

A Tribute in Memory of Dr. Carl Gruning, COVD's 23rd President

Leonard J. Press, OD, FAAO, FCOVD,
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This was the Tweet that heralded the passing of Carl F. Gruning, OD, FCOVD, FAAO, who served as the 23rd President of COVD, bridging the 20th and 21st centuries. During his two year term from 1998 through 2000, I had the privilege of serving on the COVD board along with his predecessor Dr. W.C. Maples, and other phenomenal mentors including Bob Wold, Nancy Torgerson, and Lynn Hellerstein. We were truly a communal family, and that is what makes losing a family member so hard.

It was only a few months ago that we paid tribute to Dr. Lou Hoffman in these pages, and hopefully we'll have a long respite before acknowledging other icons who have left us. But Carl deserves special mention because of how positively entrenched he was within COVD'S organizational structure. In addition to his time on the Governing Board as Northeast Regional Director, and then on the Executive Board, Carl was very active and influential on the International Examination and Certification Board, of which he ultimately served as Chair.

He was a key figure in traveling to Australia and administering the Fellowship examination to candidates there, in addition to assisting with other outreach efforts around the world.

Carl's passion for travel and his global consciousness was noted in the obituary issued by his family upon his passing on June 18, 2021. The notice noted that Carl approached each day with enthusiasm for life, high energy and a fun-loving spirit that was contagious. He had an infectious smile that no doubt put many apprehensive children at ease throughout his career. Carl delighted in helping children succeed, and his track record of success was recognized widely within his community in Connecticut as well as in being designated as a Distinguished Practitioner in the National Academies of Practice.

Carl was a role model in practice in many ways, and here is one with which you may not be as familiar. When I served as Chief of the Vision Therapy Service at SUNY Optometry, Dr. Jim Thimons was the Chief of Primary Care Services. As I gradually transitioned to practice in New Jersey, and he in Connecticut, Jim closely collaborated with Carl in co-managing patients with binocular vision problems masquerading as ocular or systemic diseases. Jim's positive interactions with Carl, and our collaborations at SUNY, resulted in a series of lectures that we gave at Vision Expo East co-sponsored by COVD and the NYSOA. You can read more about that in this *VisionHelp* blog

piece: <https://bit.ly/3nioKWt>

There were many colleagues and staff at SUNY who had a special relationship with Carl, perhaps none more so than Dr. Bob Byne and Dr. Randy Schulman. A special thanks is due to Dr. Schulman, who invited colleagues to share their thoughts about Carl. What follows is a series of tributes shared by Dr. Schulman, and a collage of photographs that were on display when Carl's family celebrated his life.



I was fortunate enough to have had Dr. Gruning as my eye doctor, doing vision therapy with him in my early teens. He hired me a couple of years later to assist in the office and he was my inspiration for going to optometry school, specifically where he taught, SUNY Optometry.

Through the years he was a mentor for COVD Fellowship and for certification for my therapists. Back in 2013 I bought into his practice and since then have had the privilege of hearing countless stories through the years about how he touched so many people's lives and helped them to success. I know that he has also been inspirational for many others, having served optometry in his capacity as faculty at SUNY for nearly 40 years, a member of the CAO and as president and committee member in COVD.

— Randy Schulman, MS, OD, FCOVD

I'm so sorry to hear of Carl's passing. He was an inspiration to me during my time at SUNY, and generously shared his love for vision therapy to his therapists and visiting students/ interns who took an interest in his work.

— Samantha Slotnick, OD, FAAO, FCOVD

Sorry to hear of Carl's passing. He contributed to both our education and our profession.

— David Cook

Linda and I are saddened to learn of Carl's passing. We were both fortunate to have Carl as one of our clinical instructors when we were The Optometric Center of New York (now SUNY). We were also extremely fortunate to know Carl and his beautiful wife, Barbara, socially. And we were blessed to have to spend the day with them one more time a couple of years ago at the home of Armie and Jill Sherman. For the younger OD's on the List who may not recognize the name Carl Gruning: Carl was intelligent, caring and gifted teacher and clinician. He was also possessed a great sense of humor and he was a wonderful human being. Carl was truly one of the unsung "Optometric Giants". If any has enjoyed or benefited from hearing Linda or I lecture then you need

to know that part of who we are as clinicians is a direct result of the knowledge we gained as a result of observing Carl work and from his compassionate mentoring.

He will be missed. May he rest in peace.

— Bob and Linda Sanet

This is sad news. I have very fond thoughts of Carl as a supportive colleague as I started out in optometry. I appreciated his friendly face and encouragement as I sat for my COVD interview!

— Catherine A. Kennedy, OD, FCOVD

I was fortunate to get to know Carl when I got involved with COVD. He was a great advocate for developmental optometry and vision therapy. He was an outstanding role model for the next generation of VTODs.

— Rob Fox, OD, FCOVD, FCSO

It is so sad to learn of Carl's passing. His passing is a loss to our profession. I did my clinic rotation in his office right before he retired. I was inspired by his care and his passion in behavior optometry. He is my role model to be a better clinician.

He will be missed indeed. May Carl rest in peace.

I am sending my deepest sympathy to his family.

— Qiaoqiao (Chelsea) Wang OD, PhD

I was so fortunate to have Carl at SUNY during my VT Residency. I remember the many Martini Lunches that helped me to become a Behavioral OD. Carl and his wife Barbara were so much fun to be with. I wish I had a chance to see him more over the last few years. Sad today.

— Stan Appelbaum, OD, FCOVD

On behalf of the CAO, I wish to express our sincere condolences to the Gruning family upon the passing of Dr. Carl Gruning. He devoted his life to professional Optometry, and to his patients' ocular and visual wellbeing. May he Rest In Peace, and his Memory be Eternal.

— Dr. Stephen Polezonis
President

Connecticut Association of Optometrists

This is sad news. I was also a student of Carl's at SUNY, and although VT did not turn out to be my calling, he was a great professor and I still use much of what I learned from him. In later years, I remember Carl fondly as one of the founding members of IDOC. We all met regularly, usually at Bob Ross' office, and in those days the group was really about sharing our practice strategies and tips with each other. Carl was always generous with his time and expertise. And he had great taste in wine! ;) Wishing his family comfort and many happy memories.

— Irene Rosenberg, OD, Dipl. ABO

I am so sad to hear of Carl's passing. I have fond memories of him from when I was a SUNY resident. He was gentle, kind, funny, and passionate about vision therapy. He offered me encouraging words of pursuing an optometric career in vision therapy. To this day, I can still picture and hear Carl telling me these words. Carl and his legacy is an inspiration and light in the profession of optometry, and he will be dearly missed. Please pass on my deep condolences to his family.

— Rosalie Lee-Hopkins, OD, FAAO, FCOVD

I too heard about Carl's passing. I was lucky enough to intern at his office in Fairfield when I was in optometry school. He was a great mentor and teacher and all around great person. I always look fondly on my time spent with him and Lee in their office. May he RIP.

— Francesca Johnson

Carl was part of that bright group of Optometric Center VT Icons, who I also had as a mentor. Those who passed away have become non-replaceable. Sad. Thanks for sharing.

— Jeffrey Cooper MS, OD

Really sad news. I got to know him through COVD. He will be missed.

— Mark Dean

Very sad to hear. Carl was an expert behavioral vision clinician. Besides being my professor when I was a student, we were office "roommates" on Wednesdays at SUNY for close to 20 years. I loved listening to his stories of patient care and travel. Shortly after I became a faculty member until his retirement, we were on the clinical interview team for the pediatric residency program. His follow up questions and insight into the candidate based on their answers was eye opening. Rest in peace.

— Ira Krumholtz, OD

Many years ago Carl and I were paired to interview colleagues who wanted to join COVD. Carl was a pleasure to work with during those years. He was kind to me and to the nervous colleagues with whom we were speaking. I will never forget how caring Carl was to all he met. That is what I will always remember about Carl ...Caring.

— Joe Miele

Carl was a wonderful person, and really cared about people. Learning from him when he taught our class in lectures and clinic at SUNY helped shape and inspire my journey as a VTOD. Carl loved what he did, and it showed in his interaction with patients, their parents, and colleagues. Years ago I referred a relative with exotropia to Carl when he was seeing patients in the Preschool/Toddler VT clinic at SUNY. Carl was patient with my cousin and his wife when they had a stream of questions regarding therapy vs. surgery that had been recommended by OMD. They chose vision therapy with Carl at SUNY, making the trip into the city from Westchester each week. Carl was generous with this time showing them different ways to incorporate therapy procedures as part of play time. My cousin and his wife tell stories of how he engaged their 2 year old daughter with a variety of therapy procedures, and the impact that he had on their lives. The 2 year old who was scared of stairs, and falling all the time is now a thriving 19 years old college sophomore. Carl's legacy is the light he brought into so many lives. He will be missed, and remembered by many. Please convey our deepest condolences to Carl's family. Warm regards.

— Dr. Kavita Malhotra, OD, FCOVD



I first met Carl during my Third Year Summer Internship at OCNV and he was a big part of my enthusiasm for VT. A year later we connected again during my Residency in VT at SUNY where I really learned how to evaluate and treat children. Carl was a good part of this with his patient and caring approach to patients and colleagues. He will be missed and always remembered.

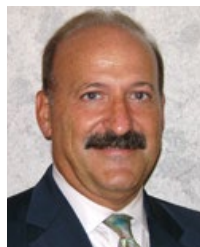
— Ken Koslowe OD, MS, FCOVD-A
President, COVD-Israel

Thanks for sharing. It is sad to hear the news. Carl and I had many good years together at SUNY, and he was a superb mentor to me organizationally in COVD as I was “coming up through the ranks” both on the Governing Board and the Exam Board.

You hit the nail on the head when you said that Carl has been inspirational to many through the years. The first time I met Carl was when I came to SUNY in 1982 to serve as Chief of the Vision Therapy Service. Carl was warm and welcoming, and we quickly hit it off. He regaled me with stories about how he was “the token Jew” at SUNY, and wore that adopted badge of honor proudly. Carl had a wealth of experience in school-based VT as well as of course private practice VT. He was very gracious in sharing material with me that was helpful both in terms of references and in therapy procedures, It was gratifying that when he taught the VT course at SUNY he advised students he used my textbook on vision therapy as “his bible”. He ultimately brought a phenomenal perspective to a very challenging role he accepted serving on the Board of Directors at New England College of Optometry. We shared many conversations on the politics of academia and organizational life. Among the fondest memories I have from COVD meetings through the years was collegiality and friendship with Carl. He had a Robert Redford aura about him, with the looks and charisma that endeared him to everyone. It was always a treat for Miriam and me to watch Carl and Barbara’s sophistication, in wine tasting with the Bynges and in all matters of class and dignity. One of my greatest regrets is that I lost touch with Carl. That was entirely my shortcoming, as I didn’t figure out how to effectively navigate some rough patches.

That in no way diminishes the fondness I always held for him, and I hope that the family continues to cherish his memory and his legacy. Warm regards.

— Leonard J. Press, OD, FAAO, FCOVD



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Dr. Leonard Press is Editor-in-Chief of *Vision Development & Rehabilitation*, the official journal of COVD. He is also an associate editor of Elsevier's Practice Update Eyecare, a weekly online review of scholarly papers in the ophthalmic field. Author of the widely acclaimed "Applied Concepts in Vision Therapy", he is working on a 2.0 edition with Drs. Taub and Schnell and a cadre of optometric authors. Dr. Press maintains a private consulting practice in Lakewood, New Jersey, specializing in the treatment of vision-based reading and learning difficulties. He is a Past-President of COVD, and of the New Jersey Society of Optometric Physicians (NJSOP). A recipient of COVD's Skeffington and Getman Awards, he has also received the NJSOP's Scientific Achievement Award on two occasions and its Lifetime Achievement Award.

