In 1995, Barrett Haik, fresh from a staff position at Tulane, was recruited by the University of Tennessee Health Science Center's Department of Ophthalmology. Dr. Haik accepted both the Hamilton Professorship in Ophthalmology and a formidable challenge: to build a clinical faculty and research team in Memphis to rival the best in the world.

With leadership gifts from alumni and friends of the university, Dr. Haik recruited Diana Johnson, Ph.D., to lead the team-building effort in research. She accepted, was named to the Roger L. Hiatt Endowed Professorship, and immediately began a search for established researchers in ophthalmology.

These and many other initiatives at what is now called the Hamilton Eye Institute (HEI) would not be possible without the dedicated support of many caring people and organizations. Most prominent among this visionary group are Memphis ophthalmologist, UT College of Medicine alumnus, and UT faculty member Ralph S. Hamilton, M.D., and his wife Barbara. The Hamiltons gave the lead gift that made the Hamilton Eye Institute a reality.

"It's critical for donors to be willing to take a leap of faith. They have to trust that we will fill a position with a highly qualified candidate," explains Mary Smith, M.P.H., instructor in ophthalmology and director of special projects and events, who came from Tulane with Haik.

Thankfully, a number of donors have made that leap; and today, six of the 50 endowed professorships on the UT Health Science Center campus are held by ophthalmology faculty. Internationally recognized medical clinicians and researchers—with backgrounds in orbital disease, eye cancer, pediatric ophthalmology, glaucoma, retinal diseases, macular degeneration, and a host of other eye diseases—now treat patients and search for causes and cures at the Hamilton Eye Institute.

Throughout, the goal has been to offer broad patient services, train ophthalmologists, and conduct research under one roof. In 2002, that goal moved within reach. Baptist Hospital generously gave its building to the UT Health Science Center. The institute now had a home—a $20 million in-kind donation. With funding from the Knapp Foundation, the Plough Foundation, and numerous individuals, renovations began on the 7th floor of the "930" building, and 10 laboratory suites...
equipped with the latest technology took shape. By 2005, adult
and pediatric clinics were completed, thanks in great part to
generous gifts from FedEx, the Hyde Foundation, and the
Children's Foundation of Memphis.

The full force of HEI's assets is focused on one goal:
preventing blindness and saving eyesight. Six-year-old Mat-
thew Harmon is just one of a great number of HEI success
stories. Born with an extremely rare disease, Matthew, at two
months old, was diagnosed with Axenfeld-Rieger syndrome.
Left untreated, the prognosis was inevitable blindness, so
Amy and Scotty, Matthew's parents, took him to three spe-
cialists in Mississippi.

Over the course of seven months, Matthew had multiple
surgeries and eye exams, each requiring a pediawrap—the
child's version of a strait jacket. "Even if he was sleeping, the
first thing they did was put him in the wrap," said Amy. "It was
incredibly stressful because Matthew was so traumatized."

After exhausting their expertise, the Mississippi special-
ists referred Matthew to Peter Netland, M.D., Ph.D., who
holds the Gale S. and Richard D. Siegal Professorship at HEI.
"On our first visit, we just knew Dr. Netland was the one for
Matthew when he examined him without waking him up, and
without a pediawrap," Amy says.

Netland performed an Ahmed implant procedure, relieving
and stabilizing pressure on the boy's optic nerve. With regular
six-month eye exams, Matthew is now just a regular kindergart-
ner who plays soccer and loves to draw. His artwork is highly
intricate and exceptionally good for so young an artist, who
without Dr. Netland, might not have been able to see at all.

"We drive two hours each way for every visit with Dr.
Netland," says Matthew's dad, Scotty, "but it doesn't matter
how far away he is, we're still going to see him."

"It's great to see Matthew flourishing," commented
Netland. "Without a doubt, our ability to care for patients
like him is a direct result of donor funding."

Dr. Haik summarizes the feelings of the entire institute
faculty, "It is impossible to find words adequate to express
our appreciation to the hundreds of donors who have made
this extraordinary center of hope a reality and one of the
nation's leading eye institutes."