

Inauguration Speech Shirley Earley, OAO President

I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to lead the Opticians Association of Ohio for the next two years. It is an honor and privilege to be part of this great organization. It does not seem very long ago when I was invited to attend a local association meeting in Cincinnati and first became involved. It is amazing; my only goal at that time was to give back to my profession, have a strong voice representing opticians and simply make a difference.

During my presidency we will continue to move forward with many great opportunities. The Opticians Association of Ohio has partnered with the ABO/NCLE National Educational Conference in Cincinnati, September 16-19. This is the premier optician conference in the country, offering training and education in all facets of our profession – all for opticians, by opticians.

OAO recently developed an online theft database. This is a new tool on the OAO web site designed to curb theft from optical shops and dispensaries. You have the ability to forward pertinent information to the Association which will then be uploaded to the theft database at www.oao.org to be shared with opticians around the state. The intent of this database is a way to share information quickly. This service is available to OAO members and web site visitors who provide a valid email address.

Opticians play a critical role in Ohioans' eye care health by dispensing eyewear, contacts, participating in continuing education and to acquire license so we can give simple refractions for those that need them in between more extensive eye examinations.

We have many challenges ahead of us, not only as an association, but also as a profession. I constantly hear questions like why do we not make more money? How can more opticians view their job as a profession? The answer to both of these questions is simple - higher education. As long as a high school diploma and an apprenticeship is all we need to call ourselves licensed, we stifle our advancement as a profession and our salaries.

Your association, OAO, protects licensure in the state. There are many who would like to see licensure disappear in Ohio. If that happens, salaries will decrease. Ohio opticians already earn 15% more on average than unlicensed opticians in neighboring states. Licensure protection is our top priority.

Our interests on the National level are protected through your joint membership with the Opticians Association of America where both Tom Barracato and I are proud to serve as Board members.

The best way to protect our licenses and to promote the advancement of opticians in Ohio is to educate the public of who we are and what we do. One of my top priorities as your president is to create a committee to **BRAND** opticianry not only within the eye care community but also directly to the consumer. My vision and passion is to enhance consumer awareness and build consumer confidence in our profession so they understand that our role is to dispense glasses or contact lenses, which is essential for comfortable functional eyewear.

The dispensing optician plays the role of engineer and designer. The optician, using his/her training and knowledge, is able to determine by the prescription the proper fit and function for each individual to best solve their visual challenges.

I want to amplify the message that dispensing opticians serve a critical role in the eye care health delivery system. Most Americans during their life time will need corrective eyewear. That corrective eyewear becomes a part of their identity. The dispensing optician provides the source for proper eyewear considering the lifestyle of the individual. For that to happen, the dispensing optician must provide the service, maintenance and repairs essential to keep that eyewear functional for the life of the prescription. It is imperative we demonstrate this knowledge and understanding of our critical role to the consumer. "Visit your dispensing Optician and see the difference", is the message I wish to convey.

We have a voice through OAO and will be heard. Let's advance our profession through stronger education and branding. I am counting on everyone present today. It will take a dedicated team with vision and passion for this to happen. I know we can accomplish this great challenge. Thank you.