New Chairman Arrives at UNC Eye

Donald L. Budenz, MD, MPH

When Donald Budenz took up the corner office as chairman of UNC Eye this fall, his arrival represented the confluence of one of the finest universities in the country and a depth of experience from the nation’s No. 1 eye hospital. After 17 years in the glaucoma service at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine—including a decade as associate medical director—Budenz set down his bag and took up new challenges in Chapel Hill.

Budenz counts among those challenges expanding clinical care by increasing the UNC Eye clinical space and increasing the number of ophthalmologists. In the next fifteen years, according to demographers, the number of Research Triangle residents over 60 will double. “In order to meet the projected community needs for eye care, UNC Eye plans to increase the number of ophthalmologists on our faculty.” He also will set about increasing basic, translational research while also fostering the clinical research in which current faculty members are engaged. “Gene transfer and stem cell research are the next frontiers,” he says. “We don’t yet have, I think, a critical mass of basic researchers.”

Budenz’s own research involves both clinical studies and global health initiatives. He heads an epidemiology study of 5600 adults in urban West Africa to determine the prevalence, etiologies, and risk factors of blindness and visual impairment. The 2-1/2-year Tema Eye Survey is one of the largest properly performed eye surveys in all of Africa, Budenz says. “We’re finding a very high percentage of visual impairment, maybe

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NEW DISTINGUISHED PROFESSORSHIP ENDOWMENT FUND

Established by David Kittner and the Samuel and Rebecca Kardon Foundations

A $1 million gift from David Kittner and the Samuel and Rebecca Kardon Foundations has established the Kittner Family Distinguished Professorship Fund in the Department of Ophthalmology, creating the department’s largest professorship fund. This gift is the second $1 million gift to the department in the last five years. In 2008, they established an endowed innovation fund that the department has used to expand patient service, educational programs and clinical research projects and activities. David Kittner, a 1939 UNC graduate, practices law in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where the Samuel and Rebecca Kardon Foundations also are based. The family’s generous support of the UNC Kittner Eye Center will be recognized at the UNC Medical Foundation’s Celebration of Giving on December 5, 2011, when Bert Kittner, niece of David Kittner, will share family comments on their major support of the department.
This story is of the young man who did not go to the big state university, the freshman who didn’t become an engineer, the med student who didn’t go into cardiology, and the administrator whose early aim toward research was waylaid by the need for clinical strength. Many things in the career of Travis Meredith, MD, have not gone as planned. And many have gone remarkably better.

After two terms as chairman, Meredith hands off the leadership of UNC Eye this fall. He is stepping onto a new platform at a new destination. Time to look down the track already covered and toward the track ahead.

One can hear an echo of that youthful idea of engineering when he explains, “I like building things. Building organizations. The opportunity to build a department was a challenging thing for me. I thought I would do it for six or seven years and then retire. The fact that I’m still here after 11 years is an indication that it has still been fun.

“What motivates me are things getting better and moving forward,” he continues. “I’m not good at simply maintenance.” When Meredith arrived to take up the chairmanship here, he had hoped to build a specialized macular degeneration unit. Gradually, however, “it became obvious that we had great clinical needs in terms of space, equipment, and faculty. We had to attend to those.”

Meredith quietly went to work, and a department with six clinicians ultimately tripled in size. “It was a matter of unmet needs for the people of North Carolina. We had to have people just to meet the minimum requirements for subspecialization. Dr. John Dutton came forward to join the department. He had a very established practice in ocular plastic surgery and tumors, so that was important. We also hired two more retina specialists to deal with the surgical load and to expand the retina service. We were able to provide services that hadn’t been available previously at a level that was much higher than we had been able to offer.”

The department’s modest clinic offices on South Campus now have become the state-of-the-art Kittner Eye Center in the Ambulatory Care Center on Mason Farm Road, and there are eight more clinical locations. And, thanks to faculty excellence, the department competes for residents who are looking for the best programs in the country.

While his experience hasn’t gone to plan, “I would have to say, too, it has been much better than I anticipated, Meredith notes. “The talent level is deep on the faculty side. The service we’re offering in the clinic has gotten steadily better and is really very first-rate. And our administrative team is functioning extremely well. So the three major things that a department relies on are all working well at this point.

Proudest moments? He demurs. Highs and lows? “I try to keep things steady at this point.

If I have had any success, it is because I have been able to pick good people.”

He continues. “You know, when Dr. Budenz [his successor] came to his first faculty meeting, we sat down and had sandwiches, and the faculty slowly filed in and started talking to each other. The level of conversation rose in the room, and there was laughter and interaction. And I leaned over to him and said, ‘This is one of my favorite times, because people are getting along.’ When you’re on a faculty where people aren’t getting along, they file into the room, sit, fold their hands, and stare straight ahead. The level of interaction here indicates that people enjoy each other, and respect each other, and are helping each other. That is one of my best moments.”

He has selected people who value autonomy, a personality trait well suited to academia, where “you want people to go the extra mile, to spend extra time to do research, to write papers, things for which they are not compensated. You need a special kind of person for that. And those people are typically very autonomous, very self-motivated.

“A friend of mine said, years ago, that when you measure the traits of our generation, independence is off the charts. We were raised to think we should be autonomous, and that we must be highly responsible in order to earn that autonomy.”

Independence and self-motivation rang true for a young Travis Meredith, who played the drums in high school in the small coal mining town of Welch, West Virginia. Most of his classmates didn’t expect to stay in Welch after graduation. “Our town was dying; the mines were closing.” His father worked for the passenger division of the railroad, and Meredith had known, from the time he was nine or ten, that someday he would get on the train.

He graduated in a high school class of 169, and had received two scholarships, one to Virginia Tech, which would have been familiar territory, near his father’s family home. But he also was accepted at Yale, a place he had never visited. “Yale was almost too far for me,” he recalls. “But when you’re 18, you don’t know what you can’t do.”

He was good at math and had worked road construction, so he thought he’d
Dear friends and colleagues,

On October 1, 2011, I will turn over the leadership of the Department of Ophthalmology at the University of North Carolina to Dr. Donald Budenz. Dr. Budenz is a wonderful choice to lead our Department into the next stage of our development, and I look forward to working with him.

The department has grown significantly over the past 11 years as we worked together to improve the quality and availability of eye care for all North Carolinians. The full-time faculty now numbers 19, all but one of us new over the last 11 years. We offer the full range of ophthalmic specialties as well as some very specialized services, such as ocular cancer care and genetics consultation which are unusual even in major centers. Our research has grown substantially and our laboratory investigators have national recognition.

Growing from a single location in the Ambulatory Care Center we now provide service in nine other locations from Siler City to New Bern. Most gratifying is the quality of our staff. Our clinics are cited by patients for the warmth and caring of our staff and we receive high patient satisfaction scores.

Our training programs continue to bring the best and brightest to Chapel Hill. We have excellent resident physicians, many who have chosen to stay in North Carolina when their training is complete. Our fellowships in oculoplastic surgery and retinal diseases have produced a number of skilled graduates. As with the residents several have stayed to provide care for the people of North Carolina.

Our successes would not have been possible without the generosity of many donors. Special mention must be made of Mr. David Kittner and of the North Carolina Lions, who have been so unflaggingly supportive and have allowed us to provide the best technical care available anywhere, regardless of the patient’s ability to pay.

To work with so many dedicated, compassionate, and skilled people has been the capstone of my career. I’m grateful to the University for the support which they’ve given the Department and to the many staff and physicians who have brought so much to UNC Eye.

I will continue to see patients and teach residents and fellows, as well as getting back to doing the research I love so much. I can hardly wait to see the great new things which are about to happen!

Travis A. Meredith, MD
Welcome New Faculty

**Dr. Jean-Claude Mwanza**

Jean-Claude Mwanza, MD, MPH, PhD joined the faculty of UNC Eye in October 2011 as an Assistant Professor in the UNC Department of Ophthalmology with a focus in early diagnosis of glaucoma and its progression. He received his Medical Doctor degree from the University of Kisangani and completed his residency in ophthalmology at the University of Kinshasa, both in the Democratic Republic of Congo. He subsequently obtained a Masters in Public Health and Doctorate in Neuro-ophthalmology at the University of Bergen in Norway. He then obtained a fellowship from the US National Research Council for post-doctoral studies at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, where he performed a series of studies to evaluate the effect of acute or repeated exposures to a single or mixture of pesticides widely used around homes and in agriculture on treatment of visual information within the visual system. He and his collaborators found for the first time that these pesticides disrupt the processing of visual signals by the visual cortex. He then joined the Bascom Palmer Eye Institute in Miami, Florida, where he started his research in glaucoma.

**Dr. Michelle Cabrera**

Michelle Cabrera, MD joined the faculty of UNC Eye in July 2011 as an Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. She completed her undergraduate degree at Stanford University, majoring in Biology and graduating with honors and joining Phi Beta Kappa. She then completed both medical school and residency at the University of California, San Francisco. She specialized in Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus at the Duke Eye Center, completing a two year fellowship. She is board certified by the American Board of Ophthalmology. Her clinical interests include surgical and medical management of pediatric and adult strabismus, congenital ptosis, pediatric cataracts, amblyopia, genetic syndromes, and ocular motility disorders secondary to cranial nerve palsies, thyroid ophthalmopathy and trauma. She is also trained to manage retinopathy of prematurity and pediatric glaucoma. Dr. Cabrera’s research interests in recent years have focused on pediatric retinal disease and she has authored multiple publications in that area, including topics of retinal imaging, retinopathy of prematurity, and Aicardi syndrome. Dr. Cabrera also speaks Spanish and Mandarin fluently.

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**SPECIAL THANKS to the**

**LEONARD G. HERRING FAMILY FOUNDATION**

for their generous gift of $100,000 to UNC Eye and its Kittner Eye Center in order to further treatments and research of various eye diseases. Patients from all over North Carolina will benefit from their generosity. The Herring Family has a rich legacy of giving to UNC and other worthy organizations.

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**Eye Reports: In the Words of our Patients**

Anne Jones of Chapel Hill, North Carolina is full of smiles and appreciation for the care she received from Scott Lawrence, MD, who successfully performed delicate surgery to restore her vision. Recently her eyesight became impaired to the point that she could not thread her small needle to sew quilt squares—a hobby she loves to do. These squares are all eventually sewn together as quilts for babies born with HIV-AIDS who need to feel the love and warmth they provide.
FELLOW UPDATE

Lyndon Lee, MD began his fellowship training in Ophthalmic Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery under the guidance of Jonathan Dutton, MD, PhD and Amy Fowler, MD in July. Dr. Lee attended Stanford University for his undergraduate studies where he received a Bachelor of Sciences degree in Biological Sciences. He then went on to medical school at the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Medicine where he graduated Summa Cum Laude. During medical school, he took a year off to participate in a year of research at the National Institutes of Health as part of the Clinical Research Training Program. He most recently completed his residency training in ophthalmology at the Emory Eye Center in Atlanta, GA where he served as Chief Resident.

Daniel Sines, MD completed his two-year fellowship training in Ophthalmic Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery in late June. Dr. Sines and his family moved to Rogers, Arkansas where he joined the BoozmanHof Eye Care Center as an Ophthalmic Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeon. All of the faculty, fellows, residents, and staff of UNC Eye wish Dr. Sines all the best with his future endeavors.

Emil Say, MD entered the second and final year of his Vitreoretinal fellowship training at the Kittner Eye Center and UNC Department of Ophthalmology in August, 2011. Originally from the Philippines, Dr. Say is expected to complete his fellowship training in August, 2012.

NEW RESIDENTS

Michael W. Compton, MD joins the UNC Department of Ophthalmology and its Kittner Eye Center after a preliminary year in the Department of Surgery at the University of Virginia School of Medicine where he also received his medical education. Originally from Syracuse, NY, Dr. Compton received a Bachelor of Sciences degree in Business Administration from Villanova University in Villanova, PA.

David Fleischman, MD joins the UNC Department of Ophthalmology and its Kittner Eye Center after completing his internship year in Internal Medicine here at UNC. Born in Baltimore, MD, Dr. Fleischman completed a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Sciences in History and Microbiology at the University of Florida. He then went on to receive a Master’s of Science in Physiology & Biophysics from Georgetown University before completing his medical education at the Drexel University College of Medicine in Philadelphia, PA.

Daniel A. Grace, MD joins the UNC Department of Ophthalmology and its Kittner Eye Center after completing his internship year in Internal Medicine here at UNC. Originally from Atlanta, GA, Dr. Grace received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Bible & Theology from Lee University in Cleveland, TN. Dr. Grace then received his medical education at the Mercer University School of Medicine in Macon, GA.

Graduated Residents

As another academic year came to an end, UNC Eye again bid farewell to three senior residents as they completed their residency training and pursued employment and further academic achievements.

Upon completion of his residency training, David Sutton, MD moved to Wilmington, NC to join the Coastal Cape Fear Eye Associates where he is now a comprehensive ophthalmologist specializing in cataract surgery. In July, Kathleeya Stang-Veldhouse, MD, MPH moved to New Zealand to begin a one-year fellowship in Oculoplastics, Reconstructive, and Lacrimal Surgery at the University of Auckland. Graham Lyles, MD, former Chief Resident at UNC Eye joined the Greensboro Ophthalmology Associates in Greensboro, NC as a comprehensive ophthalmologist also specializing in cataract surgery. He has reunited with fellow UNC Eye alumni, Michael Tanner, MD and Christine McCuen, MD.

All of the faculty, fellows, residents, and staff of UNC Eye would like to wish Drs. Sutton, Stang-Veldhouse, and Lyles all the best with their future endeavors.
18%, half of which is refractive error. The other half is, most commonly, cataract, glaucoma, and corneal opacification. We’re also finding a high percentage of glaucoma in West African adults, along the lines of 7% of people over the age of 40. The difficulty is that glaucoma goes largely undiagnosed and untreated because there is not good access to medication and surgery over there.”

Budenz has been caring for the vision of West Africans since 1995, when he signed on with Christian Eye Ministry, a nonprofit that he now leads. The organization’s mission involves developing self-sustaining eye clinics and transferring skills to local eye providers. Late this summer, he spent a week in Ghana training a recent residency graduate in basic glaucoma surgery. “Medicines do not seem to be sustainable there, and the ophthalmologists have not received sub-specialty training as we have in the US,” he says. “Sub-Saharan Africa bears a larger burden of blindness than any other part of the world. In Ghana, there are 24 million people, and approximately 40 ophthalmologists. Of those, I’ve been told that perhaps less than 15 are competent surgeons.”

“No one had done a proper prevalence study, and I think that’s what drove me. Now that we know clearly what the problems are, we will be able to help, in terms of training, address them.” Budenz is preparing his findings for publication. Meanwhile, he also is working with Moorfields Eye Institute in London to set up a surgical training center in Accra, Ghana’s capital, where glaucoma surgery will be taught. “This is obviously one of my big passions, and I wish more people would participate.”

The Tema Survey also represents “one of the largest depositories of African samples for genetic analysis, certainly the largest collection of specimens for ophthalmologists to analyze of people of African descent,” Budenz says. Researchers collaborated with Duke University on a genetics arm of the study, amassing 2,000 specimens for a Duke-led search for genes that cause glaucoma. Pinpointing the gene “would be directly translatable to US African-Americans because they are mostly descended from West Africans rather than East Africans,” he says.

With his global outlook, Budenz is hopeful there will be opportunities for collaborations between UNC Eye and Carolina’s renowned Gillings School of Global Public Health—now ranked No. 2 in the nation. “The UNC School of Public Health and the School of Medicine have a long history of involvement with sub-Saharan Africa,” Budenz notes.

In the clinical research arena, Budenz recently published one-year “Treatment Outcomes in the Ahmed Baerveldt Comparison Study,” 2 which compared two surgical implants used in treating patients with refractory glaucoma. “The ABC study is the first randomized prospective trial to compare one implant with the other. It involves 276 subjects from the US, United Kingdom, Brazil, Singapore and Hong Kong,” Budenz explains. The results found that one implant was associated with fewer early and serious complications. “Right now, the use of an implant is driven by where the doctors trained rather than what the patient needs. So use of the implant is not based on evidence-based medicine.” Budenz is now preparing to report third-year results. Since glaucoma is many different diseases, Budenz is hopeful the study “will also sort out which individual patient would benefit from which of the two implants.”

Budenz grew up in Philadelphia where his father and uncle were in the printing business and his mother was a medical secretary. Budenz was majoring in psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, when he realized that medicine offered a broader, more interesting horizon. At Harvard Medical School, he conducted research with the world-famous glaucoma specialist Richard J. Simmons, MD. “I had always been fascinated with the eye and its incredible complexity and function. Ophthalmology seemed to be a career I would enjoy my whole life. Plus, ophthalmologists were the happiest attendings I encountered as a medical student,” he recalls.

Budenz admits he had ignored a recruiting email and letter, but when the dean of the UNC School of Medicine phoned, “in a moment of weakness, I said I would interview. I was just really impressed with the university and the collegiality of the deans and the faculty, both inside and outside of ophthalmology.

“It was clear that the School of Medicine had great basic science and clinical departments to collaborate with. I felt the program was really, really good, particularly clinically. They have some great researchers, as well, in gene transfer and stem cell research, and these are really exciting areas for ophthalmology research. Carolina just had all the components of a program I’d like to lead and be part of.”

Budenz is not without Carolina connections. The parents and four sisters of his wife Sue are spread from Charlotte to Cary. The couple have three children: a son who is a candidate for an MBA at Drexel, a daughter in her senior year at the University of Miami, and a son who is a rising sophomore at Johns Hopkins.

Outside of work, Budenz is a distance runner, more intent upon wise pacing than a sprinter’s single bursts of speed. “I probably spend four hours a week on the road. I have intermittently tried hobbies, but I’m sort of a workaholic. I just have to get on to the next project.”

2 Ophthalmology 2011;118:443–452
Residents’ Day Highlights

Michael V. Rynne, MD presented with Arthur C. Chandler Teaching Award

Departing senior residents Kathleeya Stang-Veldhouse, David Sutton, and Graham Lyles presented Michael V. Rynne, MD with the 2011 Arthur C. Chandler, MD Resident Teaching Award at the annual Residents’ Dinner and Awards Ceremony, which was held on Saturday, June 25, 2011. Presented annually and voted on by the residents, the Chandler Teaching Award is given to the Faculty member the residents feel has most contributed to their education in the previous year. Dr. Rynne has led the residents’ second year surgical rotation at the Fayetteville VA Medical Center rotation for the past eight years and has been an integral part of the UNC Eye residency program during this time. Dr. Rynne and his wife, Barbara, have acted as a home away from home for our residents during their time in Fayetteville, providing countless home cooked meals. In late August, Dr. Rynne retired from practicing ophthalmology and moved to Pawleys Island, SC to enjoy life at the beach.

His value and impact on the UNC Eye residents and the overall program was echoed by current Chief Resident Hart Moss, MD: “Dr. Rynne has legendary status with the UNC Eye residents. I think we all grew up a lot during our rotation with Dr. Rynne, not just as ophthalmologists and surgeons, but as human beings. He helped us hone our skills and gave us encouragement when we needed it, but never let us off the hook when we needed to do something better. He opened up his home and his family to us and I personally know I would not be where I am today without him. It is not going to be the same without him.” UNC Eye wishes Dr. Rynne and Barbara all the best in retirement and thanks them both for their tireless dedication to the UNC Eye residency program.

Hart Moss, MD and Jay Meyer, MD, MPH presented with 2011 Frederick W. Stocker Award

At the annual Residents’ Dinner and Awards Ceremony held this year on June 25, 2011, Amy Fowler, MD, Assistant Professor and Residency Program Director, presented current third year UNC Eye residents, Hart Moss, MD and Jay Meyer, MD, MPH, with the 2011 Frederick W. Stocker Award for Outstanding Resident Research. Drs. Moss and Meyer were presented the award for their research project titled, “Surgically Induced Astigmatism and Endothelial Cell Loss After Wound-Assisted vs. Wound-Directed IOL Insertion.”

Kenneth L. Cohen, MD, Professor of Ophthalmology, and Jay J. Meyer, MD, MPH, third-year resident at UNC Eye, participated in an ORBIS International Cataract Phacoemulsification Course in Laos from September 14 – 26. Laos is a country with a population of over 5 million and just 20 ophthalmologists. Cataracts are the main cause of treatable blindness in this country with just one ophthalmologist currently performing modern cataract surgery. Through ORBIS, Drs. Cohen and Meyer provided basic phacoemulsification training for several ophthalmologists. The training included lectures and hands on experience in preoperative evaluation, intraocular lens calculation, steps of phacoemulsification, and postoperative evaluation. The trainees were first introduced to these techniques through an online phacoemulsification training course created by Dr. Cohen and residents at UNC. Dr. Cohen then worked side-by-side with the trainees in the OR to provide free surgery to 25 patients while teaching the trainees the steps of cataract surgery.
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Department Chair
Donald L. Budenz, MD, MPH

Associate Chair for Administration
Ricky D. Bass, MBA, MHA

Editors
Laura Alderson
Matt O’Neal
Sandy Scarlett, MA, MBA, CFRE