

HEALTH - As seen in THE PRESS OF ATLANTIC CITY

Monday, April 10, 2006

By COURTNEY McCANN - Staff Writer, (609) 272-7219

DOC'S VISION GIVES PRIEST SIGHT

The Rev. Charles Sasso-Crandall loved to play tennis. He started playing singles when he was only 20 and later took up doubles as the years began to take their toll. It was part of an active lifestyle for Sasso-Crandall, 69, that included presiding over St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Hammonton and spending time at the Cape May home he shares with his wife, Rose, also an Episcopal priest at a church in Paulsboro.

That was before the stroke.

In August, Sasso-Crandall suffered a stroke that damaged the right side of his brain and the left side of his body. For the next few months, not being able to play tennis was the least of his problems. In addition to having trouble moving his muscles on the left side of his body Sasso-Crandall found that he was having trouble seeing out of his left eye.

"I would knock over a cup of coffee or juice because I couldn't see it," Sasso-Crandall said. "Or I would ask for a fork or a napkin when it was already sitting there." •

He returned to the church on Oct. 31, but the altar had turned into unfamiliar territory.

"I had to turn my head completely around to see out of my right eye," Sasso-Crandall said. "My (assistants) had to give me verbal signals so I didn't run in to anything."

He couldn't be in the house by himself. He couldn't be in the supermarket without help. The tennis racket he had been using for nearly 50 years sat idle. His mind was ready to resume an active life, but his vision wasn't cooperating.

Dr. Errol Rummel (right) is one of four physicians certified in neuro-optometric rehabilitation. He treats vision problems caused by head trauma, strokes and mental illness by using rehabilitation.

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Rummel is one of a small number of physicians in the United States practicing neuro-optometric rehabilitation. He specializes in treating vision problems caused by brain injury, stroke and mental illness through rehabilitation.

"It's like physical therapy for your eyes," Rummel said

Rummel's interest began years ago while doing a tour of duty in Vietnam.

"I was working there as an eye doctor, and it taught me a lot about how gunshot wounds affect the brain and eyesight," Rummel said. "After the war, I studied other patients who had vision problems due to mental illness. Soon I found other doctors who shared my interests."

Rummel, one of only four Physicians in the nation to be clinically certified in neuro-optometric rehabilitation, started a private Practice and spends most of his time consulting at hospitals in Lawrenceville, Toms River, Tinton Falls and Brick Township. He has had a clinic at Bacharach for 12 years.

"There aren't many of us," Rummel said. "And not too many people know that this type of rehabilitation is out there. They think they're stuck with their vision problems"

Deciding how to treat Sasso-Crandall wasn't easy. First, Rummel had to diagnose the problem through a series of tests. Rummel had his patient stare at a black chart and follow moving objects so he could map out where his blind spots were. He found Sasso-Crandall had side-vision loss in his left eye.

Figuring out how to fix it took longer. Rummel asked Sasso-Crandall to come up to his Lakewood office for further testing. There he determined that his patient would need a special pair of eyeglasses, known as a visual field device, to correct his vision. The device has a special vista built into the lower left-hand COMM' of the left lens.

The prism shifts everything that is in (Sasso-Crandall's) blind spot over into his field of vision, Rummel said. "It's like having side-view mirrors on your car."

Once Sasso-Crandall had the glasses, he had to learn how to use them through therapy. "If you don't use the mirror on the glasses, what's the point of having it," Rummel said. "The occupational therapists take over from here and teach the patient how to remember to use them, with it becomes a habit".

Claire McLaughlin, Sasso-Crandall's occupational therapist, has been teaching her patient to constantly glance over into the tiny prism so he gets used to doing it "I started calling myself Mr. Bobblehead," Sasso-Crandall joked. "Because I'd be walking around bobbing my head while I was scanning."

As he improved, McLaughlin took her patient out into the hallway, and then to a parking lot, to practice in an electric wheelchair.

"I only ran into two little aid lathes," Sasso-Crandall said proudly. And that's just because they didn't get out of the way in time."

Sasso-Crandall is one of many success stories for Rummel, who says it can be a challenge to work in such a rare field.

"No two patients are exactly alike and no two patients respond to the same treatment the same way," Rummel said. "We are essentially writing text books here."

But as challenging as some days can be, Rummel has others that are just as rewarding. I was treating a patient the other day who had double vision as a result of a stroke. Three different doctors had told him there was nothing more they could do for him, Rummel said.

"I examined him and then explained how, through reha-bilitation. I could help get him down to seeing single again. He embraced me and started crying."

To ensure that more physicians become aware of the visual therapy field, Rummel finds time in his schedule to lecture. Rummel speaks at occupational and physical therapy classes at colleges across the state. He also lectures at hospitals, not only to explain what he does, but to help teach occupational therapists how to perform the techniques when he's not there. "It's a very valuable field," said Rummel.

A lot of times I think, that without us, these patients wouldn't have any of their problems solved."

Sasso-Crandall recently went grocery shopping by himself.

We went to the Acme and there were three stock boys down on the floor stocking shelves: Sasso-Crandall said. "If I hadn't had the glasses on I wouldn't have seen them." His wife ran now give him his own list and send him on his way without worrying if she will find him tangled up in a pile of canned goods. She can even leave him alone in the house when she goes out.

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Adele Hook, hie church secretary, will create an obstacle course for him to practice on, with books to show him where the flowers on the altar will be. During a recent occupational therapy session, McLaughlin told Sasso-Crandall he was ready start the driving program, which will help him to get his driver’s license back. But Sasso-Crandall was more excited by what he heard next.

“(McLaughlin) said I can start playing tennis again,” Sasso-Crandall said excitedly “I know there are some courts around here someplace. And she said she’d take me out to play.”

SVAE

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Doc's vision gives priest sight

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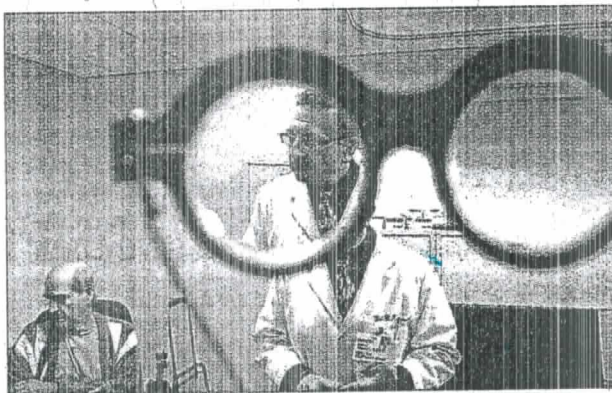
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Continued on Page B3

Doctor helps local priest on road back to vision after stroke

Continued from Page B1

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Staff photo by Anthony Smedley

Dr. Errol Rummel examines the Rev. Charles Sasso-Crandall recently at the Bacharach Institute in Galloway Township.

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