

Opinion

After the Giving Back, *Laissez les Bon Temps Rouler?*

Last November, I arrived too early at Terminal D in Louis Armstrong International Airport for the flight home after the Annual Meeting. I decided not to go to my gate right away, intending instead to reflect on the frenetic past few days. I chose to sit in a cluster of chairs directly in front of the airport entrance. The route to the ticket counters veered right of my seating area, while passengers clutching boarding passes and no luggage to check angled left to security. These days, travelers are pretty intense about finding their way when they arrive at airports, so I sat there incognito as if in a hunters' blind, seeing but unseen. Many of the ophthalmologists still wore their meeting badges, some with ribbons crumpled by the humidity, others askew from being caught under luggage straps. But none of the technicians or support staff, whom I identified by logo-splattered shopping bags from the exhibit floor, had failed to remove their badges. I didn't need a statistician to decide there must be a difference between my colleagues and the rest of the bunch. My theory is that the ophthalmologists were rendered absent-minded because they were overstimulated, having the entire meeting focused on them.

The Academy's Annual Meeting is a dizzying experience, and it doesn't engender humility. It's easy to start feeling self-important. But I'm happy to say that three New Orleans stories have confirmed my faith in ophthalmology

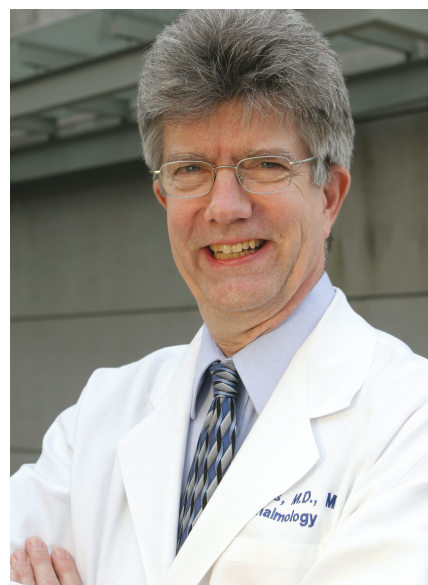
and ophthalmologists. These are feel-good tales about our profession that are worth retelling.

First, after the destruction of Katrina, it was not clear that the city would be ready to host a large convention barely two years after the storm. The Academy board of trustees weighed the pros and cons of another venue, deciding that it would be the right thing to demonstrate our faith in New Orleans' ability to rebound. And what a right decision it was! Never cleaner or more hospitable, there was no hint of the crime so many had forecasted.

Second, for the three days before the meeting, the Academy along with Habitat for Humanity hosted EyeBuild in St. Bernard Parish and the Ninth Ward. Hundreds of Academy volunteers pitched in to rebuild homes devastated by Katrina. I am ashamed to admit that I didn't volunteer. (When I have a hammer in my hand, instead of nails, all I can see are thumbs!) The Academy filmed a wonderful video of EyeBuild, featured at the Opening Session. (View it at www.aao.org/eyebuild.)

Finally, there is the story of Thomas McCauley, MD, from Narragansett, R.I. Dr. McCauley carried a second wallet as insurance against pickpockets, into which he stashed his casino winnings of \$8,000. Trouble was, there was no identification in the wallet with the cash. He inadvertently left it in a booth at the Harrah's buffet, where he had been impressed with the service of waiter Al

Castro, impressed enough to fill out a comment card. Mr. Castro is an accounting student at the University of Phoenix with a one-year-old at home. When Dr. McCauley discovered the loss, he was sure he'd been the victim of a pickpocket, but he checked back at the restaurant just to be sure. Mr. Castro recognized him immediately and rushed to return the missing wallet, with all the money still there. As a reward, Dr. McCauley gave him the \$8,000. Mr. Castro's comment? "Good things happen to people who do good things." I'm hoping that applies to ophthalmologists like you and me who are doing good things every day with our patients and in our communities.



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