

A Great Ride, Indeed!

Longtime Wink-Ease® President Retires

By Joe Schuster



Being involved in the indoor tanning industry for quite a while has given me the opportunity to become friends with a myriad of people and Brenda Fishbaugh is certainly one of them. Our friendship goes back quite a few years, probably more than either of us want to admit. Her passion

for the industry was exemplified by the fact that she not only created sales for her company, but also worked tirelessly to spread the word about the importance of using FDA-compliant eye protection during tanning sessions. More than once, Brenda offered to jump in during my salon operator certification

classes to provide additional info about eye protection. Over her years of involvement, she has been a fixture at trade events. Visitors to the Eye Pro exhibit booth were always greeted with a smile from her and probably received a gift – something related to eye protection or one of her great joys, animals. Recently, Brenda called me to say that she was retiring. Not sad news, as I'm happy for her and husband Steve as they move on with their lives. I had the pleasure of chatting with her about this news. Read on and take in some of the insights that made Brenda such a beloved tan biz mainstay.

JS: “Parting is such sweet sorrow that I shall say goodnight till it be morrow.” I think Shakespeare’s words sum up the combination of happiness and sadness that comes with news of your retirement. Did your decision just hit you one day or come after a period of self-reflection? Following my use of Old English to start our chat, what sayeth you?

BF: I have loved the tanning industry since I joined Eye Pro, the maker of Wink-Ease® in January 1991. It’s been a perfect fit for me – I’ve loved the trade shows, traveling all over the world speaking to tanners about protecting their eyes, and creating and patenting Lash Room Wink-Ease designed for people with long eyelashes. I had a blast building our international market at a time when there wasn’t Google to help find distributors or email to quickly correspond. We wrote letters and waited months for replies that were printed in a different language! As time went on, we created a website, tanning memes for salons to share on social media, PowerPoint presentations for education about avoiding eye damage, and I wrote a monthly column on eye protection for *IST Magazine*. You know, I’ve enjoyed the fact that our industry is such a tight-knit family. On the road, we would all go out for dinner together or share rides with competitors. It has been a great ride and I’ve made lifelong friends. But after 31 years and a number of health issues, my ability to attend trade shows and distributor events was compromised.

I knew then that it was time to retire and allow my right hand for 24 years, Jackie DeWald, to take over. Jackie is amazing and it is her time to shine!

JS: During your years in indoor tanning, you've certainly witnessed good times and lean times, as many of us have. Did you ever want to just move on to something else?

BF: There's no doubt that it is more fun when the sales are great, but every business has its ups and downs. We used to have endangered animals on display at our trade show booths in Vegas and Nashville – servals, Burmese pythons and eagles. In lean times, it became a challenge to reach salon owners while keeping costs down. Technology helped us offer a recorded Eye Protection Expert Certificate Training on our website and we kept in touch with customers with Zoom training sessions and social media.

JS: I know that you have been heavily involved in some really neat philanthropy. Please, fill our readers in!

BF: Steve and I don't have any children and we've been together since I was 17 years old. We decided that some of the causes we believe in would become our "kids." We support endangered animal rescues worldwide, and that's been a big part of Eye Pro, too. We've donated to the Clouded Leopard Project and the efforts to protect rhinos in Kenya. Recently, we have been assisting National Geographic's Photo Ark, which is a tremendous honor to work with Joel Sartore in cataloging endangered species. We are also interested in supporting students. We've endowed a scholarship at Purdue University, and underwritten several exhibits for the Fort Wayne Museum of Art. Giving back is very enjoyable and we feel fortunate to be able to do it.

JS: We've really enjoyed all of the fantastic photo safaris you've shared with us in *IST Magazine*.



Clearly, you've left your stamp on the industry. What would you say was your biggest impact, what you'd like to be remembered for?

BF: I certainly hope I've raised awareness about the importance of eye protection when tanning. I like to think that I've saved the vision of

thousands of tanners with our educational training. I want to thank Vince (Lorraine) and Sherron (Barden) at *IST Magazine* for allowing me to write a monthly column for a couple of decades. My hundreds of "Eye to Eye" articles really helped get the word out to salon operators about the many ways to provide and promote eyewear. →

“I’ve loved my time in the tanning industry! I am incredibly grateful to the product distributors and salon operators around the world who became Eye Pro customers and my good friends.”



JS: When you and I last caught up, you told me you have a new interest: bird watching. Do you have plans to travel and view some exotic birds or is this something you enjoy close to home?

BF: You know you are old when you join the Audubon Society and spend time looking up in the trees with a camera or binoculars! I’m hooked – I suddenly love birds! Steve and I have been driving around the U.S. to photograph birds.

JS: For as long as I’ve known you, you’ve never been one to sit still. What’s on the horizon for you?

BF: I started learning photography in 2010 when Steve and I went to Africa for the first time. I really love the challenge and the artistic aspect; I love to photograph everything but people! I’ve also been competing on an international level. So, I am one to “sit still” now, as it takes hours and hours of Photoshop work at my computer to get a couple of images ready for a competition. Feel free to follow my upcoming adventures on Facebook @Brenda Fishbaugh. I will certainly miss the amazing friends I’ve made in the industry and hope everyone will keep in touch!

JS: Brenda, your smile and enthusiasm will be missed, but we wish you and Steve nothing but the best as you move on. Thanks for all you have given to our industry! ■



Jackie DeWald (with Brenda, at right) has been with Eye Pro for 24 years and will now take the helm as General Manager.

