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MEDIA STATEMENT

International scholarship supports exceptional optometry student

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, 18 April, 2018: Today an exceptional optometry student from Ho Chi Minh City will receive an international scholarship to further her professional studies. The scholarship is being granted by an Australian optometrist, Dr Tony Hanks OAM and his wife Mrs Vicki Hanks to VÕ HUỖNH NHI, who is in her third year, studying Optometry and Vision Science at the University of Medicine Phạm Ngọc Thạch. Next year she will graduate as a first generation Vietnamese optometrist.

VÕ HUỖNH NHI has an amazing story of achievement. Her parents are farmers and she comes from a poor family who live in the outskirts of Ho Chi Minh City. During her life, she has gained very high academic records, achieved honour awards in science and research, and was also selected as the best student of her class in 2016-17 academic year.

Her hard working academic outcomes and also a willingness to volunteer helping communities in Ho Chi Minh City, are the reasons VÕ HUỖNH NHI was the successful recipient of the prestigious “Dr Anthony and Vicki Hanks Scholarship”.

In 2014, the optometry school at the University of Medicine Phạm Ngọc Thạch was launched as the first tertiary level school of optometry in Vietnam. Later this year in October, the first Vietnamese optometrists will graduate to service their country by providing increased eye care capacity to the Vietnamese people.

The optometry school is joint initiative between the Brien Holden Vision Institute, the University of Medicine Pham Ngoc Thach and the Ho Chi Minh City Eye Hospital. It is the culmination of a long-term plan to introduce optometry to the country, with the primary goal of alleviating the burden of uncorrected refractive error in Vietnam in line with the Vietnamese National Eye Health Plan.

Four years ago, Dr Tony Hanks was at the optometry school launch supporting the first enrolment of optometry students on their pioneering path. His continuing support and generosity is highlighted today as he reaches out again to provide ongoing support for an exceptional student of optometry.

Dr Tony Hanks words of encouragement from 2014 still echo his sentiment to the cause, furthering the global development of optometrists. “To describe the students as inspiring is an understatement. We felt so proud that these enthusiastic young people will be joining our profession as colleagues. They are not only “joining” it, but they will literally be helping to build the profession of optometry from scratch in Vietnam,” he said

“This is an awesome story of achievement. In 2014 there were just three optometrists for a population of 90 million; now there are 11 – including some who have returned to teach in their country of birth. In a few years there will be over 100 and on it will go,” said Dr Tony Hanks, optometrist and former owner of Hanks Optometrists in NSW, Australia.

Ms Ly Huynh, Country Representative for the Institute, “Optometry is a developing profession with great potential to create much needed change in Vietnam. I believe optometry is pivotal to improving the eye health of Vietnamese people. Today is a special celebration to honour and support one of our future ambassadors for the new profession of optometry as it begins to become established in Vietnam. We are humbly grateful to Dr Tony Hanks and Mrs Vicki Hanks for all their care, support and generosity.”

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Optometry Giving Sight is a collaboration of the World Optometry Foundation, the International Centre for Eyecare Education and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness.