

Laser eye surgery improves Biloxi officer's vision

Special to The Clarion-Ledger 10:27 p.m. CST December 18, 2015



(Photo: Special to The Clarion-Ledger)

Biloxi Police Investigator Nick Sonnier has little control over what his day brings. But he says laser eye surgery has improved his chances of protecting himself.

"Being visually impaired with eyeglasses or contacts takes away your ability to protect yourself," Sonnier said after his eye surgery. "The opportunity that people have to disable me on the job, LASIK takes that away.

"I have absolutely no idea what I'm going to do one day to next as a policeman," added Sonnier (pronounced sahn-yay). "It's what society has for me to do. New cases pop up every day."

Sonnier frequently handles felony arrests, with his cases including robbery, burglary, sexual assault, fraud, auto theft and DUI.

"It's a relief, not having to worry about contact lenses or glasses any more," he said.

Sonnier received LASIK vision correction without cost. Biloxi ophthalmologist Dr. Rainna Bahadur, a partner at Eye Associates of the South, donated it.

Sonnier is the fourth Gulf Coast "emergency first responder" to receive complimentary LASIK from cornea specialist Bahadur and the ophthalmology clinic with sites in Biloxi, Ocean Springs and Gulfport.

Bahadur, a Greenwood native, received her medical degree from the University of Mississippi School of Medicine in Jackson.

Bahadur said she's honored to work on the first responders.

"Every day, they literally put their lives on the line for citizens of the Gulf Coast, including my family," she said.

Sonnier was extremely nearsighted before his eye surgery, which also corrected his vision better than his former contacts or glasses, according to a post-surgery eye exam. "He was definitely legally blind without glasses or contacts," Bahadur said.

Sonnier's vision range was worse than 20/400, without correction. When you have 20/400 vision, you would have to be 20 feet away from an object to see what someone with standard vision would see at 400 feet, Bahadur said.

After LASIK, Sonnier's vision is "perfect." It has improved to 20/20 in the left eye for close-up viewing and 20/20 in the right eye for distance. "He finished up his medical eye drops, so his vision continued to improve as his eyes healed," she said.

Other first responders who received no-cost LASIK in the past few years include a Biloxi firefighter, a Marine Resources officer and another Biloxi police officer.

Sonnier won a Biloxi Police Department drawing to receive his LASIK — on the same day he received the department's Office of the Quarter Award.

"I'd never won anything in my life," said Sonnier, 46, a Biloxi native. "LASIK is something I always wanted to do. But I'm a single father raising two boys, so I never would have spent the money on myself."

The department's public information officer, Sgt. Jackie Rhodes, has been a patient of Eye Associates of the South since the early 1990s. He first went there for soft contacts, then finally choose LASIK from Bahadur. "I did one eye for reading and one for distance, just like my contacts were — monovision," he said.

Both Sonnier and Rhodes chose to receive monovision LASIK, instead of getting identical correction for both eyes.

Rhodes added that he also chose Eye Associates because Bahadur performs the LASIK in an outpatient surgery center (Cedar Lake Surgery Center) instead of in an office.