

[Ceremonial Wall-Breaking for the Lois Pope Center for Retinal and Macular Degeneration Research](#)

With hammers smashing through a fake brick wall, the opening of a first-of-its-kind center designed to bring an end to blinding eye disease moved a significant step closer to reality.



From left, Eduardo C. Alfonso, M.D., Palm Beach Gardens Mayor Maria G. Marino, Julio Frenk, Lois Pope, and Henri R. Ford, M.D., MHA.

A ceremonial “wall-breaking” was held Dec. 14 at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute in Palm Beach Gardens to signal the beginning of construction of the Lois Pope Center for Retinal and Macular Degeneration Research. The center, which promises to serve as the hub for clinical care and research studies to battle age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and retinal diseases, is the result of a historic \$12 million donation from philanthropist Lois Pope, the largest gift in Bascom Palmer’s history.

Mrs. Pope announced the gift in March in honor of her beloved mother, Anastasia Berroddin, who suffered from macular degeneration.

“This disease took away her ability to see the beauty of this world and to bask in the love of her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. It was a thief that slowly robbed her of so much joy in her life,” said Pope. “But it would have been even worse without the caring and compassionate treatment she received for so many years here at Bascom Palmer. I will never forget what everyone did for her.”

The Lois Pope Center for Retinal & Macular Degeneration Research will build on the renowned

expertise of Bascom Palmer's ophthalmic experts to develop state-of-the-art, targeted therapies, as well as new collaborations to identify treatments for AMD and other retinal conditions, including diabetic retinopathy and inherited retinal diseases.

"We are incredibly grateful to Lois Pope for her extraordinary gift," said Eduardo C. Alfonso, M.D., the Kathleen and Stanley J. Glaser Chair in Ophthalmology and director of the Bascom Palmer Eye Institute. "Researchers and clinicians at Bascom Palmer have a legacy of leadership in the global fight against retinal diseases. Mrs. Pope's generosity will help us make trailblazing discoveries over the next decade and impact many patients suffering from these diseases."

Age-related macular degeneration is a leading cause of vision loss among people age 60 and older. It causes damage to the macula, the center of the retina and the part of the eye that is responsible for central vision, which lets people read, drive and recognize faces.

Mrs. Pope witnessed firsthand the toll the disease can take, watching her mother gradually losing her sight during the 1980s and '90s. She hopes that the center transforms the way the disease is treated.

"This is my way of thanking everyone, all of the physicians and staff, and hoping that my contribution will make a real difference in the lives of many others," said Mrs. Pope, a resident of Manalapan, Florida, who is also nationally renowned as an advocate and supporter of disabled veterans. "It is with gratitude for everyone here, and for what they did for my mother, and in anticipation of what the future has to hold, that I dedicate this center."

In addition to the center, Mrs. Pope's gift also looks to the future, as it creates an endowment that will ensure researchers have the resources to seek out new treatments in perpetuity.

"This gift will help us usher in an unprecedented era of scientific discovery to find pioneering treatments and cures for macular degeneration and other blinding conditions," said Henri R. Ford, M.D., MHA, dean and chief academic officer of the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine. "We will be able to conduct clinical trials and research under one roof, which will help us fast track the latest innovations directly to the patient. There is nothing more important to someone facing a loss of vision."

A long-time supporter of Bascom Palmer and the Miller School of Medicine, Mrs. Pope was also the driving force behind the establishment of the Lois Pope LIFE Center at the Miller School, the world's foremost center for research, treatment, and services for paralysis and other neurological diseases. It is home to the renowned Miami Project/Buoniconti Fund to Cure Paralysis.

"This gift builds upon Mrs. Pope's long history of generosity to the University of Miami and the Leonard M. Miller School of Medicine," said Julio

Frenk, president of the University of Miami. Her remarkable ongoing philanthropy will continue to have a significant impact on the development of pioneering treatments and cures. We cannot thank her enough for her vision and dedication."

About Bascom Palmer Eye Institute

Bascom Palmer Eye Institute, part of the University of Miami Health System, is ranked the nation's best in ophthalmology by *U.S. News & World Report*, an honor it has received for the 17th time, and by *Ophthalmology Times*. In addition to its international reputation as one of the premier providers of eye care in the world, Bascom Palmer is the largest ophthalmic care, research, and educational facility in the southeastern United States. Each year, more than 260,000 patients with nearly every ophthalmic condition are treated, and more than 16,000 surgeries are performed. With five patient care facilities in Florida (Miami, Palm Beach Gardens, Naples, Plantation, and Coral Gables), the Institute serves as the Department of Ophthalmology for the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine and is directed by Eduardo C. Alfonso, M.D. Bascom Palmer faculty members also staff the Miami and West Palm Beach Veterans Affairs Medical Centers, Jackson Memorial Hospital and Nicklaus Children's Hospital. The sponsored research enterprise at Bascom Palmer has grown from \$3.8 million in 2004 to \$16 million in 2018.