

# Building a Successful Independent Practice

Next to a Walmart Vision Center



# How I Found the Perfect Practice Setting for Connecting to My Community

By Mark Jackson, OD



**M**y community has always been important to me. When opening a practice, I wanted to make building strong ties to the surrounding community a key focus of our efforts. Opening an office adjacent to a [Walmart Vision Center](#) has allowed me to be as big a part of the community as I had hoped. I have used this ideal location to get even more involved in local activities and charities.

## A SIMPLE, YET POWERFUL, WAY TO START A PRACTICE

I opened my first practice adjacent to a Walmart Vision Center in 1997 in Columbus Neb., and then moved to Fort Collins Colo., in 2001. I initially chose this practice

setting because it offered a simple way to start an independent practice. As time went on, however, I realized that not only is opening an office next to a Walmart Vision Center an easy way to start a new practice because I could focus on my patients and my community, but I also have the autonomy to practice optometry to exactly my comfort level.

## REACH OUT TO YOUR COMMUNITY

Having patients come to me in my office to receive care is only one way I serve my community and use my optometric skills. There are many others: I am a proud member of the [Rotary Club of Fort Collins-Breakfast](#), the official sponsor of the referees of the [Colorado Eagles](#) hockey

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**“We let people know that, while we hope they choose us first, the most important thing is that they get an annual comprehensive eye exam.”**

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Choosing a practice setting like this allows an office to get up and running with minimal start-up costs and without having to worry about operating an optical. Right from the beginning, I made the decision to focus on practicing medical eyecare and serving my patients. I didn't have to worry about building a retail sales infrastructure or selling glasses myself.

team, the official optometrist of [Fort Collins Foxes](#) baseball team and a proud sponsor of the [Ensign Skills Center-Colorado Low-Vision Service and Care](#).

In addition, each year our practice participates in local community auctions. Our sponsorships of events, which sometimes includes the purchase of a booth, benefits the charities while also bringing greater local



Dr. Jackson's practice's stand at a community golfing event. Dr. Jackson says that having an independent practice next to a [Walmart Vision Center](#) has helped him build strong ties to his community.

to we repeat at events is: "Yearly Eye Exams for Healthy Eyes!"

My practice has had its challenges over the last five years, but is on the upswing. We went from a record year in 2019 to a reduction in business for 2020 and 2021. However, in 2022, we rebounded, surpassing the number of patients we saw in 2019.

When your practice becomes integral to your community, you can withstand the

awareness of our independent practice.

Through our participation in all of these organizations and events, our community has come to know us as a trusted place for receiving eyecare.

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**"Right from the beginning, I made the decision to focus on practicing medical eyecare and serving my patients."**

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## FIND PHILANTHROPIES IN YOUR OWN COMMUNITY & GROW YOUR PRACTICE

If you want to grow your practice, get involved with your community by joining a civic organization, attending community events and sponsoring local sports teams. This will, in turn, bring brand awareness to your business. Plus, giving back is rewarding in itself.

We let people know that, while we hope they choose us first, the most important thing is that they get an annual comprehensive eye exam. The mot-

hard times to grow even stronger. Having a practice adjacent to a Walmart Vision Center, an essential part of the community, has proven invaluable to our growth and ability to serve the local population.

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**Mark Jackson, OD**, is the owner of [Jackson Eye Care](#), with two locations in Colorado, one of which is located adjacent to a [Walmart Vision Center](#).

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# The Practice Setting that Has Served as a Medical Eyecare Services Springboard

By Daniel Goerl, OD

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**W**hen you open a practice, it's best to have a vision in mind. I wanted my patients to really experience a difference in their eyecare.

Coming from a LASIK background, I knew I wanted to offer my patients comprehensive medical eyecare so as to ensure that they would be given innovative and person-centered care.

I also understood that medical eyecare services were the future of optometry, and I decided that the investment in growing this facet of my practice would make long-term profitability more likely.

The setting where I opened my private practice, next to a [Walmart Vision Center](#), has

attracted patients of all backgrounds and ages in need of medical eyecare. It has been an ideal place to build a practice with this vision.

## GROW ESSENTIAL SERVICES IN YOUR COMMUNITY

In 2011, I decided to open my practice, [Eyepro](#), in the town where I raised my kids. After establishing myself in Northern Virginia as a reputable optometrist and working alongside ophthalmologists in LASIK and refractive surgery patient management, I wanted to create a practice of my own with an atmosphere best-fit for the growing community's needs and which would make a positive difference for future generations.

Having a private practice is certainly challenging yet highly rewarding, and the ability to choose the "how" and the "why" we serve the community is what motivates myself and my team to continue doing what we love: serving our patients first. We now own and operate three practice locations in Northern

Virginia and two practice locations south of Myrtle Beach, S.C.

We see and take care of all patients, young and old, with insurance or without, and we will do our best to navigate the specific circumstances of each patient to ensure everyone receives the care they need and deserve. Our goal is to provide affordable, accessible and quality eyecare to anybody and everybody who walks through our door and to treat each person as family. We are trying to connect with the heart of every type of community.

Being next to a Walmart Vision Center allows my team to develop a strong working relationship between our two businesses. That relationship with Walmart Vision Center is paramount because it allows us to focus on what we do best—providing quality, comprehensive medical eye exams and contact lens fits—and then also to entrust our patients who choose the quality and convenience of the Walmart Vision Centers with the skillful care of Walmart's opticians.

It is a great balance and I'm most grateful for the way this relationship works to give the community the fullness of the services they need. Furthermore, the trust we develop with the Walmart Health and Wellness managers has only served to benefit our private practice. Once again, I cannot stress enough how grateful I am for how professional, open and understanding Walmart Vision Center has been with our independent practice model. With Walmart, you really do get to work with quality, kindhearted people.

### PROVIDE CARING SERVICE THAT SERVES AS COMPETITIVE DIFFERENTIATOR

Eyepro has a competitive edge over other independent practices because of the value we place on person-centered business ethics and care.

Both our managers and doctors are hospitable, knowledgeable, personable and empathetic. The on-site relationship between the doctor and the manager is incredibly important to ensuring we are giving the patient a very real and human experience. Eyepro would not be where we are without our team and family culture.

My independent practices give autonomy to each independent location, empowering the managers and doctors to make the

best judgments on any and every situation that arises on a given day, always within the framework of our person-centered ethical standards.

### OUTFIT OFFICE WITH LATEST TECHNOLOGY

Alongside the industry standard technology, we have innovative medical technology, such as the Topcon Maestro 2 OCT, so that we optimize our doctors' ability to see as much of the interior of the eyes as needed to determine general health of the eyes, as well as to make precise diagnoses and treatment plans. The technology we utilize, like fundus photography and anterior/posterior segment OCT, allow us to diagnose conditions such as diabetic retinopathy, ischemia or glaucoma early on. Keeping up with modern medicine and management practices has been a major key to success over the last decade.

### FIND A PRACTICE SETTING THAT MAKES MARKETING EASY

When your practice is so conveniently located, such as next to a Walmart Vision Center location,

you have an immediate advantage in marketing it to your community.

Positioning my practice next to a Walmart Vision Center helps build a relationship with the community. Walmart is a household name no matter where you are in the country, and they are focused on the community as



Dr. Goerl in his pre-testing room. Dr. Goerl says a [Walmart Vision Center](#) can be a great practice setting for expanding medical eyecare services.

well as helping their customers live better, healthier lives. Being next to a Walmart Vision Center in this way brings us closer to the everyday person within the community.

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# Your Practice, Your Way

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**C**herie Archambeault, OD, knew she wanted to provide care for others in some way, but she wasn't sure which medical route to take. She spent some time shadowing optometrists in various settings, including corporate-affiliated and private practice, as well as in full-time and part-time positions; she quickly realized the options were more overwhelming than expected.

Even before graduating from Indiana University School of Optometry in 2003, she knew that she would want a job that provided her flexibility in scheduling. In one office where she had shadowed an OD, she was discouraged by the grueling schedule and the inefficiencies

created by their long hours. She was looking ahead, knowing that there might be times in her life when she'd want to work less and times when she could work more.

A second shadowing experience with an optometrist practicing next to a Walmart Vision Center helped her see that flexibility was achievable and she wouldn't have to sacrifice anything to find it. That idea has held true at her independent practice in the space next to a Walmart Vision Center in Jefferson City, Tennessee, as an independent optometrist. Dr. Archambeault operated her practice as her own boss, just the way she likes it.

## PLENTY OF PERKS

"I have complete control over the hours I work and how I practice," Dr. Archambeault says. She currently chooses to work four full days a week and take Wednesdays off to spend time with her new husband, which has given them an opportunity to work on

building a house together. Based on her contracted opt-tech/admin hours, she also gets help with staffing, leaving her feeling confident that there will always be someone to answer the phone to assist her patients.

Her contract with Walmart provides her with one technician and guaranteed help if a staff member calls out sick. She and the Walmart Vision Center associates get along great, she says, and they are all dedicated to providing patients and customers with the best possible experience.

Dr. A, as her patients and staff call her, says this schedule encourages her to work smarter, not harder, when she's working. In her years as an associate OD in different independent practices, she saw the financial burden that some practice owners have had to take on with mainte-

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**"I have complete control over the hours I work and how I practice."**

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nance, inventory and staffing an entire practice.

That was a commitment she wasn't willing to take on, so the independent practice next to a Walmart Vision Center could be a great option for new graduates "with a mountain of student loan debt. I walked into my practice next to Walmart on day one ready to start seeing patients that day," she says. "I can focus strictly on services and patient care."

### **DON'T SETTLE - FIND WHAT FITS YOU**

Dr. Archambeault says it's

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**"I walked into my practice next to Walmart on day one ready to start seeing patients that day."**

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important to find the practice setting that works best for you, no matter what that looks like. "Look at all your options and find what fits for you at that point in your life—even if that changes as time goes on," she says. Since she opened her own practice next to Walmart Vision Center in February 2007, she has

been able to make the adjustments in her own schedule to find her best balance and keep her services accessible.

"Everything I do with the practice is what's right for me and my patients, and that's the way it should always be," she says. "Then everything else will fall into place."



# Saving Money On Overhead Lets Independent Optometrist Invest Elsewhere



**S**ara Kurtis, OD, has been working in an independent practice next to a [Walmart Vision Center](#) since she graduated from optometry school in 2005. While in school, the pressure to open a private practice was real, she says. “There was a push that private practice should be our ultimate goal,” Dr. Kurtis says. But finding a career next to a Walmart Vision Center almost 20 years ago has saved her money from the beginning and paid off in the long run.

She’s practiced independently at several different locations, but she has been at her current location in Davenport, Iowa for more than a decade. She and her team “flow” together, she says. And the

Walmart Vision Center manager has been with Walmart for over 10 years, which adds an extra layer of continuity. Dr. Kurtis contracts with Walmart for administrative and op-tech support and because the Walmart Vision Center team is trained on pretesting, it makes it easier to cover the gap if someone takes a day off. Not that Dr. Kurtis has to worry about it often—The Walmart Vision Center is well staffed and easy to work with, she says.

## THE BEST FROM THE START

Dr. Kurtis says she’s had a “full patient schedule” since day one. “Walmart provided the ophthalmic equipment necessary, as part of my license agreement, to perform comprehensive eye exams beginning day one.” With that immediate flow of income without having to worry about a large overhead or marketing as a cold start, Dr. Kurtis been able to splurge on expanded technology and equipment for her patients,





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providing them “only the best.” She brought new pieces of equipment into her practice, including a Topcon Chronos, that her personally hired technician fully operates. She also has a Topcon Maestro 2 that she purchased herself; independent optometrists working next to a Walmart Vision Center can also lease a retinal camera or an OCT from Walmart if they choose.



She has brought in a new digital phoropter and scanning instruments to “bring the practice to the next level,” she says. “Every single patient gets an optomap of their eye when they visit; for most patients, it’s

their first one ever.”

With the updated technology, she can get “so much information before I even see the patient,” saving her time in the exam lane.

“That’s the great thing about working where I do. I can choose to only do vision exams, or I can treat glaucoma, specialty lenses or whatever I want,” Dr. Kurtis says. “I don’t have to refer pa-

tients out because I am treating them right then and there. It keeps people coming back.”

And they do. Dr. Kurtis says she has lots of patients who have been seeing her for 18 years. They return for her personalized, high-quality care, and they appreciate the option of purchasing their eyewear at the Walmart Vision Center next door. She finds the practice continually growing. It isn’t uncommon for her to see upwards of 30 patients a day.

She took the time to get credentialed with specific insurance plans to expand her patient base, including becoming a primary Medicaid provider.; today, she’s one of the “very few ODs in the area that take Medicaid without a referral,” she says.

## **STEPPING AWAY**

But when she leaves the office, she doesn’t carry home administrative paperwork. “When I’m off, I’m *‘off,’*” she says. She spends her free time with her husband, Toby; son, Sam; and 16-year-old Silkie Terrier, Rex.

She also enjoys real estate investing and has found time to build her portfolio while still working full-time.

“For some ODs, one way to build wealth is owning the building you work in,” Dr. Kurtis says. “That’s not the path I’m going to take, but with the time and money I’ve saved, I’m able to do so much more.”

# Independent Optometrist Still Happy After Almost 30 Years

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**D**espite having opportunities to practice elsewhere, Dr. Beth Esposito chose to spend her career next to Walmart.

When Beth Esposito, OD, first became an optometrist, she wanted to make sure she had the opportunity to also focus on being a wife and mother. After her 1995 graduation from Salus University, long before job search sites and LinkedIn connections, she wrote to local optometry offices looking for a full-time position with the flexibility she was looking for. When she heard back from an independent practice next to a [Walmart Vision Center](#) in Morgantown, West Virginia, about an hour from where she grew up, she took

the job. Now almost 28 years later, she doesn't plan on going anywhere.

Dr. Esposito's commitment to helping the community stems in part from growing up here. As a child, her eye care provider put her in eyeglasses for the first time. "I was a -5.50D myope. I could suddenly see the leaves on the trees," she says.

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**“Some patients can't see a doctor between 9-5. Not only can I provide them with the eye care they need on their schedule, but I gain more flexibility in my week.”**

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She still recalls the wonder of that moment, and she relishes being able to provide it to others. "I love to see patients' smiles when they experience that for the first time. I want to continue to do this for people every day, and Walmart has helped me do that."

## THE BEST EQUIPMENT AND SUPPORT

Throughout her time in this practice, she has been well-supported by Walmart Vision Center associates, Dr. Esposito says. That was a factor in her decision to take over the lease in 2014. Dr. Esposito decided which space and equipment options made sense for her practice, so when

she started the two contracted exam lanes were already set up with "all the equipment needed" to provide a comprehensive eye exam, so the practice was profitable starting on day one. Dr. Esposito

was able to invest in additional diagnostic instruments, such as the Topcon Maestro.

If she has a question or needs extra support, Dr. Esposito says Walmart Vision Center managers are "extremely responsive with a quick turnaround" and



get her the answers she needs.

Through Walmart, independent optometrists next to a Walmart Vision Center have the option to lease additional equipment, such as retinal cameras, based on availability.

### **“I’LL BE HOME FOR DINNER”**

Since Dr. Esposito sets her own

schedule, she usually chooses to take a break during the week and will see patients on a Saturday or Sunday. Her patients, especially the many coal miners who have a hard time getting away during a business day, appreciate her accessibility on weekends. “Some patients can’t see a doctor between 9-5,” Dr. Esposito says.

“Not only can I provide them with the eye care they need on their schedule, but I gain more flexibility in my week.”

Dr. Esposito’s children are now grown, but “Walmart has always given me the freedom to set my own hours. I could take a day off to watch my daughter’s soccer or lacrosse game.” These days, Dr. Esposito enjoys spending time with her family, attending concerts (she’s a pianist and musician herself) and traveling.

### **STRONG RELATIONSHIP**

Dr. Esposito says her confidence in her relationship with Walmart grew during the pandemic. “Walmart’s first priority was to keep everyone safe, including patients, staff and customers. The company was transparent and there for us when the world was still uncertain. Walmart updated its policies and procedures to help us continue to provide for our patients in a safe environment. Walmart has been so good to me.”

Despite having opportunities to practice elsewhere, Dr. Esposito “chose to stay,” she says. She’s currently booked out eight weeks, staffed six days a week and plans on continuing to “help people see better every day.”



# OD Determined To Provide Patients Highest Level Of Care She Can



**M**alique Payne, OD, never had a goal of owning three independent practices next to a Walmart Vision Center. But in the nearly 10 years since she formed Superior Eyecare, “it kind of came together as I went along.” Dr. Payne started an independent practice next door to a Fayette-

ville, Georgia, [Walmart](#) in 2016. In May and again in October 2023, Dr. Payne was offered two new locations—both in Marietta. Since they were new and only a 25-minute drive apart, she thought she’d take them both.

What she appreciates most is that the three locations provide her patients with access to care. “The patients and the surrounding communities have more access with three locations than they would with one,” she says.

The communities are very different, she says. “Fayetteville is further south; it’s more rural. Marietta is closer to Atlanta, and the need for eye care for the Hispanic and Portuguese communities is high.” She calls

herself capable of handling an eye exam in Spanish, “I’m not fluent, but I’ve found it helpful as I serve these communities.

## FOCUS ON SERVICE

Dr. Payne wants to be able to do

**“The [diagnostic] technology has improved, and I’d be doing my patients a disservice if I wasn’t doing everything I could for them.”**

as much for her patients as she can while they’re in her practice. Through Walmart, she has leased a Topcon Maestro2 OCT for each location. “I want to make sure that patients know I have a full-scope optometric practice and try to do everything I can for my patients. That includes comprehensive exams, disease co-management, foreign body and other emergencies and specialty contact lenses. We work hand-in-hand with ophthalmologists for surgical interventions, of course, and I’ll refer as necessary,” she says.

Dr. Payne's patients tell her they seek out her Superior Eyecare independent practices next door to Walmart.

She has recently acquired a mobile electroretinogram (ERG) that she takes with her from location to location. “The purpose of that is to test the functionality of the retina without the subjective component,” she says. It’s still a new device to her but already it has corroborated other clinical findings or helps her determine a schedule on which to have patients return.

“If I have a patient in my chair, I want to be able to run the testing that I need to determine their eye health and vision. It’s worth my investment because technology like this makes me a better clinician, allowing

me to find disease earlier and intervene sooner,” she says. “The technology has improved, and I’d be doing my patients a disservice if I wasn’t doing everything I could for them.”

### MANAGING HER TIME

Dr. Payne is the solo OD in all of these locations. She splits her time, working several days a week in Fayetteville and dividing her time in the Marietta locations on other days. As those are still new, she’s focused on growing those practices.

She’s seeing a steady climb in the patient base. “Most of it is worth of mouth, but my

website does help patients find me. If they’ve lost track of me in the move or if they’ve moved, they’re often happy to see that I’m nearby when they check my website.”

Throughout her career, Dr. Payne has been pleased at how turnkey the opportunities are to have an independent practice next to a Walmart Vision Center. It’s allowed her to provide her patients with access to eye care and given her the flexibility to create a balance work/home life with her 15-year-old son, Jaiden, and their new pup, a miniature poodle named Benjamin.

“I want to make sure that patients know I have a full-scope optometric practice and try to do everything I can for my patients.”

Dr. Malique Payne

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