

OPTICAL PRISM

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Men of Vision

Men in the optical industry making a significant impact

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Addressing the barriers to receiving eye care

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WHEN CONFLICT HAPPENS
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The New Masculine

Exploring men's evolving eyewear styles, this issue highlights how frames are becoming a powerful tool for personal expression and individuality.

FEATURE

Visionaries *with* HEART

Four remarkable men transforming lives through vision and unwavering dedication.

BY EVRA TAYLOR

In the optical industry, there are many moving stories of people whose sight has been restored through life-changing procedures, and the professionals who make that possible. This profile features four extraordinary men in the industry whose personal stories are inspirational and whose commitment to making a difference goes above and beyond their call of duty.

Bryan and Bradford Manning: Two Blind Brothers

In New York, Bradford and Bryan Manning, 'co-brothers' and co-founders of Two Blind Brothers, are on a mission to cure blindness. At the age of seven, the brothers were told that they'd go blind as a result of Stargardt's Disease, a rare congenital form of macular degeneration for which there is no cure.



As occurs with many rare diseases, there was a long delay in receiving an accurate diagnosis which, for many people, would have meant a life defined by limitations and disability. The Manning family, however, had something different in mind. In an interview with the American Foundation for the Blind, Bryan credited his parents with helping him and his brother adopt a 'never give up' attitude. "We were super fortunate to have, from a young age, such phenomenal parents because when you're an adult and you receive this type of diagnosis, you can cope with it. You have an ability to understand what might be happening to you. But as a seven-year-old, you have no clue. So we took all of our cues from our parents. Their constant, steadfast message was, yes, this is going to be a challenge, but it's not going to define you," remarked Bryan.

The brothers' parents told them, 'Your visual impairment may be a disability, but you're going to overcome it. The challenges you're experiencing and the difficulties you're going to have will make you better and stronger'. That message has resonated through the brothers' souls ever since. "I'll never forget when I was in high school, it was a brand new school, no one there knew me and I just didn't want to be the blind kid. Just for one day, I wanted no one to know. And I had enough vision at that time such that people probably couldn't tell until they kind of got to know me a little better," stated Bryan.

Now, decades later, the brothers are on a mission to cure blindness through their luxury clothing line. Seventy percent of their employees are visually impaired and do all of the cut and sew manufacturing. Their goal is to help close the gap by funding research that makes a difference to those who are visually impaired. The brothers' message is, "Your greatest challenge is your greatest gift".

In Spring 2024, in partnership with Centennial Optical, the brothers launched the 2BB: frame collection featuring tactile elements to encompass the brand ethos 'feel the difference'. Every frame includes braille dots on the temples (which mean the "2" or "B" in braille alphabet), allowing the consumer to carry forward the mission of helping to find a cure for blindness.

Sean Sylvestre: Mobile Vision Care Clinic

Named one of Canada's Top 40 Under 40 in 2019, Winnipeg-based Sean Sylvestre has devoted his life to levelling the playing field regarding access to vision care among the less fortunate in his midst, with a mission to provide a better life through better sight. Sylvestre is the founder and CEO of Mobile Vision Care Clinic, Canada's first and only full-time mobile vision care clinic. Its objective is to ensure that all Canadians - including those who are vulnerable and marginalized - have access to vision care regardless of socioeconomic circumstance.

The Top 40 Under 40 accolade is a tremendous accomplishment but Sylvestre is, first and foremost, a community builder and social entrepreneur. While he has enjoyed building a successful business, his true passion lies in spearheading community initiatives geared toward improving students' literacy rates through better vision, for example. "There is no greater feeling in life than the satisfaction



you get from serving others. As a result, I'm no longer looking for a career but rather I have found a calling to serve - and that is what I want to do with my life from now on!" he stated.

"Manitoba's most vulnerable kids don't have access to proper eyecare, so we bring the clinic to schools and provide comprehensive eye examinations," stated Sylvestre. According to the National Coalition for Vision Health, only 14 percent of children receive a comprehensive eye examination by Grade One. "These kids don't have learning difficulties. They just can't see the front of the classroom. Every student who needs glasses gets glasses. We stock glasses at 65 percent off. If parents can't afford glasses, we donate them." Equipment and lenses for the Clinic are provided by EssilorLuxottica. The clinic performed more than 12,000 comprehensive eye examinations in 2023, and eyeglasses worth more than \$500,000 have been donated from 2017-2022.

