The evening’s theme was the “Celebration of Sight” and celebrate we did. More than 350 clinical and research faculty, board members and friends gathered at Manhattan’s Metropolitan Club on East 60th Street on September 18, 2008 to mark the 75th anniversary of the Edward S. Harkness Eye Institute. The black-tie event raised more than $1.2 million to support new research initiatives and acquire new equipment for the ITT Eye Clinic, which serves patients in neighboring Washington Heights and the surrounding area. Liz Cho, WABC-TV anchor, was mistress of ceremonies for the evening and Steve Ross, dubbed the “Crown Prince of New York Cabaret” by The New York Times, provided entertainment. Event co-chairs were Shirlee and Bernard Brown; Mary and Michael Jaharis; and Miranda Wong Tang.

The highlight of the gala was the presentation of the 75th Anniversary Visionary Leadership Awards to Louis V. Gerstner, Jr., Chairman of the Department’s Board of Advisors, and to Stanley Chang, M.D. In presenting the award to Mr. Gerstner, who joined the Board of Advisors in 1998, Dr. Chang praised him for restoring IBM’s premier position as

The Department of Ophthalmology is pleased to welcome Hilel Lewis, M.D., an internationally renowned ophthalmologist and retinal surgeon, who has been appointed to lead the newly created Division of International Ophthalmology at the Edward S. Harkness Eye Institute. He will also be a member of the Retina Division, delivering patient care, performing surgery and lecturing to fellows and residents. Dr. Lewis assumed the chairmanship of the Division of Ophthalmology at the Cleveland Clinic in 1993 and was the E. Bruce and Virginia Chaney Professor of Ophthalmology at the Cleveland Clinic Lerner College of Medicine. He founded the Cole Eye Institute at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation in 1999, serving as its director until this past June. Dr. Lewis single-handedly raised the funds that built the institute building and developed a basic science and clinical program that U.S. News and World Report recently ranked as one of the top 10 programs in the country.

Dr. Lewis is widely recognized for his contributions to retinal surgery. He designed a new surgical technique to shift the macula in patients who develop “wet” macular degeneration. After discovering that the vitreous plays a role in diabetic macular edema (swelling), he described a surgical technique to treat this condition. He is also an innovator of surgical techniques and instrumentation. He serves as Executive Editor of the American Journal of Ophthalmology. In January 2009, he will assume his duties as the President of the International Council of Ophthalmology Foundation. At Columbia, Dr. Lewis will focus on global vision loss, raising funds for initiatives to combat blindness across the globe and participating in research efforts to fight vision loss. “I chose to work here because of my close friendship with Dr. Stanley Chang and my admiration of him,” says Dr. Lewis. “I will try to increase the visibility of the Edward S. Harkness Eye Institute throughout the world.”
Dear Friends,

On September 18, 2008, our clinical and research faculty, board members and donors celebrated the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Edward S. Harkness Eye Institute at the Metropolitan Club in New York City. What an evening it was! We raised more than $1.2 million to support new research initiatives and to acquire new equipment for the ITT Eye Clinic which serves patients from our community. We also presented Louis V. Gerstner, Jr., Chairman of our Board of Advisors, with a 75th Anniversary Visionary Leadership Award in recognition of all he has done to develop a leading center for vision care and research. I was also honored to receive an award on behalf of the Eye Institute. You can read about the highlights of that very special and splendid evening in this issue of Viewpoint.

Also in this issue, we focus on the work of two of the doctors who have helped make the Institute what it is today. Peter Gouras, M.D., Professor of Ophthalmology, is focused on understanding the causes of macular degeneration at the molecular level by studying aging changes in the eyes of Rhesus monkeys. As you know, age-related macular degeneration remains the leading cause of blindness in Americans age 60 and older. Unfortunately, while we can slow the march of the disease, we have not yet found a cure. By studying an animal model, Dr. Gouras hopes to learn more about the disease process and how to slow its progress. Equally devastating is Stargardt disease, an inherited juvenile form of macular degeneration, which robs children and young adults of their vision. Dr. Gouras has partnered with Rando Allikmets, Ph.D. and Janet Sparrow, Ph.D. to develop a gene therapy approach for this disease. We also profile Michael Kazim, M.D., Clinical Professor of Ophthalmology and Surgery, a leading expert in thyroid eye disease and orbital tumors.

I am grateful to our patients, friends, and donors for their unswerving generosity and support over the past 75 years. The faculty and staff of the Department of Ophthalmology appreciate all you have done and we look forward to continuing our partnership with each and every one of you. As I noted in the remarks I made at the anniversary gala, I still enjoy coming to work every day and I still continue to learn in this exciting department. With all best wishes,

Stanley Chang, M.D.
K.K. Tse and Ku Teh Ying Professor
Edward S. Harkness Professor
Chairman, Department of Ophthalmology

Celebration of Sight continued from page 1

the world’s leading computer company. Mr. Gerstner used his leadership and visionary skills, Dr. Chang said, to expand our Board of Advisors to 35 members and to “renew the greatness of the Eye Institute.” “Lou supported the first recruit to the Institute’s Scholars Program, gave the lead gift to establish the Louis V. Gerstner, Jr. Clinical Research Center, and last year made a major gift to the Medical Center to support the development of young, talented physician-scientists who are just starting their careers in academic medicine,” Dr. Chang explained.

In his acceptance speech, Mr. Gerstner acknowledged the outstanding leadership of Dr. Chang and the formidable team he has built at the Eye Institute. “The work they are carrying out is important for all of us,” he said. “These dedicated physicians and research scientists are not only providing the best of clinical care to thousands of patients every year, but also have created an academic center of excellence where groundbreaking research is being conducted. This research benefits everyone and deserves all of our support.”

Lee Goldman, M.D., Dean of the Faculties of Health Sciences and Medicine at Columbia University Medical Center, presented Dr. Chang with his award, calling him an extraordinary physician, a visionary chairman, and a world-renowned vitreoretinal surgeon. “His steady hand ensures that Columbia’s leadership in ophthalmology is as vital now as it has been for the last 75 years,” Dr. Goldman noted. During his decade-long tenure as chairman, Dr. Chang has strengthened the Institute’s reputation as a leading international center for the diagnosis and treatment of eye disease by adding nine endowed professorships, improving the quality of clinical services and recruiting top-notch research scientists in retinal disease and glaucoma. Working with Mr. Gerstner and the Board of Advisors, Dr. Chang has doubled the department’s endowment, developed the Clinical Research Center and modernized the basic science research laboratory facilities. Dr. Chang, who became chairman in 1995, acknowledged the entire team at the Harkness Eye Institute. “Our nurses and staff always put the patients first and help them recover from the scourges of Louis V. Gerstner, Jr., recipient of a Visionary Leadership Award.
Science Insight:  
Do Monkeys Hold the Secret to Macular Degeneration?

For Peter Gouras, M.D., it’s all about the monkeys. Dr. Gouras, Professor of Ophthalmology, is researching the effects of dietary caloric restriction on age-related diseases of the eyes in colonies of Rhesus monkeys at the National Institute of Aging’s (NIA) primate facility in Maryland.

The NIA is studying the primates to learn if monkeys that are given 30 percent fewer calories than controls actually live longer. That dovetails perfectly with Dr. Gouras’s goal: to determine if, and at what age, the primates develop eye diseases associated with growing older – particularly macular degeneration, the leading cause of blindness in people over 60 in the Western world. According to Dr. Gouras, monkeys and humans are more alike than you’d imagine, especially in matters of vision. “About 70 percent of monkeys have some form of macular degeneration,” he explains. “What is being proven by my work is that monkeys are a terrific model,” he continues. “We can learn things from monkeys that we can’t from humans.” And thanks to electron microscopy, tissue from the eyes of deceased monkeys can be magnified 100,000 times, allowing him to examine the inner landscape of the eye as never before.

Because he recently acquired eyes from a one-year-old monkey, he is now comparing young eyes with older ones. “I have found macular degeneration starts at the basal membrane of the retinal pigment epithelium,” he says. “This is a crucial layer that supports photoreceptors, highly specialized structures that catch light.”

Using antibodies, Dr. Gouras pinpoints specific proteins in the retinal pigment epithelium, allowing him to do research at the molecular level and bringing him closer to understanding the molecular basis of the disease. “You can see where proteins are located, whether they are distributed properly and how they relate to the damage of this basal membrane,” he explains. Next on his research agenda is to “link the protein that is unique to the macula in primates to where it lies in the retina, by hunting through the pigment epithelial cells,” he says. “If we can understand why degeneration occurs, we can treat it.”

He will continue to study the role caloric restriction plays in the degenerative process. “Our data so far are suggestive but not statistically significant,” he notes. “We need more data and need to increase the number of monkeys.”

Dr. Gouras is also working with colleagues Rando Allikmets, Ph.D. and Janet Sparrow, Ph.D. to find a gene therapy solution to Stargardt disease, a form of macular degeneration that affects children. “Ninety percent of children with mutations in the Stargardt gene are legally blind by college,” he adds. “It would be nice to stop this disease by introducing a normal gene.” Research on mice has been promising. “We can cure a mouse by putting a normal gene into the photoreceptors,” says Dr. Gouras. He and Dr. Allikmets are collaborating with Oxford BioMedica, a biopharmaceutical company, to develop and launch a Phase 1 human study of the StarGen gene therapy for Stargardt disease.

As slow as the pace of progress sometimes is, Dr. Gouras is undeterred. “Of course, I’d love to cure diseases as soon as possible,” he maintains. “But research is fun. To take an electron microscope and see something you never saw before is uplifting. There is an element of excitement and accomplishment when you find something new and know it is related; that it is somehow telling you something about a disease.”

Understanding how macular degeneration develops in Rhesus monkeys could lead to better treatments and, possibly, a cure.
In August, Louis D. Pizzarello, M.D., M.P.H., Clinical Professor of Ophthalmology and Health Management, received the prestigious Global Achievement Award of the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) during the 8th Global Assembly of the organization held in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Dr. Pizzarello has served in numerous roles with IAPB for nine years; during the past four, he has been the Secretary General. In that capacity, he organized the Assembly, consisting of 800 people from 84 countries whose objective is to prevent blindness across the globe. The award recognizes Dr. Pizzarello’s pursuit of the goals of VISION 2020: The Right to Sight program, which he was instrumental in establishing in 1999. This IAPB program, in conjunction with the World Health Organization, aims to eliminate avoidable blindness by 2020. Since the inception of VISION 2002, levels of blindness worldwide have dropped. Dr. Pizzarello has worked in the field of blindness prevention for over 30 years, while maintaining an ophthalmology practice on the East End of Long Island.

Dr. Smith's primary research interests are in the application of high-resolution imaging of the eye to the diagnosis of glaucoma. Current projects include the development of new methods of analysis of images of the cornea and iris to identify people at risk for angle closure glaucoma. He is also working to improve techniques for analyzing retinal nerve fiber layer thickness measurements to identify glaucoma-related optic nerve damage. Other areas of interest include the measurement of fluctuations in intraocular pressure during spinal surgery and the evaluation of intraocular pressure-related complications of sustained-release intraocular steroid implants.

“Columbia University and the Institute are leaders in academic medicine with national and international recognition,” says Dr. Smith. “I was attracted by the opportunity to further enhance glaucoma research and education at an outstanding academic institution, and hope to make Columbia the premier center for glaucoma.
Highlights of the Celebration of Sight Gala

Above, L to R: Louis V. Gerstner, III, Robin Gerstner, Jill Goldman, Louis V. Gerstner, Jr., Lee Goldman, M.D., Jean Chang, Stanley Chang, M.D.

Left, L to R: Honoree Louis V. Gerstner, Jr. being congratulated by Dr. Chang.

Below Left, L to R: Dr. Chang, Mr. Gerstner, Miranda Wong Tang, Hamburg Tang.


Liz Cho, emcee, with Proclamation from the Honorable Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor of New York City.

Steven Ross, cabaret singer and entertainer at the Gala.

Harkness Eye Institute nurses celebrating.
Faculty Spotlight:
Michael Kazim, M.D.

You might say Michael Kazim, M.D. has ended up where he started.
And that is fine by him – especially since the “where” happens to be Columbia University Medical Center.

Born in New York City and a diehard Yankee fan, Dr. Kazim, Clinical Professor of Ophthalmology and Surgery, received his B.A. in biology, magna cum laude, from Columbia College, and his M.D. degree from the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Columbia University. After completing an internship in general surgery at the Medical Center, he did his residency at the Eye Institute. Additional training followed at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, where he was a fellow in ophthalmology and neuro-ophthalmology.

He finds treating patients with thyroid eye disease particularly challenging. “There are plenty of people doing this kind of work around the world,” he says. “But there are very few who are able to take care of large volumes of these patients.” That’s because their care is “extremely time-intensive,” he explains. “It is not a condition that can be accomplished in short order. Before you can consider rehabilitative surgery, you have to wait one and one half to two years until the patient’s condition stabilizes. When it does, the surgical outcome is more predictable and durable.”

“It is a difficult process,” adds Dr. Kazim. “The double vision that can develop in these patients makes it hard for them to function. And emotionally the disease can be very devastating because profound changes in appearance may develop.”

Dr. Kazim and others at the Institute have risen to the challenge. “From generation to generation, there has always been someone here who has had an interest in caring for these patients,” he notes. If appropriate, decompression surgery is performed, either reducing the abnormally expanded fatty tissue that occurs, or expanding the socket to accommodate fatty tissue and eye muscles. More recently, Dr. Kazim has teamed with Larry G. Close, M.D., Chairman, Department of Otolaryngology, to develop a balanced bone decompression operation that combines endoscopic nasal and orbital surgical approaches, further reducing the morbidity of surgery. He has also modified eye muscle surgery to address the scar tissue that occurs around the eye muscles and causes double vision, increasing the success rate. “As frustrated as patients are at the start of the disease, they are as relieved and grateful at the end of the rehabilitative process,” he says.

Dr. Kazim also treats a few hundred patients per year, from children to octogenarians, who have orbital tumors. “The eye socket unfortunately has the capacity to produce essentially any tumor that could crop up elsewhere in the body,” he says. “Even benign tumors have the ability to cause double vision or vision loss. But fortunately, life-threatening and difficult-to-control tumors are few and far between.”

Dr. Kazim’s commitment to finding the best possible treatments for patients extends beyond the Institute. As President of the International Thyroid Eye Disease Society, he is involved in furthering education and research on thyroid eye disease globally, and encouraging clinical trials on translational research. This fall, he hosted the Orbital Society’s second symposium on orbital disease, which attracted more than 300 doctors and researchers from around the world. Sponsored by the Eye Institute, the symposium reviewed the most recent advances in the treatment of thyroid eye disease, inflammatory disease of the eye socket, and tumors. Publication of the event’s proceedings is expected within a year.

That experience was just the latest milestone in a career at the Eye Institute that has been as rewarding as it has been intellectually stimulating. “If I had looked forward when I first started and said ‘What kind of practice would I want? This is it,’” says Dr. Kazim. “It has in many ways surpassed my greatest expectations.”

Celebration of Sight

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His interests have catapulted him to the frontlines of thyroid eye disease (Graves disease) and orbital tumors. His current research is focused on the causes and treatments of these conditions and on developing orbital endoscopic surgical techniques. He finds treating patients with thyroid eye disease particularly challenging. “There are plenty of people doing this kind of work around the world,” he says. “But there are very few who are able to take care of large volumes of these patients.” That’s because their care is “extremely time-intensive,” he explains. “It is not a condition that can be accomplished in short order. Before you can consider rehabilitative surgery, you have to wait one and one half to two years until the patient’s condition stabilizes. When it does, the surgical outcome is more predictable and durable.”

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Celebration of Sight

The celebration continued the next day with a scientific symposium that focused on critical issues in eye diseases and eye disorders. Speakers from across the country highlighted recent progress in research and clinical care and provided a glimpse of future innovations in vision science. Symposium chairmen were John T. Flynn, M.D. and Max Forbes, M.D., with Hile Lewis, M.D., who will lead the new Division of International Ophthalmology at the Institute, serving as moderator. Among the speakers were Ron Krueger, M.D., Professor of Ophthalmology, Cleveland Clinic Lerner College of Medicine; Manus Kraff, M.D., Clinical Professor of Ophthalmology at Northwestern University; Harry Flynn, Jr., M.D., Professor of Ophthalmology at the Bascom Palmer Eye Institute; Mark Blumenkranz, M.D., Professor and Chairman of Ophthalmology at Stanford University; and Scott Smith, M.D., M.P.H., the new head of the Glaucoma Division at Columbia.
Glaucoma fellow Roslyn M. Stahl, M.D., from Milford, Michigan earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in classical civilization from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, graduated from Columbia University’s post-baccalaureate pre-medical program and received her medical degree, magna cum laude, from State University of New York Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn. Following her internship at St. Vincent’s Hospital and Medical Center in Manhattan, she completed her residency in the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences at the University of Michigan Kellogg Eye Center in Ann Arbor, where she received the 2007 Walter R. Parker Resident Teaching Award.

Dr. Stahl’s previous research experience includes a retrospective chart review investigating the long-term efficacy of intravitreal triamcinolone acetonide injections in the treatment of macular edema associated with non-ischemic central retina vein occlusion. She also worked on a retrospective noncomparative case series investigating clinical outcomes of patients who had pre-cut tissues used in DSAEK procedures. She has published in Cornea and Clinical Cancer Research.

At the Harkness Eye Institute, Dr. Stahl divides her time between the faculty practice, where she works with Lama Al-Awad, M.D., and the resident clinic, where she works closely with Max Forbes, M.D. “The Eye Institute is one of the most prestigious in the country with excellent faculty and tremendous resources,” says Dr. Stahl. “I am also learning how to care for a population of patients with very little resources but enormous medical needs. As a physician you need to wear many hats: that of a doctor, a social worker and a friend. I am learning a lot about the intricate balance among all of these while providing good medical care.”

A native of Hamburg, Germany, retinal fellow Irene Barbazetto, M.D. works with faculty members of the Retina Division. She received her medical degree from Hamburg University and completed a residency in ophthalmology at the Harkness Eye Institute, where she also spent three years as a research fellow in ophthalmology / retina, from 2000 to 2003. Dr. Barbazetto has published widely. Recent publications include “ATM Gene Variants in Patients with Bilateral Idiopathic Perifoveal Telangiectasia” and “Central Serous Chorioretinopathy and Peripheral Retinal Neovascularization.”

“Working with Dr. Chang and his team makes every day a rewarding experience,” she says. “The exchange between clinicians and the basic science researchers at the Harkness Eye Institute provides an outstanding program for training the next generation of ophthalmologists.”

Cornea fellow Prathima R. Thumma, M.D. was born in India and grew up in New York City. She received a bachelor of engineering degree from The Cooper Union and a medical degree, with distinction, from the State University of New York Downstate Medical Center. After an internship at Abington Hospital in Pennsylvania, she completed her residency at Hahnemann University Hospital in Philadelphia, where she was co-chief resident.

Dr. Thumma works most closely with Richard Braunstein, M.D., Amilia Schrier, M.D., and Lynda Kleiman, M.D. She is also studying surgically induced astigmatism among different incision sizes for cataract surgery with Dr. Braunstein and plans to investigate intraocular pressure pre- and post-LASIK.

“I came to Columbia because of its great reputation,” says Dr. Thumma. “I am lucky to be working not only with some of the best cornea specialists but also with doctors who truly care about their patients.”

Flora Levin, M.D., a neuroophthalmology fellow, was born in Estonia and grew up in Brooklyn. She earned an undergraduate degree, magna cum laude, from Boston University and a medical degree from Weill Medical College of Cornell University. Following an internship at Washington (D.C.) Hospital Center, she completed her residency in the Department of Ophthalmology at UMDNJ-New Jersey Medical School in Newark, serving as chief resident from 2007 to 2008.

At Columbia, Dr Levin works with Jeffrey Odel, M.D., participating in patient care, working with residents, and researching the subtle differences in visual fields in patients with optic nerve versus retinal disease. “I chose Columbia because of Dr. Odel and the academic resources available here,” she says. “My experience has been highly educational and very pleasant. I am getting very good training that I will be able to build upon for the rest of my career.”

Dr. Levin’s previous research, which she has submitted for publication, focuses on surgical removal of periocular basal cell carcinoma with enhanced en-block frozen-section controlled excision technique. She is co-author of a study on rosiglitazone-induced proptosis that was published in the Archives of Ophthalmology and a study on the recognition of transorbital intracranial injury, published in Clinical Ophthalmology. Upon completion of her fellowship here, Dr. Levin will begin a fellowship in oculoplastics at New York Eye and Ear Infirmary.
In Memoriam:
Martin S. Kimmel
1916-2008

The Department of Ophthalmology mourns the loss of Martin S. Kimmel on April 15, 2008 at the age of 92. An esteemed member of the department's Board of Advisors, Mr. Kimmel was a grateful patient and a staunch supporter of medical science research. In 2006, Mr. Kimmel and his wife Helen, also a board member, endowed the department's Helen and Martin Kimmel Assistant Professorship of Ophthalmology, a five-year rotating term appointment, designed to develop and energize the careers of talented young physician-scientists in vision research.

Born in New York City, Mr. Kimmel co-founded Kimco Realty Corporation, the largest shopping center real estate investment trust in the country, and was active in philanthropic endeavors in the New York metropolitan area. He also served on the board of the NYU Medical Center, and was involved with the Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel.

Mr. Kimmel was a generous and caring man whose enthusiasm, energy and humor were infectious. He will be greatly missed.

Important Patient Care Telephone Numbers

- Cornea/External Ocular Disease: 212.326.3320
- Glaucoma: 212.342.0943
- Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus: 646.422.0200
- Refractive Surgery/LASIK: 212.326.3320
- Vitreoretinal and Uveitis: 646.422.0200