

EYE PRO

Shining On!



by John P. Ribner

EYE PRO After 26 successful years, Eye Pro, Inc. is practically a tanning industry icon, and the company still has many exciting things to offer salon operators worldwide.



Eye Pro, Inc. really needs no introduction – most people who earn their living in the “sun biz” already know about the company’s effective, convenient and affordable disposable eye protection. Led by its enigmatic president, Brenda Fishbaugh, Eye Pro has also been dedicated to educating salon pros about the importance of eye protection while tanning, offering a comprehensive training program at various industry events. Now, the company is bringing the same education and valuable revenue earning tips to salon owners via its website, as well as providing many other exciting offers. As for its popular Wink-Ease and VIEWkeepers! eyewear products, they’re still available, too – and like all things Eye Pro, continue to be made in America!

A UNIQUE DISCOVERY

Every great thing has to start somewhere, and in the case of Eye Pro, Inc., it all started in 1983 – with a snack. Entrepreneur and venture capitalist, Jim Simon, was eating a bag of potato chips when he noticed something interesting. As he enjoyed his crunchy snack, he realized he could read his newspaper through the potato chip bag as he held it. “He quickly surmised that the bag’s material, called metallized polyester, had to be able to block UV light in order to keep the chips fresh, yet he was still able to see through it,” recalled Brenda Fishbaugh, Eye Pro President. “As a result, he started thinking about what other kinds of products could be made from this material, and the idea for Wink-Ease was born.” Through his research, Jim also discovered that the patent for metallized polyester had expired. This, coupled with the excitement of a then-growing indoor tanning industry, was enough to persuade Jim to start Eye Pro, Inc. in his hometown of Fort Wayne, IN.

BRENDA ON BOARD!

Like most entrepreneurs do, Jim enjoyed getting Eye Pro off the ground, but he wasn’t interested in operating it. And so, the search for the perfect company president began. In 1991, Jim found the right person to lead his latest venture, and that person was the vivacious and effervescent Brenda Fishbaugh. “I had worked for companies such as National Cash Register, ComputerLand and Olsten Temporaries; but the dry, corporate atmosphere wasn’t to my liking,” Brenda said. “Working for Eye Pro sounded like fun because the tanning industry was still up-and-coming at that time, and I was excited to be part of it. Nineteen years later, I’m still having fun meeting salon owners all across the country and overseas, and educating them about the importance of eye protection.”

POPULAR PRODUCTS

After 26 years, Eye Pro’s original Wink-Ease product is still going strong. “These products became popular with salon owners the day we released them, and they’ve remained virtually unchanged since then,” Brenda said. “The only noticeable change in the products is that we’ve been able to print the instructions in a darker ink, so tanners can now read them clearly. Other than that, Wink-Ease continues to be the popular disposable eyewear that everyone remembers.” Based on tanner suggestions, the company also manufactures VIEWkeepers! disposable eye protection. “Some female tanners mentioned that the original cone design was too shallow to accommodate longer eyelashes, so VIEWkeepers! were created with a deeper cone to address that,” Brenda said.

In November 2003, Eye Pro added another product to its lineup – Fresh-Ease after-tanning wipes – which have become a favorite with salon pros and tanners alike, helping eliminate after-tan odor, as well as freshen and moisturize the skin. That same year, the company began selling UV Blockers safety goggles (made to ANSI standards), which are designed to protect the eyes during tanning equipment maintenance, particularly when replacing UV lamps. As with all other products offered by Eye Pro, both Fresh-Ease and UV Blockers are made right here in the USA.

AMAZING CHANGES

With so many exciting, new things in the works, 2009 aims to be a big year for Eye Pro, Inc. “We’ve recently relocated our sales office in Fort Wayne, IN,” Brenda said. “We were fortunate to find a larger facility just a couple of miles down the road. Our relocation is complete, and everyone’s excited about the new offices.” When it comes to new digs, Eye Pro didn’t stop with its office space – the company also built a state-of-the-art eyewear manufacturing facility in Caledonia, MI. “We simply outgrew our former facility in Grand Rapids, MI, so we built a bigger one very close to the former,” she said.

Since the company’s birth, all Eye Pro products have been made in the USA, a tradition that will continue. “This is a point of pride for us, especially when the quality of products from the overseas market has been brought into question lately,” Brenda said. “Because two of our main products are used on the eyes, we’re not willing to sacrifice quality for savings, which is why we’ve always had our products manufactured in FDA-approved facilities here in the U.S. Personally, I’ve always believed in supporting the American economy, and I’m proud to be part of a company with the same belief.

Chicks Rule at Eye Pro! The team of eyewear experts includes Brenda Fishbaugh, Cristi Spilker (top), Renee Loffland & Jackie DeWald (seated).



GOING DIRECT ... TO YOU!

Salon pros have many reasons to get excited about what Eye Pro has to offer – and it’s all available on the company’s website, eyepro.net/salontips. “As our team travels to various distributor symposiums, we can’t help but notice that there are a lot of new salon owners coming into this industry,” Brenda said. “To help them, and anyone else who wants to boost their eye protection sales, we’ve added a new section to our website. It features a 15-minute video focused on the basics of eye protection, as well as instructions for cleaning and sanitizing goggles, for those who wish to provide them for their clients. It also features interviews and sales tips from salon owners on how to earn more revenue by selling disposable eye protection.”

The Eye Pro website features something that’s already caused some excitement in the industry – a 104-point checklist for cleaning a salon. “I first featured this checklist in a column I wrote for *Island Sun Times*, and the response we received from that was tremendous,” she said. “People were calling and e-mailing me, asking me to send them this checklist so they could use it when cleaning their salons. Since so many people wanted it, we decided to put it on our website and it’s received a lot of hits since then.”

To up the website’s excitement quotient, Eye Pro has also included an eye protection quiz that awards many great prizes to salon pros who take it. “We’ve partnered with Norvell, Performance Brands, Temporary Tattoos, and The TANNIE for this special opportunity,” Brenda said. “We want to make sure everyone is educated about the importance of wearing eye protection while tanning, and we’re happy to encourage salon pros to learn by rewarding them with prizes from these and other great companies.”

Eye Pro also invites eyepro.net visitors to vote for their favorite pictures of endangered animals featured on the site. “Everyone who votes will receive free Wink-Ease samples,” Brenda said. For many years, Brenda was a volunteer and

tour guide at Black Pine Animal Park, an Albion, IN-based animal sanctuary that Eye Pro supports. She and the rest of the Eye Pro team are dedicated to helping endangered animals, and they support several other zoos and sanctuaries (also listed at eyepro.net).

STILL SERVING SALONS

As Brenda and the Eye Pro team look ahead, they're ready to continue their dedication to eye protection training and education. They also plan to spread the word about how salons can earn more revenue by selling the company's popular products. "We understand that the economy has put everyone in a pinch, and that some salon professionals aren't able to travel to the various tanning events to get their training," Brenda said. "So, to help us get our message out to salons, we plan to utilize our website as much as we can. It's an excellent way to provide salon operators with info about eye protection and disposable eyewear at no cost to them, and we will increase our use of it in the future." For those salon pros planning to attend upcoming industry events, don't be surprised to see the familiar, smiling faces of the Eye Pro team there, as well.



The "Eye Pro Gals" are tanning event veterans, happily providing product samples & eye protection education. Pictured at the ITA 2008 World Expo are (L-R) Renee Lofland, Brenda Fishbaugh, Debbie Miller (Total Tan), and Natalie McChesney (Eye Pro).

While Eye Pro's disposable eye protection has a 26-year history in indoor tanning, in many ways, it's like a brand new company. With their enhanced education efforts and so many exciting offers just a mouse-click away, the company's popularity should only grow in the months to come. And, like its gleaming metallic eye protection, the institution that is Eye Pro, Inc. will continue to shine brightly in the industry it calls home. ■