

# VSP Vision Care (c/o James M. McGrann, NY A '84)

VSP Global Endowment for the California Upsilon Chapter at California State University, Sacramento

**J**IM MCGRANN, PRESIDENT of VSP Vision Care, shares enthusiastically with students that an engineering degree is an excellent way to start your career no matter your field of interest—business, law, medicine, non-profits, etc. “The engineers of today shouldn’t limit themselves to the places where they think they should work. My father didn’t understand my career path. He thought I wasn’t using my engineering degree the way it was supposed to be used...sitting down at a drafting table. Businesses such as VSP and business leaders I know today are glad to have engineers work for them in all types of fields.”

Jim graduated in 1984 from Columbia University and joined Arthur Andersen in their management information consulting division. He spent the next 15 years in IT consulting at Arthur Andersen, IBM, and Ernst & Young. The second half of his career has been in the vision and eyewear industry. Jim joined VSP Global in 2008 as president of Eyefinity® from Marchon® Eyewear, Inc, where he had been senior vice president and chief information officer since 1999. In 2010, he became VSP global chief technology officer and chief executive officer for Eyefinity. In 2012, Jim took over as president of VSP’s insurance business, where his leadership has resulted in significant year over year growth.

Five lines of business make up VSP Global—VSP Vision Care (the largest vision insurance company in the U.S. covering more than 70 million members), Eyefinity (an EHR and practice management software company), VSP Optics Group (lens, lab, service, and logistics), and Marchon Eyewear (one of the three largest manufacturers, designers, and distributors of eyewear in the world) and newly formed VSP Retail (e-commerce and retail development for eye care providers). Interestingly, four presidents of these businesses graduated with degrees in engineering.

Jim recently spoke with the dean of the school of optometry at University of California, Berkeley, and noted, “I find it interesting when talking to optometrists. So far, when I ask, one-hundred percent of them cite engineering as a profession they would have considered if they hadn’t gone into optometry. There’s a similarity in the mindset of optics work and engineering.”

Jim shares, “VSP is celebrating our 60th anniversary this year. While we’ve been innovative over the past 60 years, there is a need to step it up a notch and increase the pace at which we’re innovating. To support this, we launched our innovation lab, called The SHOP, in 2012.”



There are two locations for The SHOP—one in Sacramento near the California State University, Sacramento campus and the other in Manhattan where most of their eyewear designers reside. The purpose of The SHOP is to explore disruption within our industry over the next 5-10 years bringing together technology, fashion, and

health. One of The SHOP’s early successes was VSP’s partnership on the first release of Google Glass, providing Google with access to leaders in all facets of the optical industry—and they were the first company to design a fashionable Google Glass with Marchon licensor Diane von Furstenberg.

“Outsiders see us as a big insurance company. We want to change that mentality and show we’re more than that and focused on science and technology. With everything happening in the marketplace, the companies who will succeed need to get out in front of the marketplace and understand how these products will disrupt the status quo. We want to be a disruptor, not disrupted! The best way to do this is to partner with engineering schools, especially the ones close to you. We want to leverage those students who are here and who we can bring onboard to work on projects. It’s a perfect marriage of our focus on innovation and getting young people involved.” VSP is also working with MIT and Columbia University and is starting to look at other schools.

Jim’s advice for engineering students is to have a willingness to take on work that they see other people walking away from. “Take the dirty job when you get the chance. As a Columbia engineering student, I heard that a steel company was hiring interns and went with a friend to interview. We were dressed in suits. I remember an employee laughing at us letting us know that we’d be learning the steel business from the ground up and that we needed to go home and change. I also worked in a blast furnace in Florida in the summer. It was hot but I learned a lot about the business. Lots of times people lose sight of the opportunity to learn from work from which others are walking away.”

Jim notes that VSP was happy to step forward and endow the CA Upsilon Chapter at California State University, Sacramento. “I was president of my chapter and attended the 78th Convention at Urbana-Champaign, IL, in 1983. I also remember my chapter rallying around one of our friends who received a Tau Beta Pi fellowship. VSP Global is proud to support an organization that does so much to develop young engineering talent as they grow into our society’s future leaders.”