

25 YEARS of Having It All— Sometimes All at Once

O.D. hitched her wagon to a growing Texas town, and now she's a fixture

Around the time that her three children began looking at college catalogues, **Laura Pels, O.D.**, began looking around town, planning what was next for her practice. Just as her family had grown up, Coppell, Texas, had too. With a population of 40,000, it now has eight times as many residents as it did when Dr. Pels and her husband first moved there in 1983. So with the youngest of her three children ready to start college, Dr. Pels decided it was time to take her busy private practice to a new level.

It had never been neglected; in fact, Coppell Vision Center has been growing steadily since Dr. Pels joined optometry school classmate **Bruce Ousley, O.D.**, as a partner in the practice in 1991. Pregnant with her third child, she was happy to trade her relief work for a partnership position. Plus the experience would be a total change from her earlier position in the ophthalmology department at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School. The location was ideal: not only was Dr. Ousley's second practice location in her new hometown, it was in the same shopping center where her husband, **Kevin Pels**, was working as a pharmacist.

Dr. Pels assumed full ownership about eight years later. She moved the practice

across the street to a location that offered better visibility and an extra 600 square feet of space. She has hired three women associates, but

each moved, married or decided to postpone their careers for motherhood. The fourth associate was a charm. **Sandra Elston, O.D.**, joined the practice in 2003, and she has a mentor in balancing mother-

hood and practice in Dr. Pels. Dr. Elston's second child was expected late this summer.

In early 2008, with her lease expiring, Dr. Pels had a decision to make. "We were bursting at the seams, and I couldn't expand in my current location," she says. Also, there were several vacancies in the shopping center. "Building my own free-standing office was always in the back of my mind." But was this the right time to do it? She decided it was when she found a spot just 1.5 miles away on one of Coppell's two main thoroughfares. Even though she would have to tear down an existing house and take on a rezoning process, it seemed like a smart decision.

"When I started the whole thing the economy was wonderful—it was a no brainer," she says. Her husband had job security, the house mortgage was paid off, and the kids were nearly grown. She personally notified the neighbors and received no opposition to her construction plans.

Dr. Pels began promoting the new office well before it opened. She dedicated one frame board to architectural renderings of the new



(l-r): Dr. Elston and Dr. Pels



The Difficult Juggle

While her children were in school, Dr. Laura Pels worked part time so she could be there when they needed her. But when moving her practice to a brand new building she helped design, something had to give. She wasn't able to be as involved in her daughter's senior year in high school as she would have liked. Regret is mixed with pride; she hopes the experience showed her daughter what strong women can achieve. "It's very hard to juggle raising your kids and running an office because you really have two full-time jobs. But it can be done, and my kids are better for it," she says. She credits her husband's active support as key. "Optometry is a wonderful profession for women because there are so many opportunities. Don't sell yourself short. If you dream it and want it, go after it!" **WO**

facility and a sign that read "2009: Our New Home." On recall postcards, Dr. Pels also included a note about the move. A sign still remains at her old office to remind passersby, but most patients have passed the new office in the center of town by now.

The new 2,600-square-foot building, which opened earlier this year, is 800 square feet larger than her previous office and features four exam rooms, instead of just two, and an in-office lab. Patients are delighted with the look. She says the office has an at-home, warm and inviting feel with its light sage green, browns and gold. The optical displays are a dark mahogany stain.

The automated instruments and modern technology mesh well with the personal service for which the practice is known. "We are very personable, and we try to do whatever we can for our patients," she says. "People drive in from all over because they like our personal service, our thorough eye exams and our honesty." Now, they're able to experience those same qualities in a beautiful and modern setting. Business is great, despite the recession, which affirms her decision to move. **WO**



In the new, larger facility, patients can relax and feel at home in the dispensary.