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## **Corporate Philanthropy Awards 2023: EyeCare Partners program brings vision, style to school children**

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Dilip Vishwanat | SLBJ

From left: David Clark, CEO of Clarkson EyeCare parent EyeCare Partners; Kristin Pisoni, senior marketing projects specialist for EyeCare Partners; Nivine Woods, EyeCare Partners' chief marketing

officer; Eye Thrive Executive Director Kate McKearn; and Abbie Enlund, Eye Thrive's director of development.

## **Innovation in Philanthropy Winner**

St. Louis area children can see a brighter future for themselves, thanks to a partnership between EyeCare Partners and Eye Thrive, a non-profit agency that provides vision screenings and prescription glasses for low-income children in the St. Louis region.

Founded in 2004 by Bill Jehling, then president of Clarkson Eyecare, Eye Thrive knows that the earlier they reach a child, the bigger its impact will be. Clarkson is now part of Ballwin-based EyeCare Partners, which, as one of several donors to the program, has contributed more than \$500,000 in in-kind contributions to Eye Thrive, which operates as an independent nonprofit organization.

From St. Louis city and county to Jefferson and Franklin counties and the Metro East, Eye Thrive's Mobile Vision Clinic visits school and community partners, including the Archdiocese of St. Louis, Cahokia, Collinsville and Hazelwood school districts, Casa de Salud, Hawthorn Leadership School for Girls, Lift for Life Academy and others throughout the year.

"As a leading network of eye care providers in the U.S., we understand the significant impact we have on communities we serve and recognize that the joy of sight is a priceless gift we should never take for granted," said Nivine Woods, chief marketing officer at EyeCare Partners.

EyeCare Partners provides all of the high-quality – some even designer – eyeglass frames that Eye Thrive uses for the children that visit the vision clinic.

The first eye exam one kindergartener had last year indicated that his vision was significantly impaired, but when he walked off the Mobile Vision Clinic in his new glasses for the first time, he couldn't stop giggling at all the things he could see. He wore his glasses regularly and made huge progress in school.

And he was not alone. In 2022, Eye Thrive:

Conducted 13,032 vision screenings;

Made 138 Mobile Vision Clinic visits;  
Provided 3,900 eye exams;  
Dispensed 4,576 pairs of glasses; and  
Delivered 1,719 pairs of replacements.

Children with eye health or vision concerns that require further care and monitoring are given a referral to ophthalmologists at Washington University and University of Missouri-St. Louis and Eye Thrive follows up with the schools and parents to ensure necessary care is received.

“We believe in the power of giving back and support organizations promoting eye health,” Woods said. “We also promote vision care awareness through vision walks and other community events.”

Overall, Eye Thrive and EyeCare Partners have impacted the lives and provided clear vision for more than 30,000 children in the St. Louis area since the partnership began and continue to find ways to collaborate and contribute to their shared mission.

Last fall, the EyeCare Partners marketing department promoted an idea to donate to Eye Thrive instead of sending out a printed holiday mailing to its employees. This unique opportunity provided Eye Thrive a chance to share its story with thousands of EyeCare Partner employees, value that far outweighed the monetary donation.

“One of the amazing things about Eye Thrive is that our work makes an immediate and measurable impact for our kids, and we get to see it every single day,” said Kate McKearn, executive director at Eye Thrive. “Glasses are such a simple tool, but they can make the difference between barely getting by to truly thriving, inside the classroom and in life.”

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**Who:** EyeCare Partners and Eye Thrive

**The partnership:** Ballwin-based EyeCare Partners donates funds and products to the nonprofit Eye Thrive to support their mission of free eye exams and glasses for low-income children.

**Founded:** 2004

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