

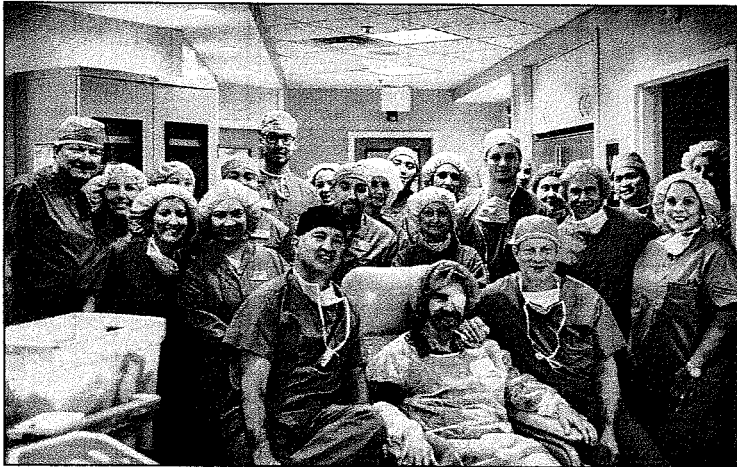


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Shown here in front, a patient who received free cataract surgery from ophthalmologists as part of the VisionHarvest initiative is flanked by VisionHarvest founder and Livingston resident Dr. Cary Silverman and Dr. Ken Miller, with the VisionHarvest team surrounding them.

Ophthalmologist Gives Gift of Sight to Those in Need

Because of ophthalmologist Cary M. Silverman, M.D., 40 cataracts patients have had their sight restored this fall.

For the fifth consecutive year, Livingston resident, along with several other participating ophthalmologists, performed free cataract surgery for those in need during VisionHarvest 2013. Dr. Silverman is the founder of the 501c3 non-profit organization, which provides cataract surgery to those who need it but have no insurance and cannot afford the procedure.

In September, 2010, the United States Census Bureau reported an estimated 50.7 million uninsured Americans – an all time high. As employers continue to shed jobs and reduce workforces, research experts speculate the problem will continue to worsen, leading up to the health care law that is scheduled to take effect in 2014.

"Individuals with cataracts and poor eyesight don't have the time to waste to wait until the government steps in next year. These patients require medical intervention sooner rather than later," said Dr. Silverman, whose ophthalmology practice, Eye-Care 20/20, is located in East Hanover. "This year, our goal was to provide free cataract surgery to more than 50

vision-impaired people without insurance or financial resources."

In the preceding weeks, participating eye physicians – including Michael Farbowitz, M.D. of Short Hills Ophthalmology; Kenneth Miller, M.D. of Laser Vision Center of New Jersey in West Orange; and Scott Pomerantz, M.D., of Metropolitan Eye Care, Paramus – and, of course, Dr. Silverman – evaluated prospective cataract patients and scheduled them for their free procedure. Eligible patients had all eye examinations, testing, medications and surgery provided to them free of charge.

Cataracts, Dr. Silverman explains, are a progressive condition that cause the eye's lens to become cloudy and eventually opaque leading to a progressive dimming of your vision. The exact cause of cataracts is unclear, but they occur in everyone as they age.

Cataracts, he adds, may be the result of a lifetime of exposure to ultraviolet rays, and other factors such as cigarette smoking, diet, and alcohol consumption. Cataracts can also occur at any age as a result of other causes such as eye injury, exposure to toxic substances or radiation, certain medications or as a result of other diseases, such as diabetes.

As a specialist in LASIK and small incision, no-stitch cataract surgery,



Shown here at the annual VisionHarvest cataract surgery event are Ken Miller, M.D.; VisionHarvest founder Cary M. Silverman, M.D. of Livingston; and Michael Farbowitz, M.D.

Dr. Silverman has performed thousands of surgeries for patients from all over New Jersey. He places high value on giving back to the community, and in addition to VisionHarvest, EyeCare 20/20 participates in many charitable endeavors, including support of Toys for Tots, the American Heart Association, and the Valerie Fund.

He started VisionHarvest in 2009, prompted by what he calls "a vicious cycle of health care." He explains, "Unfortunately, in our country insurance, is directly pegged to employment. I have seen many patients who have lost their jobs because they have lost their vision and are unable to drive. Because they have also lost their insurance, they are unable to get the cataract surgery that is necessary to pursue another job."

Some 20 patients were treated through VisionHarvest during its first year; by last year, the number had grown to 45. It was a group effort from day one. Dr. Silverman notes, "Doctors donated their time, manufacturers donated supplies, and River Drive donated the surgical day." Thanks to its initial success, Dr. Silverman has continued the program on an annual basis, and VisionHarvest became a 501c charitable organization last year. VisionHarvest now pays all the "hard costs" of providing the surgery, including staffing costs and supplies not donated. Since its inception, almost 150 patients have been treated.

This year's VisionHarvest surgery day took place at River Drive Surgery Center in Elmwood Park. A total of 40 patients – some traveling from as far away as Tennessee – received the gift of sight that day.