



## Dr. Shah Joins Southeastern Retina Associates in Chattanooga

**R**ohan Shah, MD, may be the newest physician with Southeastern Retina Associates' Chattanooga Market, but he's been with the group long enough to know he's found something really special. "Southeastern Retina Associates is always looking for new technology and ways to best take care of patients," he said. "We have to be ever-changing in retina and they are so supportive of that here. This is a very special place."

Part of what makes Southeastern Retina Associates such a good fit for Dr. Shah is the connection he feels with patients, physicians, and other staff members. "We get to make such deep connections with people," he said. "When patients come to see a retina specialist, they generally aren't expecting the best news. But now we are able to provide options for our patients and really improve their quality of life."

He's been particularly appreciative of the comradery and collaboration he's experienced since joining Southeastern Retina Associates. "Often, we are presented with challenging cases and less common diagnoses, and a major advantage is that we have an avenue of 13 other physicians with whom we can discuss things so we can offer the best treatment options to our patients," he said. "In addition, the staff here truly cares about being compassionate. I enjoy working closely with them and teaching them because they demonstrate a genuine desire to learn. And they teach me as well."

Education has always been important to Dr. Shah. "I grew up in a small town in Tennessee and was interested in science and technology," he said. "I was attracted to anatomy and physiology in high school. In college, I majored in biomedical engineering, so I was able to get an idea of how science and technology are intertwined in medicine."

Dr. Shah's education took him from Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, to Nashville and Chicago. After graduating from The Webb School in Bell Buckle, Tennessee, where he was Valedictorian of his class, he earned a bachelor's degree in biomedical engineering from Vanderbilt University. He continued his education at the Vanderbilt University School of



Medicine, where he earned his degree in medicine.

Once he completed his medical degree, Dr. Shah moved to Chicago for ophthalmology residency at the Illinois Eye and Ear Infirmary. He returned to Nashville for Fellowship in Vitreoretinal Diseases and Surgery at the Vanderbilt Eye Institute, where he was awarded the J. Donald M. Gass, MD Endowed Fellowship.

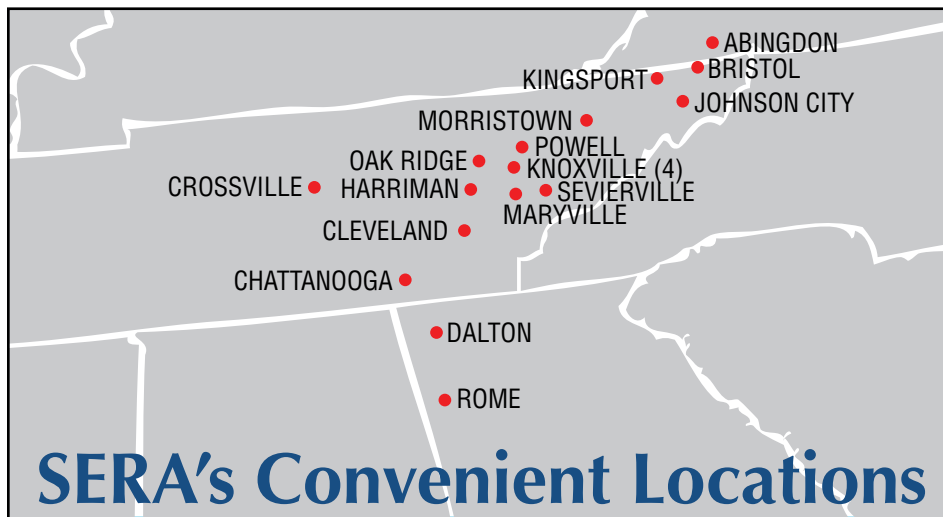
As Dr. Shah went through his training, he heard positive things about Southeastern Retina Associates. "I was familiar with Southeastern Retina Associates before joining," Dr. Shah said. "They have an excellent reputation for putting patients first and for being innovative and active in clinical research."

Fortunately for Dr. Shah, the practice has more than lived

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## SERA's Convenient Locations

### CHATTANOOGA AREA LOCATIONS

**Chattanooga Office**  
**Jarnigan Medical Center**  
 7268 Jarnigan Rd, Suite 300  
 Chattanooga, TN 37421  
 Phone: 423.756.1002

**Cleveland Office**  
 2253 Chambliss Avenue, Suite 410  
 Cleveland, TN 37311  
 Phone: 423.756.1002

**Dalton, GA Office**  
 1506 N. Thornton Ave, Suite C  
 Dalton, GA 30720  
 Phone: 423.756.1002

**Rome, GA Office**  
 210 Redmond Rd  
 Rome, GA 30165  
 Phone: 423.756.1002

### KNOXVILLE AREA LOCATIONS

**Baptist Office**  
 2020 Kay St. Knoxville, TN 37920  
 Phone: 865.579.3999

**Crossville Office**  
 1051 Genesis Road, Suite 103  
 Crossville, TN 38555  
 Phone: 931.337.0522

**Harriman Office**  
 1855 Tanner Way Suite 120  
 Harriman, TN 37748  
 Phone: 865.588.0811

**Maryville Office**  
 628 Smithview Dr.  
 Maryville, TN 37804  
 Phone: 865.977.4528

**Morristown Office**  
 3101 W. Andrew Johnson Hwy.  
 Morristown, TN 37814  
 Phone: 423.581.1271

### KNOXVILLE (CONT.)

**Oak Ridge Office**  
 575 Oak Ridge Turnpike, Suite 202  
 Oak Ridge, TN 37830  
 Phone: 423.482.3127

**Sevierville Office**  
 1101 Fox Meadows Blvd., Suite 105  
 Sevierville, TN 37862  
 Phone: 865.588.0811

**Southeast Eye Center**  
 7800 Conner Rd.  
 Powell, TN 37849  
 Phone: 865.546.7701

**Tennessee Valley Eye Center**  
 140 Capital Dr.  
 Knoxville, TN 37922  
 Phone: 865.251.0727

**Weisgarber Office**  
 1124 E. Weisgarber Rd, Suite 207  
 Knoxville, TN 37909  
 Phone: 865.588.0811

### TRI-CITIES AREA LOCATIONS

**Abingdon, VA Office**  
 310 Cummings Street, Suite B  
 Abingdon, VA 24210  
 Phone: 276.623.5254

**Bristol, VA Office**  
 1701 Euclid Avenue, Suite A  
 Bristol, VA 24201  
 Phone: 423.578.4364

**Johnson City Office**  
 100 Med Tech Parkway, Suite 140  
 Johnson City, TN 37604  
 Phone: 423.434.0853

**Kingsport Office**  
 2412 N John B Dennis Hwy.  
 Kingsport, TN 37660  
 Phone: 423.578.4364

## Dr. Shah Joins Southeastern Retina in Chattanooga

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up to its reputation. "I have been thoroughly impressed with the staff and doctors here," he said. "We really try to get out into the Chattanooga area and get involved with the community. We use so many tools to make ourselves and our practice better. It is a great learning experience and I look forward to working with these people each day. Here, we stand for innovation, integrity and excellence. We take the time to be innovative and to continue adapting to the constantly evolving field of retina, which is very unique."

Being part of Southeastern Retina Associates has provided a constant source of inspiration to Dr. Shah. "I am inspired by making a difference," he said. "Being able to help someone out, to guide others, drives me and keeps me going. There are lots of ways to make a difference—through educating others, advising someone regarding their career path, talking to patients, or helping a friend. The ability to make a difference to others comes in a lot of different ways."

As an ophthalmologist, Dr. Shah is comfortable with change—he embraces it. But he realizes that all the changes in the field of medicine may not be for everyone. "Medicine is a changing field," he said. "There are concerns, but the attitude you take toward something guides how you get through life. Yes, there are challenges. But, at the end of the day, would I rather be doing something else? No, I wouldn't. It is extremely rewarding to be able to help someone, especially in a field that has so many exciting new treatment options." ■

# Current Clinical Trials



Dr. Keith Shuler and Clinical Trial Coordinator, Kristina Oliver walk the patient through the clinical trial process.

## Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD) Studies

- **CAPELLA** sponsored by Regeneron. Location: Knoxville. Phase II, Double-Masked, Randomized, Controlled. Multiple-Dose, Regimen-Ranging Study of the Efficacy and Safety of Intravitreal REGN2176-3 in Patients with Neovascular Age-Related Macular Degeneration.
- **Alcon RTH258-C001 Phase III** Sponsored by Alcon. Location Tri-Cities. A Two-Year, Randomized, Double-Masked, Multicenter, Three-Arm Study Comparing the Efficacy and Safety of RTH258 versus Aflibercept in Subjects with Neovascular Age-Related Macular Degeneration.
- **IT-002 EMERGE** Sponsored by Iconic Therapeutics. Location Tri-Cities. A Phase 2 Randomized, Double-masked, Multicenter, Active controlled Study Evaluating Administration of Repeated Intravitreal Doses of hI-con1™ in Patients with Choroidal Neovascularization Secondary to Age-related Macular Degeneration.

- **SPECTRI**- Sponsored by Genentech/ Roche. Location: Chattanooga. Phase III study on Lampalizumab and/ or laser Treatment in Geographic Atrophy secondary to Dry AMD.
- **ATLAS** Sponsored by Wills Eye Institute. Location: Chattanooga. Optical coherence tomography guided treat and extend therapy for neovascular age-related macular degeneration using aflibercept.

## Diabetic Retinopathy (DR) Studies

- **Alimera Sciences M-01-15-004** Sponsored by Alimera Sciences. Location Tri-Cities. A Phase 4 safety study of IOP signals in patients treated with Iluvien® (fluocinolone acetonide intravitreal implant) 0.19 Mg.
- **Remote Vision Monitoring Pilot** Location: Knoxville – Sponsored by Genentech, in collaboration with DigiSight. A pilot study that will track recently diagnosed (3 or fewer anti-VEGF injections) DME patients for twelve (12) months.

## Trials Sponsored by Diabetic Retinopathy Clinical Research network (DRCR.net)

- **The Diabetic Retinopathy Clinical Research Network** facilitates multicenter clinical research of diabetic retinopathy, diabetic macular edema and associated conditions. DRCR studies examine the use of laser treatment and injections. Several protocols are available. The studies are funded by the National Eye Institute, a part of the federal government National Institutes of Health.
- **Protocol V.** Location: Chattanooga, Knoxville and Tri-Cities. Treatment for Central Diabetic Macular Edema in Eyes with "Very Good Vision."

- **Protocol AA.** Location: Knoxville. Peripheral Diabetic Retinopathy (DR) – Lesions on Ultra wide-Field Fundus Images and risk of DR worsening over time.
- **Protocol S.** Location: Knoxville. Prompt PRP Laser vs. Intravitreal Ranibizumab with Deferred PRP Laser for Proliferative Diabetic Retinopathy.
- **Protocol U.** Location: Knoxville. Short-term evaluation of combination Corticosteroid + Anti-VEGF treatment for persistent Central Diabetic Macular Edema following Anti-VEGF therapy in Pseudophakia.
- **Protocol T.** Location: Tri-Cities and Knoxville. Comparison of Aflibercept, Bevacizumab & Ranibizumab for Diabetic Macular Edema with patients seen in follow up.
- **Genes in Diabetic Retinopathy** Location: Tri-Cities, Knoxville and Chattanooga. Blood sample collection and submission to the DRCR Genetic Repository (open only to patients who are currently enrolled in an applicable DRCR study).

## Vein Occlusion Studies

- **SCORE2** (Study of Comparative Treatments for Retinal Vein Occlusion 2). Location: Knoxville. Retinal Vein Occlusion Study. ME secondary to CRVO – Sponsored by NEI.

## Vitromacular Adhesion (VMA) Studies

- **ORBIT** Sponsored by ThromboGenics. Location: Tri-Cities. Phase 4 Study to observe the clinical outcomes and safety in patients receiving JETREA for the treatment of symptomatic VMA.

To ask about trials currently enrolling and the requirements to take part, patients or referring physicians may call any of SERA's Clinical Trials Coordinators listed below. ■

**Knoxville**  
Kristina Oliver or  
Lisa Lovelady  
**865.579.3999**

**Chattanooga**  
Steve McBee  
**423.756.1002**

**Tri-Cities**  
Deanna Long or  
Chelsie Darnell  
**423.578.4364**



# Saving Premature Infants' Vision Detection and Treatment of ROP

Since Dr. James H. Miller began his career in Knoxville 25 years ago as a retina and vitreous surgeon, he has been caring for and helping premature babies that have developed Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP). For Dr. Miller, caring for and treating premature infants with ROP is a professional and personal mission.

ROP is an eye disease that occurs in some prematurely born

infants. Infants at risk for ROP include those born more prematurely, especially those with a birthweight of 1,500 grams or less. An ophthalmologist specializing in diseases of the retina can diagnose ROP during an examination of the baby's eyes in a hospital's neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) or nursery.

When a baby is born prematurely, many of the baby's organs aren't yet fully developed. Blood vessels in the retina of the eye normally finish developing in the last few weeks before birth. Premature infants leave the protective uterus before blood vessels in the retina have had a chance to fully develop. The infants are then exposed to elements, such as variable blood oxygen levels, light, and temperature changes. These factors may interfere with the normal development of blood vessels in the retina of the eye and cause ROP.

Early stages of ROP do not require any treatment. If ROP advances to a threshold for treatment, laser is used to indirectly eliminate the abnormal blood vessels.

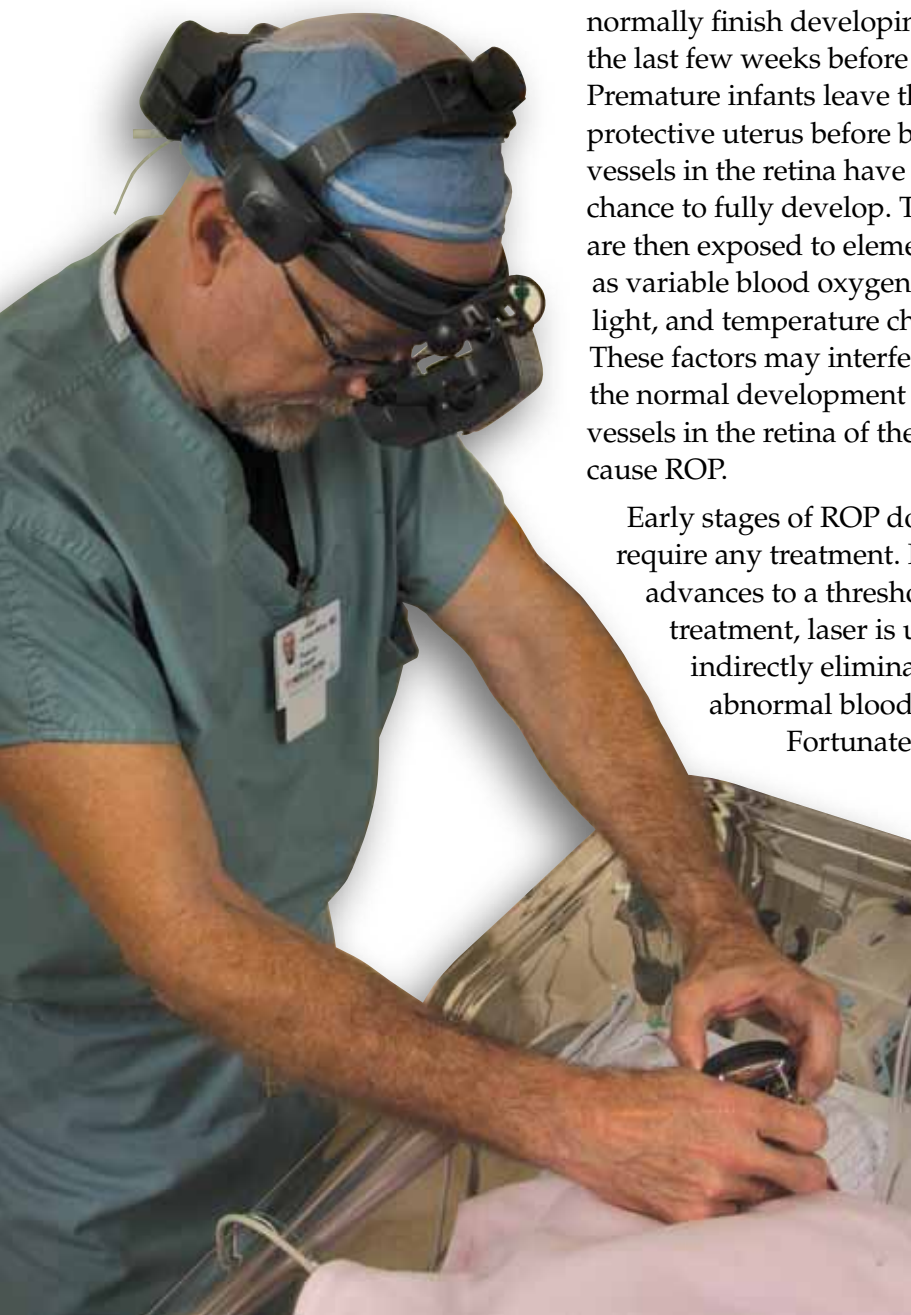
Fortunately, the



poor outcome rate for infants who receive treatment for ROP is very low. At-risk infants should be screened for ROP at appropriate intervals beginning 4-to-6 weeks after birth. Dr. Miller and several of his partners screen for and diagnose ROP during an examination of the infant's eyes in a hospital's NICU or nursery.

Dr. Miller credits neonatologists with reducing the severity of ROP in premature infants. "ROP severity is now much less than it used to be because neonatologists are managing arterial oxygen levels so carefully," he said. "Now instead of performing a dozen or so laser treatments for ROP a year, we maybe only have to do two or three per year. The frequency of treatment is much less."

Once these babies leave the hospital they may need follow-up care and Dr. Miller has implemented a system at Southeastern Retina to monitor these follow-up appointments. In the Knoxville region, Southeastern Retina physicians screen all "at-risk" premature babies for ROP at the University of Tennessee Medical Center and at East Tennessee Children's Hospital. ■



# Smart Boards Help Patients Understand Conditions, Treatment

The role of physicians as educators is widely understood. We recognize physicians as experts and realize they can teach us a lot about living healthier, fuller lives. For Richard Breazeale, MD, with Southeastern Retina Associates, Smart Boards have become important tools for teaching patients about their specific conditions.

*"In December 2013, we installed Smart Boards into several exam rooms," said Dr. Breazeale. "We use them as a way to display a patient's chart and diagnostic photos. I can draw on the board and explain to patients what's going on."*

Smart Boards enable patients to see their own eyes in ways that simply haven't been possible before. *"Often patients come to us with problems and can't explain what's going on. They often have compromised vision, so they can't clearly see their charts or diagnostic photos," Dr. Breazeale said. "With the Smart Board, which is 81 inches wide, we can show the patients their progress as we go along. We can take a 6mm slide of the retina and make it 4 feet big, and then draw on it."*

Smart Boards are currently in beta testing and are not in use SERA-wide yet. *"Smart Boards are expensive, but effective," Dr. Breazeale said. "You can explain to patients their diagnosis using their own pictures. You can also show videos of surgeries patients may be contemplating so they know exactly what to expect, or can show patients drafts and diagrams."*

Smart Boards have also had an unexpected benefit—they have enhanced communication

*Smart Boards enable patients to see their own eyes in ways that simply haven't been possible before.*

between patient and physician. *"Traditionally, when a doctor walks into a room, there's generally a note taker or nurse, and that scribe enters patient information into a computer," Dr. Breazeale said. "The part that's missing in that process is where we share that with patients. Using the Smart Board brings patients into the conversation in a new way. Smart Board technology empowers patients by really involving them in the process."*

Patient response to Smart Boards has been overwhelmingly positive. *"Every single patient we have asked has said they liked the Smart Board better," Dr. Breazeale said. "For me, it's more efficient and effective and patients like it better."*

Dr. Breazeale believes the use of Smart Board technology will increase once doctors realize their usefulness as teaching tools. *"My first job, once I know the diagnosis, is teaching the patient," he said. "Smart Boards are used in schools, so this allows us to bring something from the classroom into the clinical setting."* ■





# Southeastern Retina Associates Wel

**W**hen Andy Laverghetta started his role as CEO for Southeastern Retina Associates in March, he was fulfilling a dream he and his wife had shared for more than 10 years. They finally got to move their family closer to the mountains.

*"For years, my wife and I had talked about moving towards the mountains," Laverghetta said. "We had looked at North Carolina, but at the end of 2013, we went to Gatlinburg*

*on vacation. We stayed in a chalet, the kids got to see snow for the first time. It was great. On the drive home, my wife started saying that we had to get north, and I agreed."*

At the time, the Laverghetta family lived in Orlando, Florida, where Andy was the CEO of the Florida Heart Group. He enjoyed the job and truly liked and respected the physicians he worked with there, but when he learned about the opportunity to become

CEO for Southeastern Retina Associates, he had to know more.

*"I met Dr. Hoskins through another opportunity, and we had stayed in touch. I was excited when I learned about the opportunity here," he said. "I committed to the role around Christmas 2014, moved from Florida in February, and started in March. We sold our house in Florida, bought a home here and we are fully entrenched in the community."*

Laverghetta's decision to join Southeastern Retina Associates was about more than just the mountains. He saw a unique independent practice with a great working environment and a lot of opportunities.

*"I really like the environment here," he said. "It's a private practice where we aren't burdened by layers of bureaucracy, so we can be much more efficient and effective. We have a vision to execute and we feel like we can make an impact every day we show up to work."*

Southeastern Retina Associates' impact has breadth and depth, with 19 offices and 14 physicians. *"We have a unique practice here,"* Laverghetta said. Because many specialties have hospital ties with their location, it took me a while to wrap my head around how they have so many offices.

Ultimately, Laverghetta joined Southeastern Retina Associates because he was drawn to the people and to the field of retina surgery. But his favorite part of the job so far has, hands down, been the people.

*"My favorite thing about Southeastern Retina Associates so far has been the personal relationships with*



# comes New CEO Andy Laverghetta

physicians and the management team here," he said. "That was important to me when I made the decision to come here. I genuinely like all of these people and I felt that way about the practice I came from as well."

"There's a unique atmosphere here," he continued. "The physicians have created a friendly, laid back atmosphere, but there is a lot of intensity as well. We all feel like we're here to accomplish something big."

His management philosophy is simple: he wants to learn as much as he can in order to provide a strong support structure. "The management team is great. There is a lot of talent here," he said. "They are smart folks who are welcoming and excited about what they're doing. We're all excited to learn together."

"I want to set an environment where people feel empowered and challenged, where they can grow and

learn new things every day," He continued. "I have gotten a lot of great opportunities at early ages and I want to pay that forward."

Laverghetta is quick to acknowledge that he can learn a lot from the people he works with each day. "I am deliberate about coming in and learning all I can," he said. "There's a saying that we have two ears and one mouth and that we should use each in proportion. Right now I am listening and paying attention so I can learn more and pick up institutional knowledge. There are experts all around. I am learning from them. I've found that action takes care of itself when you listen."

Andy and his wife Jennifer have four children—three daughters, ages 4, 7, and 10, and one son who will turn two in July. He has played in bands since he was 12 years



old and even considered a career in music in his 20s. "I had fantastic opportunities, but also learned that it isn't how I wanted to make a living," he said. "I still try to write and record and play as much as I can. I look at music as therapy. It keeps me balanced. Most people are surprised to learn about that side of me, but music is a passion that doesn't go away." ■



John C. Hoskins, M.D.



Joseph M. Googe, Jr., M.D.



James H. Miller, Jr., M.D.



Joseph M. Gunn, M.D.



Tod A. McMillan, M.D.



Howard L. Cummings, M.D., F.A.C.S.



D. Allan Couch, M.D.



Stephen L. Perkins, M.D.



Richard I. Breazeale, M.D.



Nicholas G. Anderson, M.D.



Cris Larzo, M.D.



R. Keith Shuler, Jr., M.D.



Francis Char DeCroos, M.D.



Rohan J. Shah, M.D.



## In the News...Spotlight on

# Joseph M. Googe, Jr., MD

**I**t's hard for Joseph Googe, Jr., MD, to remember when exactly he decided to be a physician. "I decided so long ago," he said, laughing. "Being a physician interested me more than anything else. I came from a family of engineers – people who wanted to fix things – and I found biologic sciences interesting."

Dr. Googe said he also found people interesting. "I wanted to work with people," he said. "I said that in one of my medical school interviews – that I wanted to work with people – and the advisor said I could work with people at a service station. But I wanted to be a doctor. I just had a bend that way."

While he may not remember when he decided he wanted to be a physician, it's easier for Dr. Googe to remember when he decided ophthalmology would be a good area of focus. "When I was 16 or 17, I developed an eyelid angioma and it really concerned me," he said. "I went to see John Montgomery and he took it off for me. That was the first time I ever came across an ophthalmologist. I thought it was neat how he was able to just remove it and fix it for me."

Not too long after having that angioma removed, Dr. Googe earned his bachelor's degree in chemical engineering from the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. He then earned his medical degree at the UT College of Medicine in Memphis in 1978.

After completing an internship in internal medicine at UT Memphis, he spent time as an Emergency Room physician at UT Medical Center in Knoxville. A residency in ophthalmology at Louisiana State University followed.

Dr. Googe then earned three postgraduate fellowships – at Royal Melbourne Hospital in Australia (Anterior Segment Surgery), the University of Utah, Salt Lake City (Ophthalmic Pathology) and Harvard University fellowship (vitreoretinal surgery). He worked for two years at the Retina Associates of Boston and the Massachusetts Eye & Ear Infirmary before joining Southeastern Retina Associates in 1986.

"I was the second person in the group," he said. "I have watched the group grow. One of the great things we've succeeded in is recruiting really good doctors who are as well trained as anyone in the country. It has been very gratifying."

Southeastern Retina Associates has grown to be the region's most referred to specialists for challenging retina cases – likely because of the quality of their physicians, their cutting-edge technology and their experience bringing the latest treatment to patients through their participation in clinical trials.

According to Dr. Googe, technological advances have changed the way retina specialists practice medicine. "The technology just exploded and changed how we treat a lot of eye disease, especially in the last 10 years," he said. "When I first started, we didn't have much

treatment for what we diagnosed. Now new treatments have been developed. We see a lot of patients with macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy, and now we have better treatments for those conditions."

Many of these new treatments have come about because of leaps in technology and thorough clinical testing. Southeastern Retina Associates participates in clinical trials – and has participated in the trials for a lot of the drugs that are now standard treatments for conditions of the retina.

"We have been very active in the Diabetic Retinopathy Research Group [DRCR]," Dr. Googe said. Funded by the National Eye Institute, part of the National Institutes of Health, DRCR is a collaborative network dedicated to facilitating multi-center clinical research of diabetic retinopathy, diabetic macular edema and associated conditions.

Southeastern Retina Associates was awarded the Top Site for 2013 and 2014 by the DRCR, meaning that they have demonstrated outstanding performance as part of the DRCR network. This award doesn't just mean that Southeastern Retina Associates has signed up the most patients for clinical trials – it means that they have carefully followed and provided documentation for patients who participate in clinical trials.

Dr. Googe believes the secrets to their success have been the clinical trial coordinators at Southeastern Retina Associates. "Our clinical trial coordinators get to be very close to patients, and that's one of the reasons

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## In the News...Spotlight on

## Howard L. Cummings, M.D.



Before Howard Cummings earned his degree in medicine, he was a person who really liked science and wanted to help people. He also happened to be surrounded by ophthalmologists – his neighbor and his best friend’s dad. His own father was a scientist too – a mechanical engineer. *“At the time, I couldn’t have predicted I would become an ophthalmologist,”* he said. *“But I was in an environment that led me to the decision to become an ophthalmologist.”*

It’s a decision that led him around the country and overseas as he earned degrees and completed his fellowship, residency and internship. And it’s a decision that led him to finally settle in the Tri-Cities as part of the team of specially trained medical doctors and skilled retinal and vitreous ophthalmology surgeons with Southeastern Retina Associates.

But first, this New England native had to earn his bachelor’s degree – and he did in 1982, graduating magna cum laude with a degree in chemistry from Duke University. As part of his undergraduate education, he was also able to study 10th Century British History in England at the University of Oxford’s International Summer Graduate School.

*“I was majoring in chemistry and knew medicine would be my career, but I wanted to broaden my horizons and see what the British education system was like,”* he said. *“They were really focused on small seminar classes. It was similar to the way some graduate-level classes in the U.S. are designed.”*

Dr. Cummings went on to earn his medical degree at the University of Texas, Southwestern Medical School, in Dallas. He finished an internal medicine internship at Boston University Medical Center and then moved to Maryland for a residency in ophthalmology at the Greater Baltimore Medical Center. From there, he studied ophthalmic pathology at the Wilmer Institute of the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. He then took a postgraduate retina and vitreous fellowship in Lexington with the Retina and Vitreous Associates of Kentucky.

He acknowledges that the road to becoming a physician is long and arduous. *“My advice for anyone considering becoming a physician is that they really need to look at the long-term ramifications,”* he said. *“The journey to become a physician isn’t short – it takes a long time and can be difficult in the sense that you are sacrificing in the short term to meet long term goals.”*

Once Cummings finished his formal educational journey, he practiced at the Carolina Eye Associates in Raleigh, NC, and then the Springfield Clinic Eye Institute in Springfield, Ill. In 1999, he moved to the Tri-Cities and joined Southeastern Retina Associates.

It’s a decision he’s happy he made. *“I really like working with the group of ophthalmologists we have at Southeastern Retina Associates,”* he said. *“This is a bright, hardworking group that wants to help others. We have a comradery. It’s a good environment and we work very well together.”*

Many of the patients Dr. Cummings sees come to him for chronic conditions, such as diabetic retinopathy and age-related macular degeneration. Thanks to advances in technology, patients have treatment options for these conditions that didn’t exist years ago. *“Technology has evolved in our specialty specifically,”* he said. *“Now we have biopharmaceuticals that can attack diseases in a targeted fashion. They have improved outcomes dramatically.”*

But these medications require patients come to visit frequently – often once a month. *“Some current treatments require close observation and frequent retreatment to get results,”* he said. *“If a patient with macular degeneration wants to be able to keep reading or to keep driving, that patient may need to be seen monthly for up to two years. We can keep patients who keep up with therapy functioning well.”*

Cummings appreciates the relationships he is able to develop with patients. *“We see people frequently and, as we get to know them, they get comfortable with the staff,”* he said. *“When you get used to seeing a friendly face, you start talking on a more personal level. Our patients will get to know us and will tell us about their children and grandchildren, and we tell them about ours.”*

According to Cummings,

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## In the News...

# Southeastern Retina Associates Most Referred-to Retina Practice in East Tennessee – Offers Expertise, Cutting-Edge Technology and Clinical Trials Close to Home

**M**ost of us have heard the adage, *"The eyes are the window to the soul."*

For the specially trained medical doctors at Southeastern Retina Associates, the adage rings true.

*"It's amazing what you can see when you look into people's eyes,"* said Cris Larzo, MD, with Southeastern Retina Associates' Tri-Cities, Tenn., office. *"We can see if people have experienced a rise in blood pressure, if their cholesterol is high or if they have diabetes and their blood sugar has been high."*

Dr. Larzo says that for him and the other doctors at Southeastern Retina Associates, looking into the eyes of patients across Northeast Tennessee – including the Tri-Cities, Knoxville and Chattanooga – is an honor they take very seriously.

*"Before we bring a physician into our group, we make sure they have carefully considered why they want to come here,"* Dr. Larzo said. *"We recruit doctors who want to be in these areas long term and who are interested in the well-being of patients in this region."*

The physicians at Southeastern Retina Associates are skilled surgeons in the field of retinal and vitreous ophthalmology. They have met the stringent requirements of medical, internship, ophthalmology residency, vitreoretinal

fellowship and state licensure. All are board certified by the American Board of Ophthalmology.



Because of their specialized expertise and excellence in patient care, they are the most referred-to team in the East Tennessee region for complex retina cases. In addition to their expertise, Southeastern Retina Associates' team of professionals offer patients the latest technology and treatment, access to clinical trials and research and a large network of offices across the region.

While most referrals to Southeastern Retina Associates come from optometrists and ophthalmologists, Dr. Larzo says primary care physicians across the region refer patients to their offices as well. *"Primary care physicians in this region do a great job detecting eye problems,"* he said. *"We are grateful to all the primary care physicians who ask patients about their blood sugar, track A1C levels and convince patients to stop smoking."*

In addition to their appreciation for the excellent primary care physicians in East Tennessee, the physicians with Southeastern Retina Associates are committed to investing in the highest quality technology and equipment available. *"We are continually fine-tuning our practices as diagnostic equipment improves,"* Dr. Larzo said. *"That means patients can be diagnosed*

*quickly and less invasively and can start treatment more promptly."*

Treatments for many eye conditions have improved because of technological advances. *"Now 95 percent of the time when someone comes in with wet macular degeneration, we can keep them from losing their vision,"* Dr. Larzo said. *"Sometimes we can even make a substantial improvement in their vision. We have seen patients work longer, drive longer and be happier."*

Some of the latest treatments and technologies are tested at Southeastern Retina Associates before they are brought to market, offering patients the opportunity to participate in clinical trials and research. Physicians at Southeastern Retina Associates have been leading clinical trials for more than 15 years, investigating new forms of treatment for macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy and a variety of other retinal conditions.

*"We are plugged into multiple research networks, so we are able to provide medicines and treatments to patients before they are available to the general public,"* Dr. Larzo said.

For the past two years, Southeastern Retina Associates has been honored with the Top Site award by the Diabetic Retinopathy Clinical Research (DRCR). DRCR is a collaborative network funded by the National Eye Institute, part of the National Institutes of Health, dedicated to facilitating multi-

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# New Rome Office Offers Expert Care Close to Home

**S**outheastern Retina Associates has made getting treatment for all varieties of retinal diseases much easier for patients in Northern Georgia. On July 17, 2014, Southeastern Retina Associates opened an office in Rome, Georgia, at 210 Redmond Road.

*"Our schedule was very busy from the first day we were in the office,"* said Paula Clark, Clinical Coordinator for Southeastern Retina Associates' Chattanooga Market. *"Our location is growing by leaps and bounds. Each of the doctors finds many patients in need of help."*

There was not enough retina specialty care in Rome before Southeastern Retina Associates opened their office. *"Our doctors reasoned that bringing our expertise to Rome was an excellent way to better serve our community,"* Clark said. *"In fact, we already had many patients living in the Rome area traveling to our other locations for care. Since many of our patients come into the office monthly for treat-*

*ments, having an office closer to home is filling a substantial need."*

Currently, Dr. DeCroos, Dr. Breazeale, and Dr. Shah travel to Rome on either Tuesday or Thursday of each week. All of Southeastern Retina Associates' diagnostic testing and in office procedures such as injections can be performed in the Rome office. If a patient needs surgery, it can be scheduled in Chattanooga in one of two state-of-the-art operating facilities.

*"Patients are thrilled to not have to travel so far for clinic visits,"* Clark said. *"They want to go home and rest after their clinic visit, and us being closer really is a good thing for our patients. It feels good and rewarding to know you're taking care of patients' needs."*

Being part of the community in Rome has been good for Southeastern Retina Associates as well. *"The doctors here are wonderful and the people have really embraced us here,"* Clark said. *"We love this area and it just feels right to be here."*

## In the News...Dr. Larzo

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center clinical research of diabetic retinopathy, diabetic macular edema and associated conditions.

In addition to expert physicians, cutting-edge technology and participation in clinical trials and research, Southeastern Retina Associates also offers patients convenience. With 19 offices located throughout the region, patients can select the office that is most convenient for them. Physicians are also accommodating if a

patient needs to be seen at another location. *"We can pull up a patient's electronic medical record in any of our locations,"* Dr. Larzo said.

For Dr. Larzo and the other physicians with Southeastern Retina Associates, it's an exciting time to be an ophthalmologist. *"For many of the eye problems our patients see us with, there is no easy fix – but there are treatments,"* he said. *"We get to see our patients often and get to know them and that is very rewarding."* ■

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## In the News...Dr. Cummings

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technology in the field of ophthalmology continues to improve. Through his work with Southeastern Retina Associates, he gets to be a part of improving the technology. The group participates in a variety of clinical trials and has been recognized as the Top Site in 2013 and 2014 by the Diabetic Retinopathy Research Group (DRCR). DRCR is a group funded by the National Eye Institute, part of the National Institutes of Health.

*"We are trying to answer questions about trying to treat diabetic retinopathy and we are doing it through participation in research trials,"* Cummings said. *"This is about evidence-based medicine. We participate in trials to answer important questions and to try to improve treatment options for patients."*

For Cummings, getting to practice ophthalmology in the Tri-Cities with Southeastern Medical Associates is a dream come true. *"When I went to Duke, I fell in love with the Southeast and I knew I wanted to practice medicine in the Southeast,"* he said. *"I fell in love with the seasons and the people. After I left Duke and ventured to the Southwest for medical school, I longed for the Southeast. This is just the place for me."*

When Cummings isn't working, he can be found on tennis courts across the Tri-Cities. He also enjoys playing guitar and taking the time to learn about new things. His most current project is participation in a wine club. *"It's not just about drinking the wine,"* he laughs. *"I enjoy learning about wine and talking with the other members. It's a lot of fun."* ■

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## In the News...Dr. Googe

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*there is such strong follow-up," Dr. Googe said. "They often get to know patients and keep in touch after a trial ends."*

One of the reasons the clinical trial coordinators get to know patients so well is that they get to see them a lot. One of the benefits to patients of participating in a clinical trial is that they generally come into the office to see their ophthalmologist more frequently than patients undergoing more traditional treatment regimens.

Dr. Googe is excited about the leaps in technology that ophthal-

mologists have seen in recent history – and anticipates they will continue to see leaps in technology and treatments.

*"The technology now is very unique," he said. "All of the medicines that work for retinovascular disease are short-term treatments, so patients come back often. Eventually, they will have medicines that last longer. Now I get to see patients frequently – kind of the way an oncologist sees patients often. It is a unique time in our field."*

The physicians and staff at Southeastern Retina Associates are dedicated to educating others in the eye care field about technology and clinical trials as well. "We are fairly active with the American Academy of Ophthalmology and some

*of our partners are very active with the Tennessee Academy of Ophthalmology," Dr. Googe said. "We have put on education programs for ophthalmologists and optometrists, and we present educational conferences monthly. We try to help further education for all eye care providers in the region."*

Dr. Googe loves his work – he gets to use technology and "fix things." But he especially enjoys working with his patients each day. "As a doctor in East Tennessee, I feel appreciated," he said. "If you do the right thing and treat people humanely, people appreciate what you do for them." ■

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