

Grand Commandery Knights Templar of Nebraska

July 2025

Joseph Charbonneau, Grand Commander

## Nebraska Supplement

### Truhlsen Eye Institute

I want to tell you about some recent happenings in the Grand Commandery. On Friday, June 20, we had an opportunity to visit the Truhlsen Eye Institute and meet with Dr. Chris Conrady, a recent recipient of some Eye Foundation Grants. The short version is that we saw/participated in a presentation about his research, received a tour of both the Truhlsen Research facilities and the Dewey Research facilities, and had a wonderful time exploring different labs and discussing different facilities. It really is an amazing facility, and I am proud to support the Eye Foundation, which, in turn, supports this type of facility and research.

Dr. Conrady's research explores Herpes Simplex Virus Type 1 infection of the eye, which, in short, leads to acute inflammation and sudden loss of vision. He gave a very approachable presentation on his research on viral infections of the eye, and how they can result in blindness. It was eye-opening (no pun intended) to learn how prevalent these infections are, how quickly they can result in permanent damage, and how few treatment options currently exist; and he presented it in such a way that you didn't have to be a scientist to understand the basics of his work. The specific disease mostly affects the very young and the older populations, and if not treated quickly, can lead to permanent vision loss. His research has moved toward understanding the immunology of the eye related to the virus and the very particular proteins that are involved in protecting the eye.

Next, we went on a tour of the Truhlsen facility, which contains Ophthalmology and Optometry facilities, research rooms and labs, as well as training facilities for young doctors. It is gratifying to see that KTEF money helps fund such high-quality work and skilled practitioners. I also really appreciated Dr. Conrady's remarks about the value of KTEF funds for new scholars, and young doctors, to help them get started and to do novel research in these fields. He highlighted the use of both Virtual Reality training, as well as animal and even donor eyes from humans for the training they perform. In this, we were even allowed to view some "Immortalized" cell cultures of retinal cells which are used for his research. We were also shown where surgeries take place, though we did not go to the actual part of the facility for that.

Finally, we took a shuttle to the Dewey research facility near the main hospital where we got to view different research rooms and facilities and talked about how they were all used. Throughout all aspects of the tour we were able to ask questions, clarification, and received many tidbits of information about the operations and functions.

Dr. Conrady did express deep gratitude to the Eye Foundation for providing him, as a young researcher, the necessary funding to move his research forward and to become the foremost expert on this particular disease. He wanted us to know how important it was to receive that funding at that stage of his career and that he could not have accomplished these

things without our help. He also wanted to express the importance of private foundations in funding, while government funding is being restricted, funding from private foundations is more important than ever before, not only because of the money itself, but because it keeps research funds specific to fields that can benefit the eyes in particular.

Elizabeth relates also that “From a Knights Templar Lady's perspective, it was especially meaningful to see the actual impact of the dollars we raise and donate. It's easy to forget that these dollars impact real people's lives, but at this event, we learned a lot about how they do just that. We learned about projects that serve all ages across the lifespan, and multiple causes of vision loss. Our dollars help fund research that helps people literally retain the use of their vision, something I suspect many of us take for granted. I would encourage any Sir Knight, Lady, or new member to join an event like this in the future (or schedule one). You will come away with a greater appreciation of why what we do matters so much.”

I have been a believer in the Knights Templar Eye Foundation, and I encourage all Sir Knights to support this important institution. I, like so many of you, have seen the presentations, but having visited the institution where the research is completed inspires me to urge us to support this organization. Any support is good, and for only \$30, you can become a life sponsor of the Eye Foundation. I encourage all Nebraska Sir Knights to do this and to support this great work.