

## Beach inventor

# Looking cool can keep you looking

No fried eyes



Peninsula High team surfer Vince Tomich protects his eyes from the glare of the green room. Photo by Dave Gregerson ([www.20foot.com](http://www.20foot.com))

by Kevin Cody

Shortly after recovering from eye surgery, 23-year-old Kurtis Shipcott moved to an apartment over a Hermosa Beach liquor store, across the street from the Redondo Breakwater.

He would joke to visiting friends that the beer was in the fridge, downstairs.

He was single and making good money in pharmaceutical sales, which allowed him plenty of time to surf the breakwater. But the surgery to remove a pterygium on his left eye haunted him. It had been painful and had cost him his 20-20 vision.

Pterygia start as a pinkish-yellow growth on the nasal side of the eye's surface. Though normally benign, they can block vision if they spread across the cornea. They are caused by wind and sun exposure, which make them a common problem for surfers, sailors, and skiers.

Shipcott's doctor advised him to wear sunglasses if he didn't want the condition to recur.

That posed a problem surfing, when the sun's ultraviolet rays are intensified by their reflection off the water. Swim goggles didn't work because they fogged up and sunglasses were dangerously brittle. Snowboarder goggles were too bulky and strange looking.

Shipcott shopped for goggles with UV sun protection and polarized glare protection that would flex on impact, not fog, would float, and of course, look cool.

None were available. He came to understand why when he tried to make a pair out of old sunglasses and neoprene from an old wetsuit.

"When I got the idea, I thought I could sketch it out and give it to someone to manufacture. But I had too many different requirements for a one stop shop. This was pre Google, so I did my research at the library, thumbing through business-to-business phone books," he said.

The biggest challenge was finding a flexible, polarized plastic with UV protection. He glued small blocks of closed cell foam along the nosepiece and outer edges of the lens to serve as spacers. The spacers prevented fogging by allowing air and water to flow between the lens and the wearer's face.

His design resembled wraparound sunglasses for peripheral vision and a cool look. He fashioned a neoprene "Mellon" strap to secure the goggles and a neoprene "Money" leash that goes around the neck to keep the goggles from

floating away when knocked off.

Last summer, after 10 years of trial and error, Shipcott finally began assembling his goggles at his facility in Morro Bay, where he moved in 2005 with his wife Kara and young children Mason and Sienna.

Each pair, he said, involves over 100 manufacturing steps, which explains why they retail for \$199. He recognizes that overseas manufacturing will become necessary as his sales volume increases, but for now he's proud to advertise the goggles as Made in the USA. According to his U.S. based lens supplier, Shipcott is its only U.S. manufacturer. All of the lens maker's other clients manufacture in Asia.

Shipcott introduced the Kurtis Surf Goggles in June at the Action Sports Retailers Tradeshow in San Diego. Over the winter he took the goggles on the road to Hawaii.

Pros in Hawaii praised the goggles, he said, but were reluctant to be photographed in them because most had sunglass sponsors.

For a photograph to accompany this article, *Beach* offered a pair of Kurtis Surf Goggles to Peninsula High star Natalie Anzivino. "Can't accept them. I'm sponsored by Electric sunglasses," the 14-year-old said.

But Anzivino's Peninsula High teammate Vince Tomich eagerly agreed to take her place, and was quickly surrounded by envious friends. The goggles easily passed the crucial cool factor test.

Shipcott is confident that surf goggles, like sun screen, will eventually gain widespread acceptance among surfers. To bring that day closer he plans an educational campaign about pterygia. His company's motto is "No fried eyes."

Shipcott recently met with Quiksilver founder Bob McKnight, who expressed interest in distributing the Kurtis Surf Goggle. In the meantime, the goggles are available locally at Spyder Surf in Hermosa, and online at [www.kurtisusa.com](http://www.kurtisusa.com). ■



Surf goggle inventor Kurtis Shipcott practicing what he preaches. Photo by Dave Gregerson ([www.20foot.com](http://www.20foot.com)).

## How a surfing eye doc sees it

by Ron P. Gallemore, M.D., Ph.D.

Surfers and other outdoor sports enthusiasts are prone to a number of eye conditions that may be vision threatening. The most common are pinguecula and pterygia — growths on the eye that cause redness and irritation on the white part (pingueculum), and even vision loss when the inflamed tissue grows over the front surface of the eye (pterygium). These conditions are reduced by using UV light protection (sunglasses), by minimizing dryness of the eyes with lubricating eye drops, and minimizing the use of heaters and air conditioners.

Two other conditions are also related to the harmful ultraviolet radiation found in the sun — cataracts and macular degeneration. Cataracts are the leading cause of blindness world-wide while macular degeneration tops the charts in developed countries like the U.S.

Cataracts are a clouding of the natural lens of the eye, which is accelerated by aging, sun exposure and a poor diet. They are easily treated by cataract surgery, though this surgery is not readily available in many parts of the world.

Macular degeneration is loss of the function of the central part of the retina at the back of the eye — the light-sensitive tissue that converts the light images focused into the eye into an electrical signal that the brain can understand. Macular degeneration is a silent epidemic and affects over 20 million people in the US. Studies suggest that minimizing UV light exposure, taking an antioxidant vitamin, eating a healthy diet of fish and dark green leafy vegetables, and minimizing red meat intake to once a week may reduce the risk of this condition by up to 50 percent.

Many outdoor enthusiasts eat protective, healthy diets. Those involved in water sports like surfing, however, often do not wear protective sunglasses. New and established lines of protective eye ware, such as Barz Optics from Murray and the Kurtis Surf Goggle, should significantly reduce vision risks for surfers and other outdoor enthusiasts.

Dr. Gallemore is a surfer and paddler, as well as a specialist in retina surgery and macular diseases and director of the Retina Macula Institute in Torrance. He can be reached at (310) 944-9393 or by visiting [www.retina-maculainstitute.com](http://www.retina-maculainstitute.com). ■