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NEWS

Ophthalmologist balances laser surgery practice and tennis

by Ellen Stodola EyeWorld Staff Writer

Stephen Coleman, MD, finds time to take on roles as both a laser surgeon and tennis tournament sponsor

Since moving to New Mexico in 1995, Stephen Coleman, MD, Coleman Vision, Albuquerque, N.M., has focused solely on laser vision correction. With the exception of a handful of cataract procedures early in his career, Dr. Coleman's practice is dedicated to LASIK, and his main interests revolve around laser and wavefront-guided custom technology. His location in Albuquerque has put him in a unique position to be involved in the field, with the software largely developed in this area. However, ophthalmology is not the only field Dr. Coleman focuses on. He is also the sponsor of a professional women's tennis tournament that takes place in Albuquerque every September, the Coleman Vision Tennis Championships. This year's tournament will be held from September 14–21.

Getting into ophthalmology

When Dr. Coleman attended medical school, he did not initially know that he wanted to go into ophthalmology. "I did my internship in New York City, then I had a commitment to go on active duty in the Army because I had a scholarship while at Georgetown," he said.

This resulted in an active duty assignment for 4 years in Germany with an Apache helicopter brigade, which was ultimately what directed him into the ophthalmology field.

"I worked on a contact lens program for the ophthalmologic consultant to the Surgeon General, and they sent me to Washington for 6 weeks," he said. "I worked in the clinic with him learning about some of the visual issues that the Apache pilots were facing." Apache pilots fly many missions at night in sophisticated aircraft, which brought up a variety of vision issues.

After returning to the U.S. to continue his training in ophthalmology, Dr. Coleman quickly realized he was interested in laser vision correction more than any other type of ophthalmic surgery.

Dr. Coleman said that after seeing his first excimer laser procedure, he fell in love with it.

A chance meeting with Stephen Trokel, MD, whom Dr. Coleman said is often referred to as the "father of laser vision correction," furthered his interest in laser vision correction. Dr. Trokel mentioned that high altitude locations would be the place that laser technology would really take off, due to issues related to relative hypoxia and contact lens use. This fueled Dr. Coleman's move to Albuquerque, where both laser surgery and his practice immediately became popular.

"The Army got me interested in ophthalmology, and at the advice of Steve Trokel, I came to New



Clinics are held during Dr. Coleman's tennis tournament each year. Hundreds of elementary school kids come out to participate and get the chance to ask questions and play with the pros.



Dr. Coleman with Anna

Mexico," he said.

Tennis interest

Dr. Coleman's interest in tennis started during his childhood and continues to this day. "I grew up across the street from 7 public tennis courts," he said.

Tennis was a sport that all of his family and friends played as well, and Dr. Coleman said that he spent the majority of the summer months on the courts. Dr. Coleman played Division I college tennis and now plays with his family at the court at his house.

Sponsoring a tournament

It was in 1998 that Dr. Coleman first sponsored the Coleman Vision Tennis Championships, and he is now in his 17th year as sponsor.

Originally, the tournament was a stop on the Virginia Slims tour. This was a time when the women's professional tennis tour was not what it is today, he said.

However, Gladys Heldman, who lived in Santa Fe and founded World Tennis magazine, took it upon herself to make Albuquerque a stop on the women's professional tour, which at the time was sponsored by Virginia Slims. When people began to stop smoking, Dr. Coleman said, the Virginia Slims tour went from being very popular nationwide to slowly fading out of existence.

After the last Virginia Slims tournament there in 1991, there was no professional tennis in New Mexico. Dr. Coleman and his wife decided to sponsor the tournament after his wife, also an avid player, heard that a sponsor was being sought to bring the tour back.

The tournament itself

"We get great players because you can play year-round in New Mexico," Dr. Coleman said. The area has a strong tennis community, and there are usually more than 100 volunteers who support and staff the tournament.

The tournament features a singles draw of 32 players and a doubles draw of 16 teams. There are also 32 players in the qualifying round, with 4 of those making it into the singles main draw. Players come from all over the world, including countries such as Brazil, the Czech Republic, France, Japan, and Russia.

Each year of the tournament, they try to do something different. In the past, Dr. Coleman said there have been Native American tennis clinics and wheelchair tennis clinics (which he intends to bring back this year). The tournament also has question and answer sessions where kids can talk to some of the pros who come to play. Last year's Q&A in Spanish was such a hit that Dr. Coleman plans to continue it at future tournaments.

"All proceeds go to the New Mexico Youth Foundation for after-school programs. Each Tuesday and Thursday during the tournament, more than 700 kids from all over come out and play with the pros."

Tennis is great for the area because all you need to play are a racquet, a ball, and a wall, and that resonates with a lot of kids in the community, Dr. Coleman said.

Balancing his practice and the tournament

Dr. Coleman said he does not find it difficult to balance time spent in his practice and organizing the tennis tournament. His whole staff gets involved.

The tournament is a way of contributing to the community, he said. "I think if you get involved in something that you actually like, it can be really powerful," he said.

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Tatishvili, Shelby Rogers, and Sue Jollensten. Shelby Rogers won the Coleman Vision Tennis Championships in 2013.

Source (all): Stephen Coleman, MD