

Friday, July 8, 2006

## Prescription for Success

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**MADEIRA** - When optometrist Malinda Pence and her husband, Lane, bought a practice three years ago, they learned that goodwill did not transfer automatically.

Though the Pences theoretically purchased "goodwill" along with bricks and mortar, accounts and inventory, they still had to earn the loyalty of their patients. The challenge was to introduce new technology and products - and even a new look to the office - to attract new patients while not alienating the existing ones.

Since then, the Pences have what they hope is a prescription for success. The result: They have increased frame sales 104 percent to 540 and patient exams by 168 percent to 890 and are projecting revenue this year of \$250,000, nearly double their first year.

After a couple of years of working for other optometrists and laser eye centers, Malinda Pence, a 1999 graduate of Ohio State University's College of Optometry, decided to look for a practice she and her husband could purchase. In early 2002 she learned that Larry Spitz was ready to retire from the office he had run for 46 years. The two clicked, and Spitz agreed to sell.

The transition in early May 2002 took place in the blink of an eye.

"We literally went from the lawyer's office after our closing across the street to the office and began to renovate it," said Lane Pence, whose primary job is with Commonwealth Handling and Equipment Pool Inc., where he is a supply-chain consultant, and who has a background in marketing.

With their fathers' help, the couple spent two weeks remodeling the office at 7111 Miami Ave., stripping the suite of its 70s- and 80s-era furnishings and fixtures. They opened Madeira Optical on May 15 that year.

The problem was that many of Spitz's patients didn't know he had retired. There was no feasible way of pulling 46 years' worth of patient files and contacting individuals to inform them of the change. Spitz ran a notice in the community paper, but there remained plenty of surprised patients.

"A lot of people were just in shock," said Malinda Pence. "And, because the office space looked so different, some patients would come in, look around, and walk back outside and check the door to make sure that they hadn't walked into the dentist's office next door."

The Pences' biggest challenge was to maintain the relationships that Spitz had built over close to a half-century, being sensitive to patients' feelings and needs while helping them adjust to her approach and the technology she introduced.

Dennis Pascarella of Indian Hill said he and his wife had planned to hunt around for a new optometrist. "But Malinda made the place so much brighter and brought in new technology," he said. "She's young but very professional and very personable. Our girls really like her. We decided that we would stay."

Larry Weber met Pence when he moved to town to work for a local bank and joined the Madeira Chamber of Commerce.

"I knew I would feel comfortable with her," he said. "My wife and I transferred our prescriptions to Madeira Optical. We like the value of dealing with one person instead of going to a group practice, where often you don't see the same person each time."

### Updating everything

The practice has reinvested most of its profits into technology and new frame lines.

After the purchase, Malinda Pence immediately began transferring shelf after shelf of paper records onto a new computer system. The manual typewriter that had served Spitz's wife - who managed the office - went home with the Spitzes. Soon, all business operations were computerized and a Web site, [www.madeiraoptical.com](http://www.madeiraoptical.com), was in place.

The new technology also includes a laser-assisted auto-refractor, which is a hand-held diagnostic instrument that, within seconds, can give the optometrist an approximate idea of what correction an eye requires. Fine-tuning that initial diagnosis provides exact information.

Malinda Pence said the technology has allowed her and her two opticians to work efficiently, handling the larger patient load without compromising quality of care.

Madeira Optical now boasts an inventory of more than 800 frame styles, many from top designers such as Gucci, Modo, Kate Spade, Prodesign and Prada. It is expanding its lines of children's frames and is negotiating with several niche manufacturers. The move to stock more frames has proved popular but pricey.

"In order to get the Gucci frame line, for example, you have to order a certain amount of frames and invest so much into it," Pence explained. "We're trying to get some lines that other places around Cincinnati don't have."

That selection caught the eye of Barbara Brewer of East Hyde Park, who has been a patient of Pence's since soon after her office opened.

"I wanted to go to a small place, and they happened to be on my insurance," she said. "They had an interesting assortment of eyeglasses, and I felt I got the best, most thorough eye exam. And they always know who you are when you call or come in."

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Photos by Steven M. Herppich/The Enquirer  
Malinda Pence and her husband, Lane, bought Madeira Optical three years ago, from Larry Spitz, who had run it for 46 years. Their challenge was to hold on to old customers while updating office practices.



A display shelf holds some of the frames available at Madeira Optical. There are now more than 800 frame styles, many from top designers such as Gucci, Modo, Kate Spade, Prodesign and Prada. Lines of children's frames are also being expanded. Frame sales have increased 104 percent in three years.