



ANNIE TRITT

**A NEW EYE:** Tre Staten, 9, is fitted for a new prosthetic eye by Steven Young, an oculist based in Oakland. Young is known for his ability to make prostheses that mimic how real eyes are shaped and colored. He has developed a new technique that makes prosthetic eyes look like they're dilated when the patient wears glasses with special lenses (below, bottom photo).

# A perfect fit

# East Bay specialist combines technology, humor to help patients

By Eleni Economides  
CONTRIBUTOR

**"I've had everyone in here from death row inmates to Hollywood stars to royalty. More people have prostheses than you think. That's the great part about it — and the point — no one can tell."**

Steven Young  
OAKLAND OCULARIST

**A**LL TRE STATEN really wanted was to look normal. The 9-year-old's right eye had been destroyed in a BB gun accident two years ago, claiming his vision and devastating his family.

The accident would end up sending the Alaskan family on a mission to help Tre that ended in the Bay Area.

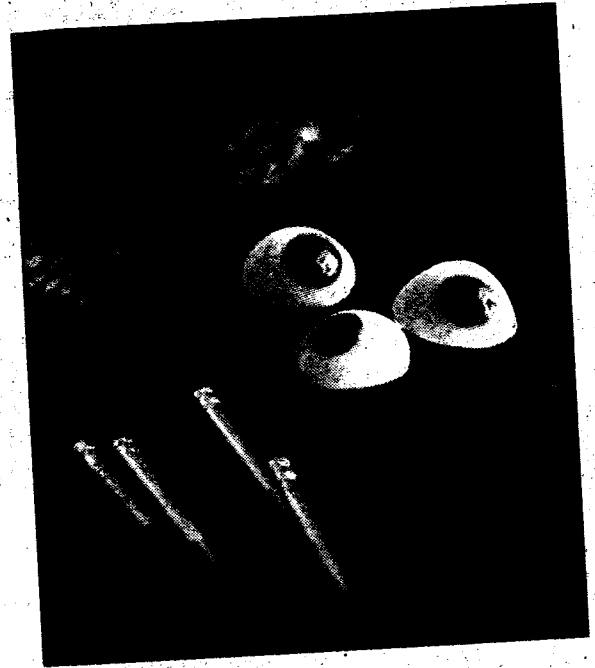
After Tre was first injured, the family went to an eye clinic in Baltimore, where Tre was fitted for his first artificial eye. The results were less than satisfactory, with Tre's new eye drooping downward and peering outward, looking far from normal.

The challenge with eye prostheses is finding one that imitates how the real eye appears, especially how it moves.

While precise statistics are hard to find, birth defects and trauma cause many children to need a prosthetic eye. Once made of glass, artificial eyes today are made of acrylic, which allows for a much better match with the remaining eye. A prosthetic eye can cost from \$2,000 to more than \$3,500.

Tre's mother, Marcia Staten, said Tre

Please see **FIT**, Living 5



he trioly at Halloween



# Young combines technology with humor

► **FIT**, from Living 1

could still tell his new eye did not quite match the other.

"At first they told us that it was hard to fit a child with a prosthesis and that it would settle eventually and look more normal," she explains. "So we kept waiting for that to happen and that day just never came."

Frustrated, Tre and his parents returned to their home in Juneau.

"We just prayed on it in the hopes that something better would come along," Marcia Staten says.

The family came to the Bay Area for a business trip and to consult another specialist. Browsing through a phone book, Tre's father Anthony Staten came across the name of Oakland ocularist Steven Young.

According to the American Society of Ocularists, an ocularist is a trained technician skilled in the arts of fitting, shaping and painting ocular prostheses. In addition to making the eye, the ocularist shows the patient how to handle and care for the prosthesis and provides long-term care through periodic examinations — especially important for children, whose eyes change as they grow.

For some reason, the Statens felt there was something special about Young's name and called immediately for an appointment.

Young, who specializes in custom ocular prosthetics, is known for his artistic ability to mimic a real eye's color and shape, making him one of the most sought-after ocularists in his field.

He's also known for his offbeat bedside manner when it comes to working well with children. He doesn't wear a lab coat and keeps his office festive, with a TV often blaring in the background and plenty of Disney videos for children to watch while he's working on them.

His appearance, with his tousled Einstein-looking hair, combined with his sense of humor, help distract children and adults from their fears and discomfort.

And that's part of the reason for his success.

"You need the cooperation of the child if you are going to match the colors, the shape of the eye," says Young, 52, who treats many of the patients at Children's Hospital Oakland where he is on the Cranio-Facial Panel. He sees "a huge number" of children who are born with an eye deformity that requires a prosthesis.

"I'll do just about anything it takes, especially with smaller children, to make them feel at ease. I've had some parents in here either really tickled or really mad that I've started water fights with their kids. I don't need the parents' attention, I need the children's attention, and that's what I end up getting."

Within days, Tre was fitted for a new prosthesis that matched his bright gaze perfectly.

The day after his final fitting he looked in the mirror and turned to his mother with a bright smile to say, "Mama, I can't hardly tell."

Marcia Staten couldn't hold back her tears.

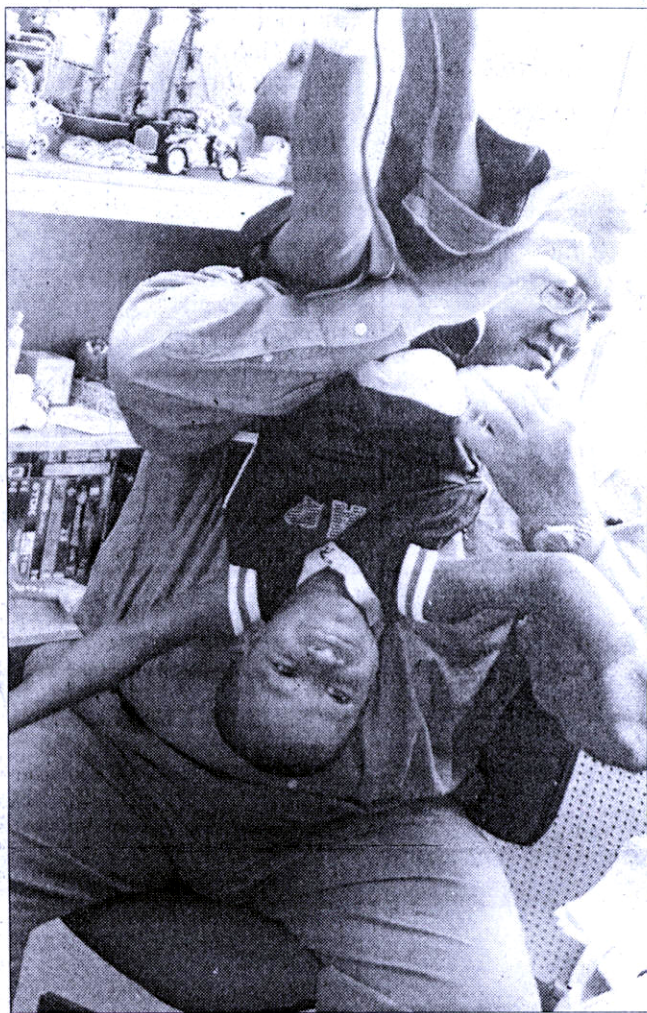
"Dr. Young just made such a major transformation," she said later, recalling the moment.

Young's work has led him to a breakthrough in his field.

"The only part about the artificial eyes that is not lifelike is their ability to have a dilating pupil that reacts to light," he explains.

One night, while fiddling around with two linear polarized lenses, he found a solution.

"Once I held them on top of each other at 90-degree angles, the lens on the bottom turned dark. It was a simple



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**A NEW PERSPECTIVE:** Benjamin Staten, 5, whose brother was being fitted for a new prosthetic eye, plays with Steven Young in his Oakland office. The ocularist is known for making his patients feel at home and can often be found joking with them.

solution," he says.

He has received a patent for the process, which also serves to protect the patient's eyes. Every patient, especially those with only one seeing eye, is advised to wear glasses — even if they don't need prescription lenses — to help shield the "good" eye from trauma.

Using polarized technology in the glasses and in the prosthesis creates the illusion that the pupil is dilated. Without the glasses, the polarized lens in the prosthesis' iris (the colored part of your eye) loses the dilated effect.

"It really is quite simple, and with the glasses on or off you can see the difference," he says.

He hopes that the technology will be available to patients in the coming year.

Tre Staten can't wait to get take advantage of Young's new product.

"We are just so lucky as it is to have found Dr. Young," his mother says. "This new technology just makes it even better."