

Rose Optical sees success with preventive eye care approach

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GODFREY - Kevin Mangrum, owner of Rose Optical Inc., says making regular eye exams a priority is more important now than ever.

"Between what we are being fed today and UV rays being so intense, we are finding so many more eye diseases than we ever did in the past," Mangrum said. "The drugs and steroids in our foods are helping to create eye tumors and we see eye infections now that seem to pop up from nowhere."

Rose Optical has built its practice on preventative eye care for the entire family, from young to old.

"What we didn't know a few years ago is that you need to use eye protection to prevent damage to the macula of the eye, which can cause cataracts," Mangrum said. "The time to start protecting your eyes is right now, not when you are older and it is too late."

"For anyone age 40 and up, get your eyes checked every two years. For everyone else, you need to have them checked every year."

Rose Optical, open since 1991, has been recognized as the River Bend Growth Association Business of the Month for August.

"Any time you get recognized for something that you do, it is a nice feeling," Mangrum said. "We really appreciate the recognition the (JCBA) has given us."

Mangrum owns the practice alongside co-owners optometrist Mark Ferguson and Jim Toutloian. All three previously worked for Dr. Robert Handleman at Crown Optical, gaining years of invaluable optometry experience.

"It all started in 1974 when my mother sent me to Dr. Handleman at Crown Optical to get new glasses," Mangrum said. "I was just out of high school, and he hired me on the spot that day. Five years later I became office manager. He took me under his wing, like I was his own son."

When Dr. Handleman sold his practice, Mangrum decided the time was right to open his own eye care center, and Rose Optical's sights were set on Feb. 4, 1991.

"It took me about three or four months to get everything ready," he said. "Mark and Jim were still at Crown. Once we were up and flying here, they jumped on board. It has been a great family relationship here, actually."

Mangrum said that first year proved to be a success, as many of their old customers returned to the eye care practitioners they had trusted for years.

"We run this as a family business, and we brought that here with us," he said. "That is how we run Rose, and it could not be better."

Rose Optical has about 14 employees in addition to five eye doctors, including lab technician Gary Wilks, who has worked with Mangrum since Wilks was 17, and insurance processor Stacy Stahlschmidt, who has been with Mangrum since she was 18. His wife, Marie, also serves as co-owner, helping with paperwork and managing the employees.

"We have had an awesome 21 years," Mangrum said. "The doctors I have here are high honor physicians, and I am very fortunate to have them."

With an emphasis on customer service, the care center has built a loyal following of regular clients.

"We draw customers from around an 80-mile radius," Mangrum said. "They come from Springfield, Ill., to Springfield, Mo. People from out of state come and visit their families, and their families bring them here."

"I had a guy come in from Jerseyville a few weeks ago. I told him I hoped his experience was good here. He said this was his first visit to us and he will never go anywhere else. Stories like that make you feel good about coming to work."

Not answering to a franchise or a corporation allows the owners to go that extra mile when they feel the need to.

"The nice thing about owning a practice is that if people cannot afford (their eye care), we can work with them," Mangrum said. "Nothing is set in stone in this office, and you can't be stuffy. If you go to a restaurant and get the best steak in the world but the service is lousy, that steak suddenly isn't that good anymore."

"I am the luckiest person alive. I thoroughly love what I do, and I don't regret a single day I have come to work here."

Rose Optical, 3300 Godfrey Road, is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, staying open until 7 p.m. on Monday and Thursday and 8 a.m. until 2 p.m. on Saturday.

For information, call (618) 466-8778 or visit the website at www.roseopticalinc.com.