



Multiple Practice of the Year

Award-winning vibes are emanating from an East Midlands shopping centre, where Specsavers Sutton-in-Ashfield has a glittering trophy cabinet that includes being 2009's Family Optician of the Year and this year's top multiple location.

The practice also has two in-house Specsavers Practice of the Year awards on display but opted to let someone else have a go rather than entering once again this year. Nevertheless, winning Multiple Practice of the Year at the 2013 Optician Awards was a real boost for store director Nigel Davidson, in the same year he took on a major charity project in Africa.

'It is always a surprise [to win an award]. It's a bit like fishing, in that you're not going to catch a fish unless you cast your line out. The Optician Awards are a chance for a good night together and to celebrate with the team regardless of whether you win.'

Located in the busy Idlewells Shopping Centre, the practice employs 56 people and is brimming with patients on the Friday morning of *Optician's* visit. Davidson started the joint venture in 1995 using a much smaller space employing just six staff, before moving across the parade in 2002 to the current 5,000 square foot location set out over a single floor.

In organising the vast space, Davidson turned to world-renowned feng shui expert Paul Darby, who lives locally. A keen golfer, Davidson first tried out the techniques by relocating his golf clubs to a new area in his loft with some success. 'It got me thinking there must be something in this,' he says. Darby, who is noted for carrying out feng shui blessing ceremonies to bring better fortune to football stadiums, was asked to take a look at the branch. 'There were lots of bits of advice about the way the practice should be laid out,' says Davidson. 'He did say it wouldn't be good to have green in the dispensing area but that's difficult when you're a Specsavers.'

Darby also pointed out that the practice was north-east facing, meaning it would need to tackle 'sluggish' energy at the rear of the property, while amethyst crystals were hung near computer screens and the whole place de-cluttered.

Of course, it would be foolhardy to attribute professional awards to

Specsavers in Sutton-in-Ashfield, Nottinghamshire was the winner of this year's Multiple Practice of the Year award. **Joe Ayling** reports



Nigel Davidson and his team: 'The more stuff you do the luckier you are'

anything other than hard work, but the minimalist flow of the practice is evident from the front entrance, where an optical assistant is positioned to take remote patient bookings using an iPad.

'I am only successful because of how great these guys are,' Davidson says of his fleet of staff also including technicians, dispensing opticians, optometrists and department managers.

Beyond basic eye testing, the practice is kitted out with a Topcon 3-D OCT-2000 for early detection of retinal disease, while it also has a busy diabetic retinopathy clinic and dedicated contact lens fitting area.

'Looking at an average practice, we've probably got four times as much equipment,' says Davidson. 'As an optometrist I am aware of the sorts of things that would be relevant to me. Someone with glaucoma is having a great experience here compared with the local hospital.'

In addition to its role in community eye care, the practice has also set out to help the local population with charity initiatives. There is a food bank outside the entrance while it recently commissioned a local learning academy to make up personalised Specsavers mugs for the staff kitchen. At the time of visiting, five optical staff were also growing moustaches in aid of the Movember campaign.

Moreover, since winning the award in April, Davidson has embarked on a charity mission to Ghana with seven other professionals who together completed 1,300 eye tests. The trip was organised with a charity called Ashanti Development, with the Sutton-in-Ashfield store asking patients to bring in their old glasses to be graded and packaged up. An Africa Day was also held at Idlewells to raise funds.

This year's Multiple of the Year is a hive of activity both in a clinical and community sense, driven by the boundless enthusiasm of its leader and staff – with some Chinese spirituality thrown in for good measure.

'The more stuff you do the luckier you are,' Davidson adds. 'I don't think about other opticians and don't know if I should. We spend a lot of money on marketing as the entire group does, but at the end of the day if you've got a successful business that's what really counts.' ●

● **Multiple Practice of the Year, sponsored by Macuvision**

Winner:
Specsavers, Sutton-in-Ashfield



Shortlisted: Boots Opticians, Wolverhampton
Boots Opticians, Canterbury
Specsavers Opticians, Hartlepool
Specsavers Opticians, Sevenoaks