Institute

out to the community by rebranding. In 2005, Custom Laser Eye changed its name to Woolfson Eye Institute.

“One reason was that affiliate doctors didn’t know where he moved to and wanted the name recognition,” Raasch says. “The second part of the rebranding effort

was to educate the market. The operators at our call center are trained to answer questions and to make sure patients are making the right decision.”

Through education, WEI seeks to emphasize quality for the price. “Others will advertise low prices to the consumer, but the ads aren’t completely truthful,” Dr.

Woolfson says. “We are trying to get our message out and remain ethical. We are not the cheapest because we are not sub-par.”

And this month, WEI will update its technology by offering bladeless LASIK procedures, in which a laser will take the place of the microkeratome blade generally used to cut the cornea.

“We are doing this now because we evaluated the technology to make sure it’s the right decision,” Raasch says. “It isn’t necessarily better than the microkeratome, but it has its needs.”

The company is also expanding to provide other areas of care. “We want to expand to different eye care and surgical areas, including treatment of cataracts, glaucoma and diabetes patients,” Woolfson says. WEI also provides a corporate discount program to companies of any size that provide vision insurance to employees. **GBJ**

At A Glance: LASIK

What is it?

LASIK stands for Laser-Assisted in situ Keratomileusis. It’s a type of refractive eye surgery performed by an ophthalmologist using a laser to correct myopia (near-sightedness), hyperopia (farsightedness) and astigmatism.

Why is it so popular?

It’s relatively inexpensive, pain-free and has a short recovery time. In other words, the surgery, for many people, is a small price to pay for never needing eyeglasses or contact lenses again despite the procedure generally not being covered by medical insurance.

Who invented it?

The basic process of reshaping the cornea using a tiny blade was invented by a Spanish doctor in the late 1950s. Since then, the process has evolved all over the world. In the 1960s, Russian and American scientist began experimenting with lasers. In the early 90s Greek and Italian surgeons began offering elective LASIK surgery to patients. Since then, its worldwide popularity has exploded.

How does the procedure work?

The goal with LASIK is to alter to correct vision problems by slightly altering the shape of the cornea. The operation is performed with the patient awake and mobile, though usually mildly sedated. The first step is to create a flap of corneal tissue. The second step is remodeling of the cornea underneath the flap with laser. Finally, the flap is repositioned.

Is it safe?

Generally, yes. Studies have shown patient satisfaction ratings in the 92 to 98 percent range. Most experts agree that the procedure is extremely effective for patients with minor to moderate vision problems. The FDA recommends prospective patients get a full eye examination and carefully consult with their eye doctor before deciding to get the procedure.