

# One of DMEI's Strongest Part

**THE OKLAHOMA LION'S EYE BANK (OLEB), ONE OF THE DEAN MCGEE EYE INSTITUTE'S (DMEI'S)** key partners in restoring vision to thousands of patients, celebrated its milestone 65th anniversary on December 2, 2022.

Headquartered in Oklahoma City, OLEB is one of the most respected eye banks in the United States (U.S.), and was established by the Oklahoma Lion's Club as a nonprofit service organization in 1957. Its primary mission is to recover corneal tissue from donors, evaluate that tissue's suitability for corneal transplants, and then prepare it for use in transplant patients. The tissues are then made available to corneal surgeons on an as-needed basis, said Lori Miller, OLEB's executive director.

The organization also has been partnering with DMEI since the latter's dedication in 1975, Miller noted. In fact, once the Eye Institute opened, the two entities were housed in the same building until 1989. They again shared quarters from 1992 to 1997, before OLEB expanded into its own building.

"We feel extremely lucky to have one of the premier eye institutes in the U.S. just a couple



of miles down the street from us," Miller said. "All of their surgeons are so knowledgeable, and we have learned from each one of them. It is a pleasure to provide corneal tissue to their patients, because we are confident that the outcomes will be excellent."

Since 2015, DMEI corneal specialist Rhea L. Siatkowski, MD, has served as OLEB's co-medical director, a volunteer position that she says is extremely rewarding.

"They are a fabulous eye bank—state-of-the-art, one of the cleanest, most well-organized, and expert at analyzing and preparing all types of corneal tissue," Dr. Siatkowski said. "Despite their small size, they provide for the most cutting-edge corneal procedures. Even if donor tissue isn't available to meet a particular patient's needs, they will make that extra effort and reach out to their contacts around the globe to try and obtain what's needed."

# ners Celebrating 65 Years

BY STACI ELDER HENSLEY

“OLEB is vital to corneal transplants for our state and for the patients DMEI serves, and they are a great group to work with,” she added.

OLEB provides approximately 225 corneas to Oklahomans each year. Since its inception, it has facilitated the transplantation of nearly 23,000 corneas for patients in Oklahoma, the U.S., and more than 40 countries around the world. The organization is funded through two ongoing endowments, as well as placement fees for the tissue, which is typically paid through private insurance, Medicare, or Medicaid, Miller said.

She joined the organization in 2008 and was named executive director in 2015. Under Miller’s leadership, the team has continued to grow, and now consists of 10 full-time and three part-time employees.

“We are all very proud to work at a local nonprofit whose sole mission is to improve the lives of others by fulfilling the wishes of our donors and donor families,” Miller said. “The part that I enjoy most is knowing that we help these generous donor families make such a difference in the lives of people who they’ve never met and likely will never meet. It’s really quite something when you think about how they’re going through their worst day, right after losing a loved one, and yet they still think of helping others through corneal donation.” ■

