

Marin Magazine / January 2008 / The Incredible Laser

The Incredible Laser

Breakthroughs in technology have made lasers the ultimate tool for beauty and science

BY SOMER FLAHERTY



Ella Faktorovich, M.D., Director of the Pacific Vision Institute

PHOTO BY TIM PORTER

When Albert Einstein, a man better known for his grasp of physics than his aesthetic sense, theorized back in 1917 about the process that makes lasers possible, we can be sure he wasn't thinking how they could be used to improve eyesight, zap frown lines or vaporize away a few extra pounds. Today, though, lasers are a common medical and cosmetic tool that can take years off a patient's appearance and give 20-20 vision to those who never had it before.

The best vision possible

New York ophthalmologist Steven Trokel performed the first laser eye surgery in 1987. At first the procedure, called Lasik, could only correct the most common types of nearsightedness, but thanks to recent advances, Lasik can now remedy farsightedness and even astigmatism. The latest techniques, used in a procedure called IntraLasik, are more precise and hence less risky than ever, enticing previously wary patients to sign up.

Marin ophthalmologist and Ross resident Gayle Shimokaji finally decided to have laser eye surgery two years ago after waiting for experts to perfect the technique. Shimokaji, an Ironman triathlon participant, wanted relief from the burden of wearing glasses during competition. She consulted Ella Faktorovich (photo at left), M.D., Director of the Pacific Vision Institute in San Francisco. Faktorovich, an ophthalmologist on the faculty of the department of ophthalmology at the UCSF VA Medical Center, is one of the first local doctors to offer IntraLasik.

IntraLasik uses all-laser technology rather than incorporating a traditional surgical blade into the laser operation. In standard Lasik surgery, Faktorovich explains, doctors push a blade across the eye to create a thin flap that is folded back so the laser can go to work. With IntraLasik, doctors create the flap with the laser, which has proven more accurate than the blade. When patients visit her office, Faktorovich says, they're looking to make their lives easier, and "glasses are the first to go." The average fee ranges from \$2,850 to \$3,650 per eye.