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## Great Glasses to appeal \$1 million fine

By Susan Gamble

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**Local News** - Despite losing his optician's licence and being assessed a staggering \$1-million fine, Bruce Bergez's Great Glasses store is open for business as usual in Brantford.

And that has angered local opticians.

Bergez, the owner of a chain of Great Glasses stores, was found guilty of contempt last week for ignoring a court order requiring him to follow a provincial law that says glasses and contact lenses have to be prescribed by an optometrist or physician. At Great Glasses, eyes are tested by a machine and, until recently, Bergez was the only optician in the 17-store chain.

Two weeks ago, the College of Opticians suspended Bergez's certification as an optician as it investigates allegations of professional misconduct.

"It should be over, but it's not," local optician Peter Watson fumed Tuesday. Watson wonders what it will take to close down what he considers a dangerous and illegal operation.

"It's illegal, what he's doing. He has no licensed staff but they're open and running."

Great Glasses stores — scattered mainly around the Hamilton area — offer a free eye examination and low-priced glasses, sunglasses and contact lenses. Opticians and optometrists have cried foul over the stores since the free eye exam doesn't focus fully on eye health and an optician isn't creating the final product.

That's a recipe for disaster, said Watson, because health issues such as glaucoma can be missed.

Staff at Great Glasses, located in the Brantford Mall on King George Road, referred all questions to Bergez on Tuesday.

Reached by e-mail, Bergez said the court decision will be appealed and that, once there's an outcome, Great Glasses will conform to the provincial law.

Bergez said the College of Optometrists is trying to force Ontarians into their monopoly.

"(They want) everyone to buy an eye test from them at a cost of \$80 to \$100 per visit when there is a safe, reliable computerized alternative available to the public," he said in his e-mail.

He added that the provincial government wants more choice in health services and wants to reduce costs, making eyeglasses more affordable. "This is what is meant by 'serving the public interest'," Bergez wrote.

Changing technology means new ways of doing things have to be accepted, he added.

That's a disheartening attitude to Dr. Gregory Wilson, an optometrist with Young, Szak, Bobar, Georgeff and Wilson on William Street.

"The danger with this is twofold: he's telling people they're getting an eye exam and they're not. It's just a refraction test, but there's a lot more to eye health than that. Second, the people in the stores are not trained in optics so there's no assurance that the glasses are made properly."

Improperly made glasses, Wilson said, can lead to eyestrain and blurriness. There's a particular danger for children since, if they are given the wrong glasses, it can lead to permanent vision loss.

Wilson said he'll be watching the situation closely on Dec. 8, the date a judge has given Bergez to pay the \$1-million fine (based on a calculated profit he has made on Great Glasses franchises of about \$3.6 million).

Other aspects of the judge's ruling said that the stores were to post signs stating that customers must have a prescription from an optometrists or a physician in order to get glasses at Great Glasses; that similar ads be run; that anyone looking at buying a Great Glasses franchise should be informed about the judgment; and that no advertising can be run that intimates a person can get eye wear on the basis of the eye test performed by the store.

Bergez insists the appeal process must be respected. His stores remain open this week.

But frustrated local opticians still wonder why.

"This is the equivalent of someone handing out prescriptions when they're not a doctor," said Paul Imola, an optician and the owner of the Looking Glass on Brant Avenue.

"How long is it going to be before we see action? I'm thrilled someone has finally found a fault in this but our frustration is, they're still doing what they're doing."

Imola said this is just the most recent ruling against a company that has incurred the wrath of the College of Optometrists, College of Opticians and dozens of optical eye wear suppliers.

"It's just driving me insane," agreed Watson. "If you're convicted of robbery, you can appeal the conviction but you do it from jail. (Monday) the whole industry was celebrating but today, we see it's just business as usual. The court system is ineffective and obviously is not going to stop him. I'm wondering when the police are going to get involved."

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