



# Vision Source® TRUSTED COLLEAGUE

## Robert Prazer, OD

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### Making Eye Care a Mission

Robert Prazer, OD, of Wexford, Pa., says that he has a “mission heart inside of me.” He had been on mission trips to Guatemala as a young OD but between the demands of running a practice and having a family, committing to that level was difficult. So this past year, he borrowed a template for mission work from dentists who run a program called Dentistry from the Heart. “We named our program ‘Vision Care from the Heart’ as a way to give back to those truly in need right here in our community.”

Dr. Prazer pushed for volunteers among his staff, friends and colleague ODs, telling them that volunteering was more than working for a day without pay. “I knew that if they did it, it would be transformational for them,” he says.

He chose February 21, close to Valentine’s Day, to play off the heart theme. Prior to the event, the volunteers called homeless shelters, women’s shelters, churches and schools. “We had no patients scheduled for the day, and people started coming in around 8 a.m. Our goal was to get 200 people in, and we got 103. But these weren’t simple eye exams. These were children and adults with problems, like the 14-year-old -8.00D patient who had never had eyeglasses. Or patients with 5.00D of cylinder.” The practice, which included four additional volunteer ODs that day, saw a steady flow of people until 5 p.m. “Now that we’ve done one, we know how to do it better. My goal is to secure other Vision Source® practices to do the same because not all the people who need help can get here.”



Before the event, Dr. Prazer told the staff who had volunteered for the day to accept the patients at face value. “Even if it looks like they don’t need the charity, you can’t judge them. Their house may have burned down or they might have lost a job.” In fact, he recalls a moment from a trip to Guatemala where one helper to the effort was, well, not helpful. He was rather difficult, and Dr. Prazer was frustrated by his attitude. That night, he learned the man’s wife and daughter had disappeared recently and never returned. Never judge.

The transformation that Dr. Prazer felt during his own mission work in Guatemala was apparent this day, too. “I think it was the happiest day of our practice in years. My staff was so happy. The patients were so gracious and thankful,” he says. Many of his 42 staff members did volunteer their time that day, and those who didn’t saw the change in the practice staff the next day. Some had tears in their eyes as they recounted the experiences, and most of the team that volunteered has become a closer and more cohesive team. “We were all astounded that we could see 103 patients smoothly with so little stress when on a regular day, we see 45 patients and it’s stressful.”

Dr. Prazer says that he’s thankful for the template created by the dentists’ program, in which 800 offices participated. He’d love to see the same thing occur with optometry. “We can all give back one day. And it’s more personal for some reason when it’s local.” That’s an important distinction. “I was so grateful that these patients came. I wanted to make sure they had a good experience and received what they needed, in a respectful way. I wanted them to know that we are here as a part of the community.” He also learned from his Guatemala trips that many people don’t want to take charity, so he had set up a table that allowed them to make food or monetary donations to the local food bank.

Dr. Prazer has hopes that other Vision Source® practices will dedicate a day to this cause. “I’d like to shoot for 1,000 patients helped in one day and a future goal is to help 10,000,” he says. He acknowledges there are out-of-pocket costs for the practice – such as food, lenses and frames, but he added that vendors were very generous, providing heavily discounted frames and free blank lenses. “I don’t think it hurt us financially,” he says. “What we gave that day will come back to us tenfold”

In fact, it contributes to the atmosphere that Dr. Prazer wants to create. “I’d like to be known as a humble and generous office. People who come appreciate a practice that gives back.” Indeed, they’ve been appreciating it for 23 years, since Dr. Prazer opened cold in 1991. “It was just my mother, who was my receptionist, and me,” he says. His growth has been steady, and now he’s facing a decision about whether to expand or move to a larger building in the next year or so. “We’ll be able to serve more people. We have five exam lanes and four full-time doctors, so we are limited by our space and equipment. We have a lot of capacity to expand,” he says, and the Vision Source® savings will help bring the goal into sight. “The equipment savings alone could cover a year’s membership.”