



## THE EYES HAVE IT

There's a nondescript brick house at 54 S. 9th St. on Pittsburgh's South Side. On a warm evening late in August, the guerillas invaded. Armed with tens of thousands of dollars in mobile ophthalmology equipment—including the famed “Better one? Or better two?” machine (that device docs use to check your vision when you're peering at the A-C-G-M-Z, etc., eye chart)—they went about their work, providing free vision care to the city's underserved.

Patients—some Spanish-speaking undocumented workers, some residents of the neighboring Salvation Army shelter, and some working poor—were whisked to the second floor of the building, the Birmingham Free Clinic. There they were tested for cataracts and glaucoma and given eyeglass prescriptions—filled for free—by a half-dozen medical students and ophthalmology residents. (The clinic has multiple health-related uses and is staffed by a rotating cadre of volunteers.)

The three-year-old project, called the Guerilla Eye Service, is

funded by foundation grants and the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, which donated the van that hauls the team's gear. Evan “Jake” Waxman, an MD assistant professor of ophthalmology and director of the department's residency program, heads the team. He loves the service aspect of what he calls “missions,” as well as what the program does for students and residents who participate.

“Taking care of people who otherwise wouldn't get eye care is very important,” he says. He also says it's important for med students and residents to get involved in community outreach.

The guerillas also visit sites in Sewickley, Greene County, and Squirrel Hill, seeing close to 700 patients each year. It's a time-consuming project. But, says third-year resident Tim Marra, Waxman meets the challenge with joy.

“He works harder than anyone I have known,” Marra says. “It takes a very special person to do this.”

—Joe Miksch  
—Photo by Jim Judkis