



County woman undergoes revolutionary eye surgery

By **FRANCES ABBITT**
Contributing Editor

Bea Miller, Program Manager for the Appomattox Counseling Center, was only eight years of age when, following a routine eye examination at her school, was sent home with a note saying she had no vision in her left eye. Nothing was done at the time but when she was ten years of age, Dr. Fred Morrison of Lynchburg, removed her left eye and she was fitted with an artificial eye.

"Dr. Morrison was ahead of his time in this field," Miller said. "And things went well for many years."

"As a child there was more eye movement but as the implant aged and I, too, aged, problems began to develop. The prostheses, (artificial eye) sagged, wouldn't move and the lower lid began drooping," Miller continued.

Miller knew something had to be done. She scheduled to have surgery in 1980 by a doctor from India, but her husband, the late Dr. Jack Miller was stricken with cancer late in 1980 and the surgery was postponed. He died in September of 1982.

It was time for something to be done with Miller's left eye and quite by accident, though her allergist, she learned of the new surgery for artificial eyes. The more she looked into the possibility of having this done, the more she liked the idea of what the surgery would accomplish.

"A friend asked me if I would be able to see better and I answered 'No, but I'll look better and that will make me feel better'", she said.

An active career woman, Miller knew she wanted to have this done. She was employed by the Commission by The Visually Handicapped for a time. Was director of the Amherst County Department of Social Services, and presently is Program Manager of the Appomattox Counseling Center. She realized it would be to her advantage, coming in contact with so many people with var-



Revolutionary eye surgery will give Bea Miller's artificial eye life-like movement.

ious problems, to avail herself of this medical help. She would be in position to enlighten others with a similar problem. She felt in her heart it was something she needed to do.

The old implant came out and in its place a new kind of implant. The new implant is made coral from the sea that has been treated to extremely high temperature until it becomes like bone. Muscles and nerves are attached.

Five or six months after surgery for the new implant, a new artificial eye is attached to the coral ball/sphere implant. This will give conversation eye movement. The new eye will move in conjunction with the other eye.

Miller has undergone the first part of the surgery and July 27 she will get the new eye.

Being fitted with an artificial eye is painless. The steps involved take several visits over the course of time. The first step is making a custom eye is a fitting process by using a wax shape which is contoured to the patients eye socket. An accurate impression of the socket is taken using a soft alginate material. The iris is hand painted on a curved plastic lens which has a pupil fused on the back. The entire shape is cast in white plastic. Blood vessels and tinting are hand painted to match the natural eye. All of the painting/colors are sealed in clear acrylic, which is

smoothed and polished, ready for insertion.

Michael O. Hughes, Ocularist is with the Artificial Eye Clinic in Vienna, Virginia and also practices at the University of Virginia Hospital in Charlottesville as well. He will fit Miller with her new eye as the end of the month.

Hughes began working with prosthetics in 1982. After receiving a Fine Arts education from Penn State and Bucknell University, he obtained a certificate in Maxillofacial Prosthetics from Temple University in conjunction with the Veterans Administration Medical in Wilmington, Delaware.

After working in St. Louis, Philadelphia and the University of Virginia, he relocated to the Fairfax/Washington, D.C. area in the fall of 1991.

Dr. Sara A. Kaltreider, Associate Professor, Oculoplastic Reconstructive and Orbital Surgery, Department of Ophthalmology, University of Virginia removed the old implant and fitted Miller with the coral implant.

Miller noted that 10,000 American are fitted with an artificial eye every year.

Miller will be, indeed, proud to have her new eye but she is proud of other things too.

"Next to being a Child of God and a Virginian, I am proudest of being a graduate of Longwood College," Miller said. "And I will be proud of my new eye."