



## Health watch

# Life without glasses clear

IT'S the little things Melissa Skilton enjoys about life without glasses.

Like cooking pasta without steaming up her lenses, snuggling up to her boyfriend without the frames digging into her face, and being able to go for a swim and find her towel afterwards.

"The number of times it has been annoying to wear glasses," she said.

"They were little things but they kept adding up."

Ms Skilton, 24, had worn glasses most of her life to deal with her short sightedness and astigmatism.

But a new laser eye

surgery technique gave her an new outlook, minus the spectacles.

The Grovedale accountant, her mum, dad, brother and sister all had surgery within a week of each other almost a year ago.

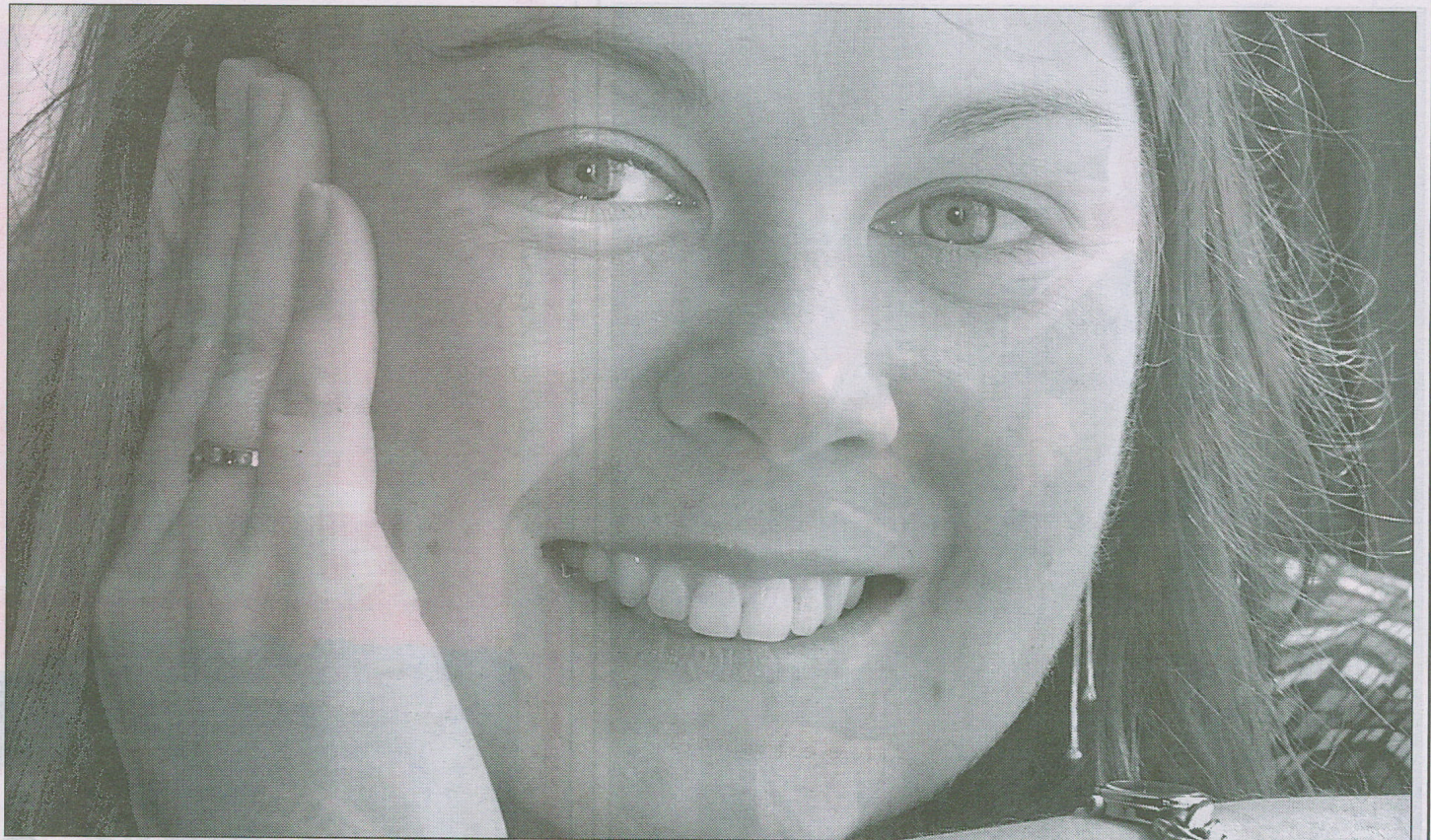
Her parents still need glasses for reading because of their age, but the family is otherwise glasses free.

"It's amazing," Ms Skilton said.

"I used to take my glasses off and I wouldn't be able to see street signs or posters on a wall.

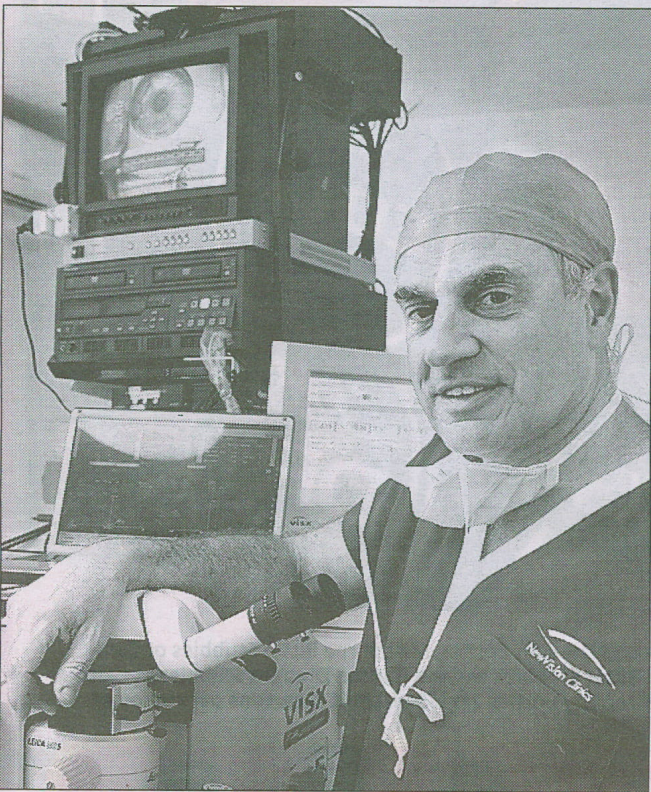
"Now, I have got better than 20-20 vision."

— Kamahl Cogdon



Improved look: Melissa Skilton has no need for spectacles after laser surgery. Picture: JAY TOWN

# Laser's new focus



World first: Dr Noel Alpines. Picture: BELINDA O'NEIL

A MELBOURNE ophthalmologist is returning clear vision to people destined to a view of life through glasses.

Dr Noel Alpines' world-first laser eye surgery technique is correcting blurred and distorted vision in people with irregular shaped corneas.

Twenty-nine patients with a mild degree of the condition keratoconus in 45 eyes had no need for their glasses after being treated with Dr Alpines' technique during a 10-year trial.

"A lot of people who in the past have been told that they're not suitable for laser treatment because of their condition are now able to undergo laser vision correction," Dr Alpines said.

Keratoconus is a thinning of the cornea, the front surface of the eye, resulting in significant visual impairment.

The one in 80 Australians affected by the condition in its mild form can usually have their vision corrected with glasses.

In advanced stages, rigid contact lenses are required, and in about 15 per cent of cases, corneal transplant is needed.

## Kamahl Cogdon

Dr Alpines said his technique also worked on people with the less severe but more common condition astigmatism.

Close to one million Australians report having astigmatism, but many more are thought to be unaware they have the condition.

**'The elation of patients when they have been wearing glasses all their life and find they no longer have a need for them is remarkable'**

— GEORGE STAMATELATOS

It is also caused by an irregular shaped cornea, which is oval rather than round.

Symptoms include difficulty seeing distant or close objects, headaches and visual fatigue.

Dr Alpines said his technique was the first to aim at the shape of the cornea, leaving it less distorted and improving the results of laser surgery.

He said other laser vision correction methods were guided only by the kind of glasses a person required, a

measure of their focusing problems known as their refractive error.

"What we have done is added another dimension in the treatment which actually hasn't been there before," Dr Alpines said.

"We have incorporated the shape of the cornea into the treatment plan rather than what they have done in the

past with the treatment being entirely based on the spectacles.

"By looking at the corneal shape before the surgery and looking at the spectacles you get an optimised view, a balanced view between the two.

"It's kinder to the cornea, leaving it with less astigmatism at the end of the day.

"By leaving less astigmatism on the cornea, the window of the eye, you end up with better vision and better outcomes."

Dr Alpines, who runs three

New Vision Clinics in Melbourne, said a computer program had been developed to support his "vector planning" technique.

The program calculated individual laser treatment for a patient based on their spectacle and cornea details.

Dr Alpines said he hoped the software would be adopted by laser companies so the technique could be used in the mainstream to help people with keratoconus and astigmatism.

Results of the study by Dr Alpines and optometrist George Stamatelatos were published in the respected international *Journal of Cataract and Refractive Surgery*.

Mr Stamatelatos said the laser vision correction was changing lives.

"The elation of patients when they have been wearing glasses all their life and find they no longer have a need for them is remarkable," he said.

"We had one lady who cried within minutes of her surgery as a result of the change in her vision," Dr Alpines added. "It's very life-changing for people."