

Ronan Eye Clinic and Its History – by: Dr. Marcus Simonich, OD

Especially in the medical profession, a great business is a reflection of its people and their dedication over time. This holds true for the Ronan Eye Clinic and its founder, Dr. Arnt James Ofstad.

Fresh out of school, at his exiting national board examination, young Dr. Ofstad met an interesting man from Montana who painted a picture of Montana in young Ofstad's mind that was hard to ignore. After growing up in Seattle, WA, Montana sounded like an adventure. Excited for new beginnings and freedom, young Ofstad made his way from Pacific University College of Optometry in Forest Grove, OR, to Tribal Health regional headquarters in Billings, MT.

The elder in charge at the IHS headquarters issued Dr. Ofstad his first job. Ofstad was to provide eye care services to many reservation towns on Montana's high line, including: Box Elder, Fort Belknap, Browning, Brockton, and Wolf Point. Dr. Ofstad's region also included Ronan and St. Ignatius. With a van of portable optometry equipment provided, the city-slicker set off on a one-of-a-kind adventure into rural Montana.

Dr. Ofstad found himself providing eye care in many different settings, including: gymnasiums, hospitals, basements, and libraries. In St. Ignatius, Ofstad remembers creating room walls for privacy by hanging sheets from the ceiling of the old tribal health center. He would stay at each new town anywhere from two weeks to six months, depending on the size of the town. He did not make any friends with the local basketball players from Brockton, MT, because he competed with them for gym floor space in the early evening hours. Dr. Ofstad said, "I usually saw children all day and then saw adults in the evenings. I did not know when to stop seeing patients until a tribal pharmacist told me that it was time to go home at ten o'clock at night."

Ofstad's first job as a Commissioned Officer for the Indian Health Service, in 1971, provided him with tremendous experience in ocular disease management, ocular trauma management, and complex optical cases. However, around 1973, Ofstad decided to start his own private practice in Ronan. He was drawn specifically to Ronan because of the natural beauty of the land and its people.

In 1973, Jim purchased the real-estate located at 113 2nd Avenue SW from Bob and Mercedes Hanson. This property is currently located behind the city library and sits east of the Ronan Fire Hall. From its bones as a small home, Ofstad and Clyde Rolson re-modeled the space into a functional optometry office. They flipped: the bedrooms into optometry lanes, the living room into an optical, and the basement into a lens fabrication laboratory. On December 2nd 1977, Ofstad hired Arlene Starkel as his first employee and later office manager. Arlene provided structure to Ofstad's schedule that helped his new business grow. In 1983, Ofstad added more to the building's architecture and arched store front.

When Ofstad started his business in Ronan, other optometrists around the area included: Dr. Gordon Fisher (Polson & Ronan), Dr. Moorely Cooper (Polson), and Dr. Bert English (Polson). Dr. Ofstad purchased Dr. Fisher's old files, and Dr. Fisher's old optometry equipment can still be seen at the *Miracle of America Museum* in Polson.

With an expanding business in the later 1990's, Ofstad decided to purchase lot number 7 and 8 of the *Stanley Scarce Addition* at the end of Ronan Main Street. According to Ofstad, "Don Olson Jr told me that he used to shoot ducks at the end of Main Street where the new building now sits." Don was a good friend to Jim and told him to hire a couple of local brothers (possibly the Resner Brothers) to tear down the old steel structure on the lot where the new building was to be built. "I was not expecting these older guys to be up for such a difficult job," said Ofstad, "they salvaged almost every piece of hard-wood and sheet-metal from the old steel edifice." In 2000, Dr. Ofstad hired Hugh Beaver to construct the new office building where the Ronan Eye Clinic resides today.

Over the years, the Ronan Eye Clinic has grown into a modern optometric practice. Dr. Ofstad was the founder of the clinic, but he admits that he would not be where he is today without the help of other people and their talents. Dr. Clay Benkelman, son of well-known family physician Dr. Benkelman of Polson, has been working part-time at the Ronan Eye Clinic for many years. Currently, the Ronan Eye Clinic employs six full-time workers, one part-time worker, one full-time optometrist, and two part-time optometrists.

In 2009, Dr. Ofstad hired Dr. Marcus Simonich, a Montana native from Colstrip. After working together for three years, Dr. Ofstad and Dr. Simonich both realized they had similar values, perspectives, and ambitions. In December 2012, the Ronan Eye Clinic was purchased by Dr. Simonich.

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The Chamber Connection

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MAY Message from the Chamber

Can you believe this weather? It feels more like summer than Spring. Since it really is spring here are a few events that I don't have a flier for.

1. The Chamber always helps sponsors Ranch Days for the Ronan 4th graders and this year it is on May 7 & 8. It takes place at the Polson Fair Grounds.

2. The Ronan Farmers Market will start up this Thursday on main street. It runs from 3pm to 7pm.

3. The Diamond S RV Park opened May 1st. That means some lucky people are already on the road enjoying the weather.

4. Don't forget it is Mothers Day on May 10th, in honor of this Saturday, May 9th, the library will be providing supplies to make crafts to take home to mom.

5. The Ronan Chamber has a Bi-annual **Crab Fest** and the date has been set for June 19th, at Bochman Park. I wanted to get the word out early because if you purchase before the event, your name goes in for a chance on 6 prizes. The tickets are available at Access Montana, NAPA, Community Bank, Valley Bank, Ronan Flower Mill, Polson First Interstate Bank, and Ronan Power Products.

Remember one of the major efforts the Chamber Board wants to focus on is our Website. We are hoping to put a historical section on the Chamber website. We are looking for any historical pictures or stories to post. Please send us any information or stories you think would be of interest. It could be family stories or Business Stories. We have a lot of businesses that have been operating for over 50 years. You can drop the information at the Chamber office or to Roland Godan at the Lake County Community Development.

We usually highlight a Gold Member each month and this month is **Ronan Eye Clinic**. Thanks to **Ronan Eye Clinic** for all they do.

Please keep those event notices coming in I send out notices all month long so if you want the word out please let me know. Have a great month.



At a Glance

- >> **General Chamber Meeting**
May 7/12PM
Allentown Bar & Restaurant
Speaker: Mike Maddy
Mission Mountain CC
- >> **Ninepipes Museum Opens**
April 1/9am-5 pm
Ninepipes Lodge
- >> **Ronan City Council Meeting**
May 4/6pm
Ronan City Hall
- >> **Diamond S RV Park Opens**
May 1st
Old Hwy 93
- >> **Ronan Farmers Market**
Every Thursday 3pm-7pm
Main Street Ronan
- >> **Women 4 Wellness**
Joe McDonald Fitness Ctr
May 14/10am-4:30pm
Salish Kootenai College
- >> **Ronan's Spring Clean up**
Ronan City Park
May 16/9 am
Ronan area & Businesses
- >> **The Hoop**
Salish Kootenai College
May 15-17
Pablo, MT
- >> **Chamber Board of Directors Meeting**
May 20/2-5 PM
Ronan Chamber Office
- >> **LCCD Tours of Food Processing Center**
May 20/1PM
Or call for appointments
LCCD Main Street Ronan

2015

Gold Members



**St. Luke
Community
Healthcare**

School Dist



COMMUNITY BANK
Serving Montana Since 1910
MEMBER FDIC



Harvest Foods
We Honestly Care!



**St. Joseph
Medical Center**



MISSION VALLEY EYE CENTER INC
RONAN EYE CLINIC



**Whitefish
CREDIT UNION**
We Belong to You

www.ronanchamber.com

MAY 16th, 2015
Meet at 9am at the Ronan City Park

Ronan's Annual Spring Cleaning

Everyone's welcome!



- Grab some coffee, gloves and trash bags to help clean up town .
- Ronan City will pick up larger items.
Call to Schedule. 676-4231
NO ELECTRONICS!
- Disposal containers on-site and yard debris dump site available.

More information contact
City Hall at 676-4231 ore Ellen at 676-8666

Sponsored by



City of Ronan

Friday, June 19th
5pm at Bockman Park
Ronan City Park

Crab Fest 2015

Bring your
favorite beverage,
chair & crab pliers!

Rainy weather
Crab Fest will
be moved to
Ronan
Fairgrounds
Horticulture Barn



Don't miss out
on the Duck
Races!

It's Good Eats!

Ticket Pricing - \$30/person | \$10/under 10 yrs

Ticket purchase gets
you entered to win a
6 person Crab Party Kit!

RONAN AREA
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
EVENT

More info contact
676-8300

Tickets available at:

Access Montana, NAPA, Community Bank, Valley Bank,
Ronan Flower Mill, Polson First Interstate Bank, & Power Products