

MSI FORMER OFFENDER USES OPTICIANRY SKILLS IN BUSINESS OWNERSHIP

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A bad decision at 22 cost Roby Davis his freedom.

"I was involved in a robbery," he said. "I have to say I knew better, wound up going to prison." But Davis was sentenced beyond the guidelines, up to 75 years behind bars.

"I could do better, I knew I could do better," Davis said. "Normally I don't take from people and act like a menace to society. It really bothered me." Davis spent the next two decades in an MDOC state prison—but he didn't waste a moment.

"When I was in prison I took every class I could take, I went to college," he said. "Whatever program they offered, I did it and graduated."

After meeting certain criteria, Roby Davis entered the optical program at the Gus Harrison Correctional Facility in Adrian. Offenders take classes there and learn highly technical skills and are trained in the optical lab. That is where they work and make eye glasses for every offender statewide.

"It provides a great trade for the offenders who get out," said Matt Yeager, MSI Optical Technology Trades Instructor. "He was a go-getter, he wanted it—you could just tell," Yeager said. "He told me from the beginning when he got out he wanted to start his own business, start a non-profit to help kids get glasses. He said I am going to look you up—I said I will be waiting." Through appeals, Davis was released from prison in 2011. He did not let his instructors down.

Last year, Davis opened his own business—Rosedale Vision in Detroit. "I am excited to come to work every day," he said. "New clients get a new smile—our motto here is 'Rosedale Vision seeing better.' We like to say that to everybody getting their glasses."



Roby Davis working at Rosedale Vision

Although many offenders have left prison and entered the workforce as an optician, Davis is the first to run his own business using the skills he gained at the Michigan Department of Corrections Optical Lab.

"I am really happy for him, really proud of him," said Jerry Johnston, MSI Optical Theory Instructor. "It is good to see that he is taking knowledge he gained while he was incarcerated and applying it in a real world setting and has the drive to do really well."



Roby Davis with his son at Rosedale Vision

Davis is doing so well, he has brought his 28-year-old son on board and trained him to do the same. "I can't even really say in words how proud I am—where he went, where he has been," Roby Davis Jr. said. "He was

gone 20 years. To me, I want to be successful too, I want to do the right thing. It is really important to me. I look up to my dad."

"Students tell me frequently that 'because I have this felony I can't get a job, I am not employable,'" Johnston said. "No matter what I say, it falls on deaf ears a lot of times. But Roby Davis is a success story I can take back and say 'see, you can do this if you want this!'"



Roby Davis fitting his mother for frames at Rosedale Vision

Davis, now 49, is living his dream, back home in the city he loves and now inspiring others with his second chance.

"When you have your freedom taken you have a totally different perspective," Davis said. "I value it now, and before I didn't. In retrospect I didn't really know the value of life. Now I get an opportunity, I take every moment and I take it all in."

The MSI Optical Lab and Theory program currently has a 100% offender pass rate with many offenders who are now ABO (American Board of Opticianry) certified.

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