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FIFTH ANNUAL INVESTIGATOR AWARDS WINNERS ANNOUNCED FROM PREVENT BLINDNESS AMERICA

More Than \$500,000 Distributed by Group Since Program's Inception To Support Sight-Saving Research

CHICAGO (May 28, 2008) – Prevent Blindness America, the nation's oldest volunteer eye health and safety organization, announced today the recipients of its 2008 Investigator Awards. Winners were selected from the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary, University of Alabama at Birmingham and the University of Illinois at Chicago. The winners were chosen by a panel of scientists from the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO).

The Investigator Awards are research grants awarded to those projects that seek to put an end to unnecessary vision loss and blindness. Part of Prevent Blindness America's 100-year history is supporting research that improves the quality of life for all citizens through vision preservation. The group has declared June as Vision Research Awareness Month to draw attention to the essential part that research has in battling vision loss and eye disease.

Through the organization's own research, the group has discovered that the costs of adult vision problems to the U.S. economy amount to \$51.4 billion every year. And by updating its "Vision Problems in the U.S." report with the National Eye Institute last April, the group found that, as predicted, the numbers of Americans over the age of 40 who are at risk for age-related eye disease and other vision threatening conditions continues to climb-- with the number expected to double by the year 2030.

"Supporting research is one of Prevent Blindness America's fundamental core values," said Daniel D. Garrett, senior vice president of Prevent Blindness America. "Since the Investigator Awards program began five years ago, Prevent Blindness America is proud to have awarded more than \$500,000 in grants to those scientists who join us in our belief that research is key to our sight-saving mission."

Prevent Blindness America has awarded the 2008 Investigator Award for the research project, "Effectiveness and Safety of Topical Bevacizumab (Avastin) for Treatment of Corneal Neovascularization" to Dr. Reza Dana at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary in Boston. The purpose of the study is to determine the effectiveness and safety of Avastin for the treatment of the abnormal growth of blood vessels in the eye. Corneal Neovascularization is a leading cause of monocular visual impairment.

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Cynthia Owsley, PhD, at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, was awarded the 2008 Investigator Award for her project entitled "Vision Impairment and Eye Care Utilization Among Older Adults Residing in Assisted Living." The research seeks to identify the prevalence of vision impairment in older adults currently residing in assisted living facilities and to determine the amount of eye care received by each individual. The goal is to collect data to develop strategies to enhance the quality of life for seniors in assisted living communities through vision services.

In 2006, Charlotte E. Joslin, OD, of the University of Illinois at Chicago, received an Investigator Award for her study "Chicago-area Acanthamoeba Keratitis." The condition is a severe and painful infection of the cornea that can cause corneal scarring and even blindness. This year, Dr. Joslin will continue her research on the subject with her project "The Role of the Domestic Water Supply in a Persistent Acanthamoeba Keratitis Outbreak Following a Contact Lens Solution Recall." The goal of her study is to determine the cause of the continued Acanthamoeba keratitis outbreak in the Chicago area, despite an investigation by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and a worldwide contact lens solution recall.

For more information on the Prevent Blindness America Investigator Awards, or for free brochures on eye diseases and other eye conditions, call toll-free at 1-800-331-2020 or visit www.preventblindness.org.

About Prevent Blindness America

Founded in 1908, Prevent Blindness America is the nation's leading volunteer eye health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight. Focused on promoting a continuum of vision care, Prevent Blindness America touches the lives of millions of people each year through public and professional education, advocacy, certified vision screening and training, community and patient service programs and research. These services are made possible through the generous support of the American public. Together with a network of affiliates, divisions and chapters, it's committed to eliminating preventable blindness in America. For more information, or to make a contribution to the sight-saving fund, call 1-800-331-2020 or visit us on the Web at www.preventblindness.org.

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