

FACE TIME

Clear vision

JEFFREY WHITMAN HELPS PEOPLE SEE BETTER

Dr. Jeffrey Whitman, 51, wanted to be an eye surgeon ever since accompanying his sister to her ophthalmologist appointments as a child. He grew up in Dallas and graduated from high school a year early before attending Southern Methodist University. He was accepted to University of Texas Southwestern Medical School at age 20, and in 1985 became an associate with Dr. Charles B. Key at the Key Eye Center, now the Key-Whitman Eye Center. In his career, Whitman has pioneered some of the most advanced eye-care technology to date, all while overcoming personal tragedy — the loss in 2005 of his youngest daughter, Dana. Whitman was interviewed by Staff Writer Shashana Pearson-Hormillosa.



DESCRIBE YOUR FAMILY. I've been married to my wife, Bonnie, since 1980. We have a 22-year-old daughter, Andrea, a 20-year-old daughter, Allison, and another daughter, Dana, who passed away when she was 13.

CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR DAUGHTER'S PASSING? Dana had pan encephalopathy, which is when the brain doesn't develop normally. She went into a nursing home when she was 4 and eventually died at age 13 from respiratory failure.

HOW DID YOU AND YOUR WIFE DEAL WITH THE LOSS? We already had a great relationship and dealt with Dana's loss as a family. Andrea was 19 and Allison was 17 when Dana died. We had professional help through counseling.

WHAT IS DANA'S HOPE? Dana's Hope is a project that was conceived before Dana passed. When you have a child with full-body failure, the options are limited; there are no children's nursing homes in the area. We would like to create a wing for children at a nursing home in Dallas with 12 to 15 beds to start. We are in negotiations for a location at either the Golden Acres campus or at The Legacy at Willow Bend.

WHAT INSPIRES YOU TO GET UP EVERY MORNING? I like the people I work with. We try to focus on the employees and everyone who works with us and for us.

WHY DO YOU THINK YOUR EMPLOYEES FOLLOW YOUR LEAD? They realize they're in an office where we're always doing our best and those efforts are rewarded. And, I'm a nice guy, too.

WHY IS THE KEY-WHITMAN CENTER SUCCESSFUL? We're successful because we haven't stayed in one little niche. We've targeted growth and provided general ophthalmology where it was needed.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST REVOLUTIONARY DEVELOPMENT IN EYE CARE OVER THE LAST 20 YEARS? Advanced-technology lens implants to correct near, intermediate and distance vision.

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF EYE SURGERY? The future is accommodative

lens implants, which has a hinge on either side of the lens to allow the eye to focus on different distances. It is great for aging baby boomers.

WHAT PART OF YOUR JOB DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST? Crystalens surgery. Doing the surgery has made me a better surgeon.

IF YOU DIDN'T WORK IN EYE CARE, WHAT WOULD YOU DO? My wife says I'd become a chef.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB? I worked at a bookstore.

WHAT IS YOUR MOST INFLUENTIAL BOOK? "Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't," by Jim Collins.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO ON YOUR TIME OFF? Cooking, water and snow skiing and working out.

WHOM DO YOU ASPIRE TO BE LIKE? I'd like to be a better multitasker, like my wife.

WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGE? Time management.

WHAT ARE YOUR PET PEEVES? It bothers me when people miss the trash can.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BEST BUSINESS DECISION? Having Dan Chambers join us as executive director; before that, we had no administrative personnel.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR WORST BUSINESS DECISION? A few former employees and doctors I've hired; it hurts when it doesn't work out.

WHO IS YOUR MOST RESPECTED COMPETITOR? Dr. John Haley, who has a practice in Garland, whom I know through the Texas Ophthalmological Association.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP THREE PASSIONS? Practice of ophthalmology, food and fun.

WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU HAD INVENTED? The YAG laser, which is a laser used to open a membrane behind a lens. And, gelato ice cream.

WHOM WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO MEET? I'd like to meet Dana (as an adult) and see what sort of person she could have been.

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