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Shanna Fleming May, OD

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Doctor Takes a Leap of Faith on New Practice Location

After her optometry school graduation, Shanna Fleming May, OD, of Troy, Alabama, rented a space in which to start her practice. "The building was not very visible from the main road," she says. So when the lease renewal came due five years later, she and her husband – also self-employed – had to make a big decision about whether or not to buy a location or continue renting. They chose to buy. In fact, they chose to build the entire building.

That was three years ago, and Dr. May says it's been a great benefit. "It was scary, but it has really paid off. My payment is actually only a few hundred dollars more per month than my rent was, and we own the building," she says.

One of the most significant benefits can't be measured financially. Her old location had a difficult entrance and exit onto the main road. She worried about her older patients navigating the traffic patterns safely. "That was one thing that really bothered me. Now we're off a major highway at a traffic light," she says. Perhaps that easier access has driven more patients her way, too. "As a mom of four, I look at things like that," she says.

Her husband, David, was able to help in overseeing the construction and development of the new office and the move itself. "We wanted to lose as few days of patient care as possible. I still had power bills and staff to pay, so we didn't want to have much downtime." Two days after the old office closed, the new one opened.

Since that time, her growth has accelerated. "We grew from day one, but at that five-year-mark, it really started to take off," she says. She has seen a lot of patients who tell her that they didn't even know there was an OD in town, even though this office is just a few miles from the old location.

In addition to the more visible and accessible location, she credits much of her success to her staff of five. "I tell people whom I interview that I can train them to do whatever I need them to do, but they have to have the right personality for the office. It's a very friendly place, warm and inviting. People come in and feel at home," she says.



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Dr. May with her husband, David, and their four children

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Thanks to her Vision Source[®] membership, she says she has been able to acquire some new equipment that helps her practice more efficiently. "Just being able to touch base with other doctors in the network has been great. You don't have to be afraid to ask questions about how your colleagues have handled something. They're willing to share ideas," she says.

Now she recognizes the need to put on more of a CEO hat as her business builds. She has an office manager who has done very well with managing staffing issues and the overall functions of the office daily. She also has an open-door management style, encouraging employees to come to her with problems before they become big issues.

So far, she's been the only OD, but now she's beginning to see the need for another OD to help. "A lot of doctors don't want to come to a smaller town, so it has to be the right fit," she says. The newer location has three complete exam lanes, and Dr. May is working on opening a fourth one in anticipation of hiring an associate.

Her Vision Source[®] membership continues to bring her rewards as she charts this new path toward growth and management of a larger practice. "I've known since the time that I went to an optometrist in fourth grade and got my first pair of eyeglasses that I wanted to be an optometrist. That whole experience was so neat. But for years, and even through much of optometry school, I didn't realize that running an independent practice required more skills than taking care of people's eyes. I've had to learn about billing, taxes, salaries, staff management and so much more," she says. Having a network of colleagues who have encouraged her and helped her with practical advice has made the path easier to travel.