

# The Post-Standard BUSINESS

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**FAYETTEVILLE BROTHERS** (from left) Ronald, Robert and Ralph Cotran examine eyeglass lenses made using digital manufacturing technology at their new company, US Optical in East Syracuse. Ronald and Ralph are vice presidents of US Optical, and Robert is president. They formerly owned Optogenics of Syracuse, another eyeglass lab.

## Firm Offers Strong Vision

# Cotran brothers open US Optical in East Syracuse

By James T. Mulder  
Staff writer

**T**hree entrepreneurial brothers from Fayetteville have returned to the optical industry with a whole new focus — high-tech progressive eyeglass lenses.

Ralph, Ronald and Robert Cotran have launched US Optical LLC at 6848 Ellicott Drive, in East Syracuse. The wholesale optical lab is outfitted with a \$1 million robotic digital manufacturing system that makes prescription lenses. The lab will supply lenses to opticians, optometrists and ophthalmologists nationwide.

The Cotrans used to own Optogenics of Syracuse, a lab they bought in 1986. Under their watch, production at that lab increased from 85 prescriptions a day to about 2,000 a day. They sold the company in 1999 to Essilor of America, a leading lens manufacturer and distributor, and managed it until they left last year.

All three brothers are Syracuse University graduates.

“One of the reasons we decided to leave our old company is because of the new technology,” Ralph Cotran said. “We’ve been at the cutting edge of the optical business for more than 20 years.”

Progressive lenses provide near and distance vision correction in one lens without any of the visible lines found in traditional bifocals.

The major problem with traditional progressives is that all the curves needed for vision correction are made on the front of the



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**RONALD COTRAN** stands near US Optical's freeform surfacing line, which manufactures eyeglass lenses from different plastics. The company makes progressive bifocal lenses that mold a patient's prescription on the back of the lens, closer to the eye, which eliminates the distortion of traditional progressive lenses.

lens, Ronald Cotran said. That can lead to distortion.

“Sometimes they are hard to adapt to,” he said. “When you walk you think you are going to fall.”

About 15 percent of people cannot wear progressive lenses because of distortion problems, said Ralph Cotran.

The Cotrans said the new technology, known as freeform manufacturing, eliminates that problem by molding a patient's prescription on the back of the lens closer to the eye. For consumers, the lenses are 10 times more precise, Ralph Cotran said.

Because there are few labs in the country

making these kinds of lenses, customers typically must wait a week to get them, he said.

US Optical will provide the high-tech lenses with anti-reflection coatings within 24 hours, he said.

The company's 12,000-square-foot plant has a dust-free clean room where thin film anti-reflection coating is applied to lenses.

US Optical has 15 employees, a number the company wants to increase to 50 over the next five years.

The plant can produce 600 prescriptions a day and has the space to double that capacity in the future, Ralph Cotran said.

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