

Seattle optometrist helps legally blind to see again

New Office in Bellingham

By Elena Lombardi
Freelance Writer

Just because you have macular degeneration or other eye diseases like diabetic retinopathy doesn't mean you must give up driving.

Ever look through a pair of field glasses or binoculars? Things look bigger and closer, and much easier to see. Dr. Ross Cusic is using miniaturized binoculars or telescopes to help people who have lost vision from macular degeneration or other eye conditions.

"Some of my patients consider me the last stop for people who have vision loss," said Dr. Cusic, a low vision Optometrist. "People don't know that there are doctors who are very experienced in low vision care."

Irv Matthes drove all the way from Penticton, BC to Kirkland. "Thank you for putting some living back into my life. I could never have done this without these reading glasses. Now I can write this letter and solve the daily cryptogram in the newspaper."

Macular Degeneration is the most common eye disease amongst the senior population. As many as 25% of those over 65 have some degree of degeneration. The macula is one small part of the entire retina, but it is the most sensitive and gives us sharp images. When it degenerates macular degeneration leaves a blind spot right in the center of vision making it impossible to recognize faces, read a book, or pass the driver's vision test.

The experts do not know what causes macular degeneration. But it is known that UV light from the sun is a major contributing factor. Other factors are smoking, aging of course, and improper nutrition. Fifteen to 20% of the time it is genetic.

There are two types, wet and dry. The wet type involves leaky blood vessels and can be lasered shut. Unfortunately, it's a temporary fix since other leaks usually occur.

"Our job is to figure out everything and anything possible to keep a person functioning," says Dr. Cusic.

Washington and Oregon are among many states that allow the use of telescopic glasses to help meet the vision requirements for driving.

Donald Paguette, 72, a former county assessor from Anaheim, California was seen last November. "I could not read my



Carol Buckley with bioptic telescopes

saxophone music anymore," he said.

The doctor fit him with bioptic telescope glasses. "Amazing!" says Donald, "I can read the street signs twice as far as I did before. I can play my sax again. Happy day!" Dr. Cusic also provides special prismatic reading glasses to make the newspaper a little easier to read.

Carole Buckley, 71, of Arcadia, California came on the advice of a friend. "I wanted to be able to keep driving and do the fun things in life. One of those fun things is baseball. I love going to baseball games and now I can see those close plays again," said Carole.

Bioptic telescopic glasses were prescribed to read signs and see traffic lights farther away. As Carole put it, "These telescope glasses not only allow me to read signs from a farther distance, but make driving much easier. I've also used them to watch television so I don't have to sit so close.

Definitely worth the \$1950 cost. I don't know why I waited two years to do this; I should have come sooner."

Peter Rhodes traveled from Manchester, UK to be fit for special amorphic glasses for Retinitis Pigmentosa; he is one of the first patients in the United States or the UK to be helped with this rare eye disorder.

Ellen Imboden traveled from Sweden and was helped with two pairs of glasses: Special \$475 prismatic glasses that let her read newsprint, as well as bioptic telescopes to continue driving in Sweden.

Low vision devices are not always expensive. Some reading glasses cost as little as \$375 and some magnifiers under \$100. Every case is different because people have different levels of vision and different desires.

Dr. Cusic sees patients in his offices in Kirkland, Bellingham, Olympia and Vancouver, WA, and can be reached at:

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or toll free at
1-877-823-2020.