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Big-time Service in a Small-town Practice

Iowa Falls, Iowa, has a population of only about 5,000, and nearby Parkersburg has only about half that many. Yet Jarod Wood, OD, and Amanda Wood, OD, considered these practices very viable when they purchased them nine years ago. And that has turned out to be true.

The two doctors had worked for other ODs after they graduated from Southern College of Optometry, but they knew that they wanted to be on their own. They reviewed the Iowa Optometric Association's blue book of optometrists, which lists ODs' birthdays, and sent letters to 10 60+-year-old doctors in small Iowa towns, asking if they were interested in selling. Four doctors got back to them, and the couple determined that these two locations, just 30 miles apart, would be a good place to start.

Since then, the practice has grown. The doctors have added an associate, Nickolas Huisman, OD, who brings experience with complex specialty and scleral contact lens fittings. He has also been able to cover eight nursing homes in the region, to which he travels to provide health exams. Dr. Wood says that he and his wife started providing eye care in the nursing homes, but as the practices became busier, it was difficult to keep up. "We do gain patients to the practice through those visits. Staff and family members of these patients know that we provide their care, so they seek us out," he says.

The practice also added an in-office Santinelli edger, which has allowed it to provide faster service and lower the cost of goods. "We run some promotional offer every month, and being able to do our own edging allows us to capture additional sales by offering specials for backup eyeglasses for contact lens wearers or second-pair sales," he says. At that time, the doctors hired a technician, and now three technicians can operate the edger. "Any time there's downtime, the technicians can go into the lab," he says.

It's important that the practice be able to feature the services and products that patients could get in larger towns. So the doctors have invested in diagnostic equipment, such as the Optos Daytona. "It's at least an hour's drive to see an ophthalmologist so we provide a lot of medical eye care here," he says. In one recent morning, he saw three patients with glaucoma and two with age-related macular degeneration and one who was there for a refractive exam. Indeed, some of the other ODs in the region send their patients to this practice for advanced testing, too.

Similarly, patients don't want to drive far to buy fashionable frames. "People come in and very surprised to see that we carry Jimmy Choo and Gucci and Silhouette. But we do very well with those lines," he says. For example, the practice hosts trunk shows, but only about every other year. Less-frequent shows have a bigger impact, says Dr. Wood. He noted that in the most recent show, even in a town of 5,000 residents, the practice netted \$25,000 in $\frac{3}{4}$ of a day. "It wouldn't be sustainable if we did that too often," he says.



Drs. Amanda and Jarod Wood



The staff at Wood Vision Clinic



In-house edging means faster service

(Over, please)



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However, they do occasionally invite their VIP customers in for private showings when frame vendors stop by to show special frames. "We have a few patients who come in and buy just about every time," he says. The practice also features periodic flash sales on its Facebook page, which has more than 1,000 people following it.

"One day recently, all three doctors were away for CE, and our office manager posted a note about a special on Jimmy Choo frames via Facebook. The staff sold seven frames while we were gone that day," he says. For those – and all – frame purchases, the staff members make it special for the patient. New eyeglasses are dispensed on a nice tray, and the patient goes home with branded eyeglass cleaner and a cleaning cloth, as well as some nice chocolate. That kind of focus keeps the revenue numbers up, which in turn allow the doctors to treat their staff well. A 2014 trip for the entire staff to Jamaica is an example of the kind of team spirit created.

The doctors joined Vision Source® about two years after they purchased the practices. "The savings from the Heidelberg Spectralis alone have been incredible," he says. "It has enabled us to be able to refer patients appropriately without having to send them an hour away."

Plus, the doctors have taken care to cultivate the kinds of relationships that are common in small towns. They send hand-written thank-you notes to new patients and frequent buyers, and the staff sends sympathy cards to the family when an area resident passes away. The practice sponsors local sports teams, builds a float for the 4th of July parade and is involved in the local school's 4th grade reading challenge. The doctors and staff work with social services to identify a needy family to support during the holidays. Dr. Jarrod Wood is a member of the Rotary and Elks clubs and serves on the local airport board. Dr. Amanda Wood coaches basketball, is a member of the Lion's Club, has organized the community's Toys for Tots drive and serves on the board of directors for the local hospital, which has helped establish great rapport with the local primary care providers.

"We're not just the optometrists in town. Our patients are also our neighbors. We see them in church, at school and at the grocery store," he says.



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