

# #WONDERWOMEN



NEW YORK—In keeping with the theme of this year's Special Report, we think the group of honorees for 2014 are all "Wonder Women" in their own way, showing signs of strength and courage while always looking out for those in need. This year's list of Influential Women is as varied as the optical industry itself, spanning the worlds of vision care, retailing, manufacturing, distribution, dispensing and designing.

What is it about the optical industry that attracts so many successful and talented women? Some of this year's Most Influential Women shed some light on that question:

Mary Anne Stangby, VP and GM for Sears Optical summed it up saying, "This industry is about helping the world see—every interaction I have with people confirms that this is a unique blend of our business and our calling."

Stephanie Johnson-Brown, OD, executive director of the Plano Development Center in Chicago credits

her success to her Dad's example and says "the passion I have for what I do and what I believe" is key to her success.

This year's Influential Women were chosen from a large pool of nominees named by *VM* readers and in the following pages we profile their accomplishments in these roles:

- **Executive Suite:** Candidates are women who hold positions such as president, VP, CEO, CFO, CMO, CIO or COO that guide their companies forward, inspire leadership among their teams and peers and achieve high performance.
- **Rising Stars:** Candidates are women who are "up-and-comers" in their careers and within their companies or arenas within the industry; sharp talents who are on their way toward higher levels of responsibility and influence.
- **Mentors:** Candidates are women who are team builders, developers of talent, who via example or education and training successfully influence oth-

ers to learn and to grow in their business or professional acumen.

- **Innovators:** Candidates are women who have initiated new product developments or special programs in the arena of marketing, technology or retail, who have spearheaded innovative business ideas or enterprises.

As you read through these profiles, we hope you'll learn something about each of these "Wonder Women" and come to know why we've honored them. They join a distinguished group of more than 400 Influential Women whom we've profiled since 2003.

Join the conversation about these Influential Women and other industry standouts you may know using the hashtag #WonderWomen.

Please visit [www.visionmonday.com](http://www.visionmonday.com) to review an alphabetical listing of past years' honorees and to read prior years' Special Reports. ■

—The Editors



# EXECUTIVE SUITE

WOMEN WHO HOLD POSITIONS SUCH AS PRESIDENT, VP, CEO, CFO, CIO, OR COO

## Stephanie Johnson-Brown, OD, MEd

### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Plano Child Development Center  
Co-Owner, Plano Optometrics Ltd.  
Chicago, Illinois

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Her love for children’s vision is what drives her. Stephanie Johnson-Brown, OD works tirelessly to make sure that children can achieve and that vision will not be an obstacle.”



Compassionate service to the community and a driving dedication to children’s vision care have defined Dr. Johnson-Brown’s professional goals for most of her 36 years as a behavioral optometrist in Chicago.

As executive director of the not-for-profit Plano Child Development Center, she strives to provide inner city children with the behavioral vision therapy they need to succeed in life, whether or not they can pay. She recently presented at the International Conference on Behavioral Optometry in Birmingham, England; her topic, “Methods to Address the Visual Needs of a Large Urban Low Income Population,” was based on her own life’s work.

Dr. Johnson-Brown is the current president of the National Optometric Association (NOA), whose mission is to advance the visual health of minority populations. She received the NOA’s Founder’s Award and was named NOA’s 2011 Optometrist of the Year. Awards aside, Dr. Johnson-Brown is most proud of being able to provide “world class vision therapy treatments to patients that are unable to afford it. To see the lives of many of the patients changed as a result of the vision therapy has been very rewarding.”

Following in the footsteps of her optometrist father and mentor, the late Dr. Robert Johnson, optometry was a natural career path for Dr. Johnson-Brown who worked in her dad’s office in high school. She credits her successful career to her dad’s example

and “the passion I have for what I do and what I believe,” along with her ability to see the big picture and to be a visionary.

**SHE SAYS...** “Service is not what you receive, it’s what you give.”

## Kate Doerksen

### FOUNDER AND CEO

DITTO.com  
San Francisco, California

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Kate and her team are leading the way for how consumers will most probably be buying eyeglasses in the future.”



Kate Doerksen says she’s always had the entrepreneurial spirit. She sold her sister’s clothes at school. She started a basketball camp in her family’s Evansville, Ind. driveway. Basketball led her to Ball

State, where she was recruited to play and where she launched an online recruiting platform for men’s and women’s college basketball. The WNBA drafted her for the Connecticut Suns, where she stayed for a “very short career.”

But ultimately, Doerksen was drawn to New York City and the business world. She started as a Citigroup M&A financial analyst following retail companies, later moving to a Chicago private equity firm. But she was driven to be operational. At Stanford University’s business school, and its high-powered Silicon Valley environment, she connected with a high-tech engineer and search expert. The team developed a revolutionary new approach to gathering and analyzing data to formulate a 3D Try-On fitting tool, which became the basis for creating a “ditto,” the replica of an anatomical image of an individual’s face for DITTO.com.

The site, which Doerksen founded at age 28, now works with some 40 eyewear brands and has also just launched a new “Personal Shop” quiz to help consumers sort through style choices and DITTO will start

testing in-store kiosks in 2015. Last month, the e-commerce site received \$5 million in additional funding from August Capital and strategic partner, National Vision, Inc.

**SHE SAYS...** “Women in the workplace can be self-conscious. But be 100 percent confident. Know your strengths and weaknesses and stop caring so much about what everyone else thinks. Slow down, speak articulately and with conviction. Raise your hand to run that project and lead that team.”

## Celia de Lourdes Feliciano, OD

### OWNER

Vision 4 You  
Santa Isabel, Puerto Rico

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Dr. Feliciano has given optometry the position it deserves, fiercely backing the therapeutics bill. She has given all of us the pride and the willpower to keep on learning and making ourselves better doctors.”



As president of the Puerto Rico Optometric Association, Dr. Feliciano strives to increase recognition for the excellent vision care provided by the organization’s 500 member optometrists. She is leading efforts to change Puerto Rico’s Optometry law to allow optometrists to prescribe therapeutic drugs to treat ocular diseases as they do in the states.

As ocular primary care doctors, she believes optometrists can work together with ophthalmologists to provide the full range of services that will benefit patients. Changing the law, she said, “will provide the professional justice that we deserve because we have the knowledge and the desire to serve with a full scope of practice.”

Dr. Feliciano chaired the 2013 “Health for All Puerto Rico” forum that addressed new solutions for

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islandwide health care reform, promoting the importance of children's eye exams. During her tenure, the Optometric Association began a weekly radio show about vision topics and sponsored a contest for World Sight Day asking children to draw pictures showing how important vision is to their lives.

After 24 years in the profession, Dr. Feliciano believes optometry is "a beautiful career because an optometrist can help you see children smile and the colors of a rainbow, and enjoy the wonders of life." She said, "Every day you also see more women leading optometric associations, doing research, teaching at optometry schools, etc. Optometry gives us the opportunity to be part of the world of science."

**SHE SAYS...** "All the efforts to change Puerto Rico's Optometric law, the time taken for continuing education and learning new technology, all of this is done thinking about how this benefits my patients."

## Melody Healy

**SVP, CHIEF STRATEGY & INTEGRATION OFFICER**

VSP Vision Care  
Rancho Cordova, California

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Melody is a leader both inside and outside of VSP. She has moved initiatives forward that help doctors, consumers and other companies in the industry."



Melody Healy brought a diverse and successful background to Vision Service Plan (VSP) when she first joined the managed vision care company 18 years ago. Healy attended CSU-Sacramento, studying accounting and marketing and knew she wanted to use her finance knowledge to shape businesses.

Her first job was in the workman's comp space. She

went on to work for the owner of a private health care trust and eventually became a partner in the business. Healy then moved to Anthem Health and through contacts there, heard about an opportunity at VSP.

Healy was able to work with VSP's large strategic customers and as the market got more complex, she realized there was a need for customized programs which in turn led to the creation of a product development/management process. Healy was then promoted to VP of product strategy for VSP and in January she moved to her current role reporting to the division's president, Jim McGrann.

Healy describes her goals as "making sure VSP Vision Care and our resources are working on the highest priority projects. Our business units for customer care, eyecare delivery, product and underwriting report to me and we make sure they're supporting all the market-facing businesses."

Early on, Healy recalls, "I was the only woman in the room. But now we're seeing more women break through in executive roles." She's had great mentors,

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citing Kate Renwick-Espinosa, VSP's chief marketing officer and McGrann as inspirations.

**SHE SAYS...** "You have to be a lifetime learner; you have to want to increase your knowledge and bring something to the table. Define what's important to you and don't let anything stop you from pursuing that."

## April Jasper, OD, FAAO

### OWNER

Vision Source/Advanced Eyecare Specialists  
West Palm Beach, Florida

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Co-Professional Editor of *Women in Optometry*, Vision Source administrator, and frequent speaker and consultant to the profession on practice management and clinical issues."



In addition to owning and running a thriving practice in West Palm Beach, Fla., April Jasper, OD, FAAO, spends a great deal of time at the lecture podium, sharing her vast knowledge of both practice management and clinical issues with colleagues around the country. She serves on the advisory board of Vision Source, for which she has been an administrator for the past seven years, organizing activities in her region.

Over the past year, she has presented a series of "Practices of Distinction" programs for Vision Source members in various metro areas, based on her concept that there are six key areas in which a practice must demonstrate excellence in order to rise above the competition. She also is involved in organized optometry, having been vice president of the Florida Optometric Association and having served nationally on the AOA Third Party Committee.

Most recently, Jasper was named Benedict Professor, College of Optometry at the University of Houston. Jasper advises other women in the profession: "Be open to hearing more about opportunities in life

and not too quick to say no, especially if you are afraid. Women's influence in optometry will depend entirely on their willingness to "lean in," as described in Sheryl Sandberg's book *Lean In*."

**SHE SAYS...** "The optical business is one of the best in the world because we are given the opportunity to make people see. What a gift to be able to change peoples' lives every day with everything we do."

## Alexis McLaughlin

### SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT AND GENERAL MANAGER

Target Optical, a Division of Luxottica  
Mason, Ohio

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "A role model for hundreds of women, Alexis has day-to-day influence in every brand location via her commitment to engage the field teams with store visits."



Following years of marketing experience with other household brands, Alexis McLaughlin joined Pearle Vision as director of marketing in 2009 and became Target Optical's senior director, product and planning in 2012. In her current role, she has set and led the strategic vision and direction for Target Optical's 346 stores and approximately 1,350 associates across the U.S. "To be an effective leader and mom, you have to give up some control and ask for help from others," she said.

She further advises women: "Be bold, curious, fearless and confident. The optical industry is changing and women have an opportunity to influence not only the quality of care but also the perception of the industry. Make every decision with the patient/customer in mind. Find the right balance."

She sees more women in leadership roles in the

industry. "Women are frequently the health care decision makers in their household and seek affordable, convenient options, which means that accessibility to convenient care is going to be increasingly important for eyecare providers," she said. "The majority of optometry school students today are women. They will look for practice models that provide flexibility and security."

**SHE SAYS...** "Speak the truth, even when it would be easier not to. Achieve success by motivating people to move the business forward."

## Karoline L. Munson, OD

### PRESIDENT-ELECT

Kentucky Optometric Association  
Frankfort, Kentucky

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Dr. Munson is committed to promoting and advancing access to eyecare in Kentucky. She is a great leader for optometry who wants her colleagues to become more involved in the profession."



Karoline L. Munson, OD, has worked in the industry for 22 years, starting at the office of her hometown OD as a teenager. Munson then worked for the IU School of Optometry in the billing department during optometry school, and after graduation, started at the Frankfort Vision Center in 2001, which she purchased in 2003. A member of the AOA and Kentucky Optometric Association, Munson earned her ABO Diplomate status in 2014, was awarded the KOA Presidential Award in 2014, the KOA Young Optometrist of the Year in 2006, and has been awarded the Kentucky Colonel twice. She is now the president-elect of the Kentucky Optometric Association.

"My biggest strength is my ability to communicate with a diverse patient population. Everyone needs to understand their eyes, and even the most technical conditions can be made easier to understand."

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Munson credits her success to her ability to multi-task. “All things are ultimately my responsibility to manage. I excel at what I do because I have the ‘want to’ factor. I want things to be successful and have a positive outcome, so I work my hardest to see that the desired outcome comes to fruition.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Women can apply their innate mothering skills in a way that will benefit patients, whether it be compassionately listening to a problem, juggling many treatment scenarios or simply trying to figure out a tough multifocal fit.”

## Julie A. Schornack, OD, MEd

### VICE PRESIDENT OF CLINICAL AFFAIRS

Marshall B. Ketchum University  
Southern California College of Optometry  
Fullerton, California

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Dr. Schornack is responsible for clinic operations at the University Eye Center at Southern California College of Optometry at MBKU and she holds leadership roles in state and local optometric organizations.”



Dr Schornack’s distinguished career has been devoted to the education and training of optometric students, the doctors and future leaders of the profession. A graduate of Illinois College of Optometry, she joined the faculty at Southern California College of Optometry in 1986. She became director of clinical education in 1993, associate dean for clinical education in 2003, and in 2010, was named vice president of clinical affairs with oversight for campus and off site clinical operations.

Responsible for the strategic direction of SCCO’s training clinics, Dr. Schornack’s goal is to provide stu-

dents with a rich and diverse clinical experience. She tells her students, “What differentiates the good from the great is carefully listening to the needs of the patient and always operating in their best interest.”

As an educator and leader within state and local optometric groups, one of her greatest challenges is to motivate people to embrace and deal with change productively. “Health care has constantly shifting sands,” said Dr. Schornack. “Inspiring people to embrace these changes and move forward requires clear communication with some gentle shoving and motivation toward the desired outcome.”

“Come to the table with self confidence and do not be afraid to work for the principles that you believe are important. If you identify a problem, be sure to also come with a solution.”

**SHE SAYS...** “I am grateful to the amazing mentors that I have had over the years. They all pushed me to do things that were beyond what I thought I could do myself.”

# RISING STARS

WOMEN WHO ARE 'UP-AND-COMERS' IN THEIR CAREERS AND COMPANIES

## Kirsten E. Albrecht, OD

**DIRECTOR OF PROFESSIONAL SERVICES FOR ACQUISITIONS**

MyEyeDr

Kannapolis, North Carolina

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Kirsten works with ODs in newly acquired practices over a large geographic area to integrate them into a new practice modality for MyEyeDr. She is an important first point of contact for many established ODs as they transition from ownership to working for a large regional practice."



Having run two eyecare practices in North Carolina, Kirsten Albrecht, OD knows a thing or two about keeping one eye on patient care and the other on the business side. "When I started in Concord in 2002, I was one of the first female optometrists practicing, so in the beginning I was met with trust issues. My patient base grew after I earned that trust, which I did by listening, being an educator and building a relationship that kept them coming back," she said.

In 2013, Albrecht decided to merge with MyEyeDr and was promoted to her current position as MyEyeDr's head of professional services in September of 2014. Today, she oversees acquisitions in all of their regions spanning Maryland, Virginia, D.C., North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia, developing and implementing custom tailored integration plans while preserving and promoting the MyEyeDr OD culture.

"Having gone through the integration process personally, I am able to serve as a mentor and advisor to new ODs during the transition, able to address individual concerns, and provide feedback to our operational divisions to ensure protocols that are constantly evolving and improving.

**SHE SAYS...** "Determine what you love to do most and prioritize/search out the right path to make it happen. Don't be afraid to change if you aren't

getting led down the path you thought you were. Make decisions that you can stand on because you researched and made the decision, not because you have used conclusions from others."

## Deirdre Carroll

**SENIOR EDITOR, SOCIAL MEDIA DIRECTOR**

Vision Monday

New York, New York

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Dee's creativity in *VM*'s coverage of frames and sunwear brings new perspective to readers, online and in print. Her style and her 'eye' has raised *VM*'s profile among the fashion eyewear companies and retailers in the U.S. and abroad."



With a B.A. from Lehigh University, Deirdre Carroll's keen interest in fashion led to an A.A.S. Cum Laude degree in fashion merchandising management from New York's Fashion Institute of Technology. She did editorial work at *YM Magazine* and *Family Circle* and for a brief time in corporate PR before joining *VM* in 2006.

Carroll interviews designers, executives and celebrities around the world. She conceived *VM*'s successful trend-spotting *Style.Pages*, its popular *Check.Out*, and each week's *Bold Face* celebrity eyewear web posts. Carroll reports news for *VMail* and oversees and writes *VMail ProductWatch*. She's tackled cover stories ranging from last month's "FrameWorks" article to architecting the retailing excellence "D.A.R.E Awards," the "A Day in the Life" project and more.

She will be editor of *VM*'s Millennial Project, a year-long print, web and live event series, part of a Jobson 2015 editorial initiative with sister pub, *20/20 Magazine*. Carroll also established and manages *VM*'s social media, including ideas like the #VMSpirit campaigns.

"I enjoy my job and have the pleasure of working

with some of the best, most knowledgeable people in the industry, who inspire me to raise the bar," she said.

**SHE SAYS...** "Seek out opportunities that excite you. Success is easier when there is passion behind your actions. If you don't get what you want the first time, figure out why, and keep plugging away until you get there."

## Erin O'Fallon

**DIRECTOR OF VENDOR RELATIONS**

SportRx, LLC

San Diego, California

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Erin meets with vendors and determines key product assortments. She makes educated decisions based on what's best for focused business growth within SportRx, which hopes to double its revenue in the next two to three years."



Erin O'Fallon, who's been in the optical business since 2003, felt like she found a home when she stepped through the doors of SportRx some 12 years ago. Starting out as a filing temp, O'Fallon quickly learned the ins and outs of the online Southern-California-based company which specializes in custom prescription sunglasses and prescription snow goggles for athletes in virtually every sport. "Being an athlete growing up, and as someone who needed glasses most of my life I felt like this is exactly where I was supposed to be."

O'Fallon earned her ABO certification in 2008, and she is currently studying for her advanced certification. As director of vendor relations for SportRx, she coordinates all communication between current and prospective vendors and manages those relationships. "I do all the buying and inventory management which covers about 30 different brands," she said. "I was fortunate enough to start my optical career with a very unique

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company, who fits patients virtually over the internet or via phone for their optical needs. We help people see better doing the things they love.

"I feel like I work in a very unique position. I am a buyer, and work very closely with reps and companies, but I'm also an optician. I've definitely noticed more women stepping into management positions, and men stepping into the optician role. So there is definitely a shift happening."

**SHE SAYS...** "Glasses have a way of changing how people view themselves. There is no better feeling than that of confidence. When you feel good about yourself and your appearance and can see the world clearly, anything is possible."

## Gilda Mehraban

**DIRECTOR OF BRAND MANAGEMENT**

REM Eyewear  
Sun Valley, California

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Gilda's ability to connect with her team members and motivate them to uphold the values of REM is remarkable. She's highly intelligent and goes above and beyond to make sure REM is successful."



If you ask Gilda Mehraban she'll tell you glasses are a lot more fun than law. "My background is in law with an emphasis in marketing. Prior to coming to REM, I worked in licensing with celebrity properties, but I've been in the eyewear industry for a little over three years now. I am inspired by the fact that I can go to work every day, be 100 percent authentic and have fun while accomplishing my goals," she said.

As director of brand management at REM, she oversees all branding and marketing initiatives for the company's brands domestically and internationally.

Launching new brands also plays a big part of her role at REM. "In 2011, I helped REM launch Tumi Eyewear and I've been driving the 2015 launch of Jonathan Adler Eyewear, which is really exciting and something I'm very proud of. I've always loved fashion, so having the opportunity to establish and contribute to the growth of brands was appealing to me," Mehraban added.

"I also enjoy having access to a sneak peek of our brands' new collections, the product direction and getting a heads-up on future trends. One of the things that I love is my ability to directly impact our business. I get to establish sales and marketing strategies that get results and show up throughout our sales around the world," she concluded.

**SHE SAYS...** "The optical industry is filled with wonderful, warm, smart people. Maintaining good relationships is one of the most important aspects and I think everyone will gain when we add more fabulous women into the mix."

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# RISING STARS

WOMEN WHO ARE 'UP-AND-COMERS' IN THEIR CAREERS AND COMPANIES

## Amanda Nanasy, OD

### DIRECTOR OF OPTOMETRY

The Eye Center  
Pembroke Pines, Florida

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Amanda is truly a role model. She is a director for IDOC, a great optometrist and a mentor to the interns at her office."



Sports vision is a major focus for Amanda Nanasy, OD. Her interest in the specialty was ignited while doing research involving baseball and vision training as an optometric student at Nova Southeastern University. Graduating from NSU in 2010, she was the first Stuey Award winner for Student of the Year from the School of Optometry.

Today, Nanasy is a member director for IDOC (Independent Doctors of Optometric Care) covering the central/south Florida area. She is also part of the High Performance Vision Associates "A Team"—a national group of sports vision specialists that provide vision testing at sports events around the country. She has also screened LPGA players and NASCAR's Hendrix Racing team, and is a team optometrist for the Miami Dolphins and for NSU Athletics.

Nanasy's professional goal is to be an "approachable health care provider" who encourages patients to ask questions. "I love seeing very young children that are very timid when I walk in the room, and are smiling on their way out to the front desk."

Nanasy believes optometry is a great profession for women to succeed both professionally and in their personal lives. "Be passionate in everything you do. It's 100 percent possible to be an amazing mom and wife when you're with your family, but to be at your best professionally, you have to be there for your patients when you are at work."

SHE SAYS... "My patients inspire me. Such as the aspiring athlete that is working for a baseball scholarship that I can make 20/20 for the first time, improving his batting average and his odds of going to college."

## Heidi Schwitzer

### SALES DIRECTOR

Zig Eyewear USA  
Madison, Wisconsin

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Heidi is responsible for sales and the sales staff at Zig and is leading the brand from a little known line into a nationally recognized designer brand."



It has taken Heidi Schwitzer 25 years to become a "Rising Star" but that time was put to phenomenal use. She began her optical career in 1989 as a sales rep for Tura, a long and fruitful tenure that set the foundation for her current role as sales director for Zig.

"In December 2012, I was recruited to join Zig Eyewear USA as their sales director. The position was brand new and created just for me," said Schwitzer. "That means I got to forge my own path and really make a difference in how we sell, build our brand image and grow the company."

"I'm responsible for a team of 14 national sales representatives. Since I've become the sales director for this growing company, I'm proud to say we've doubled our business in 12 months. I also have my own accounts that I travel to see continually and that's one of my favorite parts of the job."

Another favorite? "I love the product that I sell and enjoy introducing accounts to a line that not only provides a way to grow their business, but excites them about offering artistic eyewear to their own customers."

"On the brand management side, I'm in charge of creating fun promotions for my reps and I also develop our marketing and ad campaigns. I need to have fun

every day in my job, and I want my reps, my coworkers and my customers to live that philosophy, too."

SHE SAYS... "The optical industry is changing very quickly. I've always said my career is like a roller coaster. To survive, you must be adaptable and anticipate the next big thing."

## Kelly P. Smoyer

### MARKETING DIRECTOR

Essilor Laboratories of America  
Dallas, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "She is a true thought leader and can make positive changes to any environment and any organization she serves."



After majoring in communications in college, Kelly Smoyer started her career in the wireless industry. As a 20-year marketing professional, she has held leadership positions across all marketing disciplines including consumer, product, B-to-B, channel and strategy. Since joining Essilor in 2006, she has held critical marketing positions with increasing responsibilities from Definity brand manager and Varilux associate director to her current role as director of marketing for Essilor Labs.

She enjoys working with the diverse teams within the Essilor lab organization, which include many people who grew up in the lab business. "I get to tap into their knowledge, test their ideas and get practical implementation," she said.

Smoyer believes her strengths as a manager include an ability to "distill complex ideas into tangible solutions combined with the professional relationships that help me take those ideas to outcomes." During eight years in the optical industry, Smoyer has seen women rise to become equal to men. "I see people coming out of optometry school, working and changing the industry. It's a great industry for women to grow and thrive." She adds that women can be effective when they can bring out the qualities of a

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product that resonate with patients, and help find customized solutions to their needs.

As a member of the OWA, Smoyer likes helping other women advance their optical careers. She advises, “come to the table prepared to learn, to team, to work, to have a perspective and to keep to your convictions.”

**SHE SAYS...** “As Bill Gates noted, ‘business is a game.’ Understanding how to keep score, build a strong team and create a winning tradition drives me daily to seek opportunities for improvement.”

## Katie Gilbert-Spear, OD, MPH

### OWNER

Sight and Sun Eyeworks  
Pensacola, Florida

CHOSEN BECAUSE... She owns a multi-location

practice with specialty services for vision therapy and vision rehabilitation. Co-edits *Women in Optometry* magazine, and shares her business knowledge consulting to practices.



Katie Gilbert-Spear, OD, MPH, owns Sight and Sun Eyeworks, a four-location practice in Pensacola, Fla., along with her husband, Carl Spear, OD, FAAO. Gilbert-Spear admits to being “passionate and goal-oriented.” One recent achievement is the opening of a Visual Performance Center—where patients of all ages work with ODs and vision therapists to improve learning skills and maximize sports performance. The center also realizes often dramatic successes with low-vision patients and patients recovering from traumatic brain injuries affecting vision and perception.

Gilbert-Spear is delighted to share learnings from the process of running and growing a multi-location

practice. She consults to other practices and is co-professional editor of *Women in Optometry*, which conducts live networking events for women ODs at major professional meetings.

When it comes to inspiration she says, “My husband is my biggest fan and a great mentor. He supports me in everything I do and pushes me to go outside my comfort zone. My children and employees inspire me every day to set an example that they can be proud of and hopefully follow.

“By 2020, women will comprise the majority of practicing ODs. We now see women in key leadership roles, and those opportunities will continue to expand. Seek out other women and learn from them,” she advises. “There are so many practice modalities as our field continues to expand. Decide what you want out of this profession and make it a reality.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Take care of the patient, and the patient will take care of the practice.”

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# RISING STARS

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## Captain Lauren Joy Stone, OD

### ASSOCIATE OPTOMETRIST

Drs. Foster, Steele and Stone  
Newport, Tennessee  
McGhee Tyson Air National Guard Base  
Tennessee Air National Guard

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "She is the first female Captain OD at McGhee Tyson Air Force National Guard. Everyone that knows her listens to her."



Captain Joy Stone, OD is excelling in both private practice and in the military as the first female optometrist-captain at McGhee Tyson Air National Guard Base in Tennessee. In civilian life, Stone works with a three-doctor practice that she joined in 2010 after graduating from Southern College of Optometry. She helped the practice achieve record growth in her first year there, introducing early morning hours to accommodate third shift workers in the community.

Stone's military career began in 1999 when she joined the Tennessee Air National Guard and performed as a vocalist and instrumentalist with the Air National Guard Band of the Smokey Mountains (now Band of the South). In 2012, she began practicing as an optometrist at McGhee Tyson Air National Guard Base. Her optometric mission is to help ensure the military readiness of Tennessee Guardsmen.

Stone said her greatest challenge is maintaining a balance between her professional responsibilities and her family, including her three-year-old son and her husband who is also in the Air National Guard. As a working mom and optometrist, she has a knack for getting even uncooperative children to respond positively during their eye exams, setting the stage for future success. She credits her ability to connect with patients to her personal philosophy based on the 3 Cs: Competency, Commitment and Compassion.

Stone's advice to women in optical: "Have a plan,

for yourself, for your personal future and for your career, but be flexible, as things do not always go as planned. The unplanned events are sometimes the greatest opportunities!"

SHE SAYS... "Every opportunity is a learning experience. Education is a lifelong process."

## Heather Suggitt

### SOCIAL MEDIA AND PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGER

Vision Source  
Kingwood, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "She is the face of Vision Source's more than 5,000 doctors."



About 20 years ago, Heather Suggitt realized her talent as a writer when she was published in the Houston Chronicle and some other national publications. She learned to push the envelope, knock on

doors, and take it to the streets in the restaurant business. In the past five years, taking it to the streets transitioned into "putting it out there" on social media, which is her current role with Vision Source. "One of the aspects that I love about social media is that there is an instant report card—engagement—that allows me to know with each post if I am successful," she said. "My greatest challenge is managing content. There is too much content and too little time!"

Intrigued by the optical field and Vision Source, she said, "The ability to embrace vision and turn it into style and something fun is the message that I like to convey through social media."

She advises women that "The optical business has unlimited opportunities for women. From office staff to optometrists, the sky is the limit. I haven't seen a glass ceiling or gender discrimination as in some other industries." She feels that women can bring a unique perspective to any industry. "Women demand fashion and are shoppers. Many are working moms and

make most eyecare decisions for the family," she said. "As an industry, we need to find new ways to cater to women as well as create more eye health awareness."

SHE SAYS... "This is one of my favorite Steve Jobs quotes: 'Here's to the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, the round pegs in the square holes...because the ones who are crazy enough to think that they can change the world are the ones who do.'"

## Barbara Vitchus

### GENERAL MANAGER

Global Optics, Inc.  
Green Bay, Wisconsin

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Barbara has brought her knowledge and experiences to Global Optics, and has developed the company into a major player within the optical supply chain."



With 22 years of experience in supply chain logistics, including positions as CFO and VP/general manager in other industries, Barbara Vitchus brought exactly the skill set required to take over

as general manager at Global Optics three years ago. In this role, she oversees operations for the company, which provides logistics solutions, consolidated purchasing power and product distribution support for its independent optical lab members.

Unlike buying groups, Barbara points out that Global Optics has its own warehouse and distribution network. To appreciate the scope of her job, consider that Global Optics warehouses over 165,000 SKUs of optical lens materials and designs from 22 lens manufacturers. Its 34,000 square foot distribution center ships products daily not only to 65 member lab locations but also to its members' customers as well.

Communications are key to the success of this large-scale operation. Vitchus meets regularly with product vendors to identify new solutions to keep the

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# RISING STARS

WOMEN WHO ARE 'UP-AND-COMERS' IN THEIR CAREERS AND COMPANIES

supply chain running smoothly and to negotiate the best pricing for members. When a new product is introduced, she and her team develop distribution plans and computer ordering systems to ensure a smooth launch. "I am a problem solver. As the leader of a great team, I hope I have learned when to get out of their way. Let people work to their strengths."

She believes the optical industry is a great place for a woman just starting or in mid-career. "The opportunities are endless."

**SHE SAYS...** "I'm inspired by the emotional high of knowing that what you do makes a difference."

## Gina M. Wesley OD, MS, FAAO

### OWNER

Complete Eye Care of Medina  
Medina, Minnesota

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Gina is a DIY force in learning how to grow an optometric practice from scratch in her small-town community. Her ability as a communicator and influencer of other emerging OD owners is impressive."



Gina M. Wesley, OD, MS, FAAO, graduated in 2006 from The Ohio State University with both her OD and Master's Degree in vision science. She started as an employed OD, and just a year and a half after graduating, opened her own practice and obtained her Fellowship with the AAO.

Her practice concentrates on primary care, contact lenses and children's eyecare. Wesley also participates in clinical research trials. She's been an active member of the AOA and her state affiliate, the MOA, since she was a student. Other industry involvement includes publishing and lecturing on a variety of practice topics and business, as well as serving as an advi-

sor for many ophthalmic companies. Awards include Minnesota's Young Optometrist of the Year in 2011 and the Early Professional Achievement Award in 2013 from Ohio State.

"I've been interested in optometry since I got my first pair of glasses at age 8," Wesley said. "It just seemed like such a great thing, being able to help people see clearly and protect their eye health. I truly care to take the time with each patient and figure out what it is that would help him or her visually. I then allow each patient to make educated decisions based on my recommendations, as each patient needs to know and understand in order to be fully engaged with their optical purchases."

**SHE SAYS...** "Women will recognize what the major purchasers and health decision makers in families want and seek value in the delivery of eyecare products and services. We will listen, and we will execute what our patients desire in eyecare."

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## Kristin Ellsworth

### FOUNDER AND CEO

Peeps Eyewear  
Madison, Wisconsin

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She not only founded a children’s frame company; she’s authored a book, “Princesses Wear Glasses,” published a book, “Glasses, A Board Book,” and advocates for children’s vision, as well as being the co-founder of Great Glasses Play Day.”



“I started my business six years ago, when my daughter was 4,” said Kristin Ellsworth. “She had been prescribed glasses but refused to wear them because ‘Princesses don’t wear glasses!’

From that instant, I was determined to create a fun, new way for children to experience their first pair of glasses and Peeps Eyewear was born.

“Two of my very first mentors were Leslie and Richard Morgenthal,” she added. “I shared my dream to empower children to feel good about wearing glasses and increase awareness of early childhood vision health and she and Richard have encouraged me to never be afraid to ask for help from people in the optical industry.”

Despite the help, Ellsworth still has challenges. “My biggest challenge is communicating to parents the importance of investing in a good pair of glasses and proper service even when budgets are tight. There’s no substitution for proper fit, professionally measured pupillary distance and quality lenses.”

But she sees hope on the horizon. “In my six short years, I have noticed an increase in the number of women becoming doctors of optometry and leaders in retail. My experience with women mentorship has been very positive and involved lots of collaboration and support. I’ve seen many women who are concerned about vision health support each other, through the Optical Women’s Association (OWA) and elsewhere.”

SHE SAYS... “I would encourage women interested in a career in the optical industry to join the OWA right away. Work on identifying their strengths and weaknesses and don’t be afraid to ask for help. Be patient, don’t give up and have fun.”

## Mary Rose Jaszczynski

### BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

ClearVision Optical  
Biltmore Lake, North Carolina

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Mary Rose has a keen eye for style and has her finger on the pulse of customer needs. She is known for her mentorship and level-headed approach to delivering sales excellence.”



Mary Rose Jaszczynski has enjoyed a long and successful career in the optical industry starting in the 1980s as a sales rep for Neostyle. In 1996, she transitioned into sales management and in 1998 she joined ClearVision Optical as regional sales manager for the Western region. In 2007, Jaszczynski moved into her current position as business development manager where she works primarily with buying groups and associations to create more meaningful and profitable partnerships.

As part of the ClearVision management team Jaszczynski trains sales consultants and sales managers, and works closely with the marketing department and David Friedfeld, president of the company. “I am very proud of the reputation that I have built and equally proud of the reputation that ClearVision and the Friedfeld family have built over the past 66 years. I am fortunate to work for a company that shares my values and vision,” she said.

Jaszczynski feels there are many opportunities for women in optical “without the typical glass ceilings and limitations based on gender that exist in other industries. Basically, the sky is the limit,” she said.

“Eyewear has changed from a corrective necessity

to a fashion accessory with almost limitless choices for the optical consumer. The creativity and innovation continues to inspire me and the career opportunities are still excellent, particularly for women. If you love fashion and business, optical is a perfect environment.”

And what does she love most about her job? “It allows me to interact with people I’ve known for decades while exploring new possibilities.”

SHE SAYS... “Maya Angelou said, ‘I have learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.’”

## Kate Monahan

### NATIONAL SALES TRAINER

VSP Optics Group  
Sacramento, California

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She energizes her sales team and has a deep commitment to excellence, which inspires everyone around her.”



Kate Monahan’s roots at VSP Optics Group run deep. Her father, Robert Monahan, was a friend of John O’Donnell, the company’s first CEO. He became the first sales consultant for VSP, then

known as California Vision Service (CVS). “My greatest mentor was my father,” she said. “He passionately and honestly represented this industry, his customers’ needs and his peers with great integrity.”

Monahan began working at CVS herself in 1978, while still in high school. “It felt natural to me, since I had been exposed to the company’s culture by attending company picnics and other events. I grew up a VSP brat,” she joked.

Three years later, Monahan left to become an optician at a Sacramento optometric practice. She remembers a formative experience there. “I dispensed a pair of -6.50 glasses to a young woman. She was speechless. She stood up and walked to the window with tears roll-

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ing down her face. She realized she hadn't really seen the world before that day."

Monahan mastered her dispensing skills and then joined a multi-location practice. After working outside the industry, she rejoined VSP in 2000. Since then, she has worked in customer care, lab sales, network recruiter and provider education, national sales training and education for VSP Vision Care, national sales training and development VSP Optics Group.

As head of sales training, Monahan "onboards" new employees as part of "VSP Boot Camp." She draws on her deep and broad experience with the company to impart its key values and history.

**SHE SAYS...** "I am inspired whenever I share learning with someone who then applies it, makes a difference and then passes it along to another for the same."

## La Jeanne Niles, ABOC

### DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Carl Zeiss Vision  
Lewisville, Texas

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "She always goes a step beyond her job to cultivate and grow her team and others."



La Jeanne Niles is a senior level sales executive with many years of experience in national account sales, marketing and management. She is currently responsible for managing key accounts and key account managers for Carl Zeiss Vision. Her colleagues credit her with being innovative in her approach to mentoring and managing employees, and fostering "an environment of communication that enables those she influences to achieve their highest potential."

"I've been in the optical industry all my life," said Niles. "I started my career in a small optical lab in Tulsa, Okla., then worked as a dispensing optician for Drs. Berenson and Cope before working at Zeiss." In her 22 years at Zeiss she has held a variety of positions, and is currently working in the retail managed care channel. She has also been active in industry organizations, having served on the board of directors for the NAVCP (National Association for Vision Care Providers) for three years and NASHO (National Association of Specialty Health Organization) for two years.

Niles credits several industry veterans with mentoring and influencing her: John Potocny, Jim Bunnelle and the late Bill Benedict. "Each one invested in me and contributed greatly to who I am today. I have also learned a great deal from the customers I have managed over the years, some strong women who have also influenced me greatly."

**SHE SAYS...** "I believe that it is important to give back. I have been a member of VOSH for the last

*More* →

20 years. Each year, we travel to a third-world country and perform eye exams and give new glasses to the poorest of the poor. We not only provide vision—we change people's lives."

## Debby Bauer-Robertson, ABO, NCLE

### LICENSED OPTICIAN

Ruff Eyes/Jeanne I Ruff, OD, LLC  
Williamsburg, Virginia

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Debby is passionate about opticianry. She is generous with her knowledge and skills. She is committed to raising the bar for opticians through mentorship and education."



From working part-time in an optical office while in high school to becoming president of the Virginia Opticians Association, Debby Bauer-Robertson's career trajectory has been fueled by a passion for her profession. As a teen, Bauer-Robertson worked for Dr. Stanley Jason, who recognized her talent for interacting with patients. She learned to help people insert contact lenses and was fascinated watching the optician fabricate eyeglasses. "I was hooked and have enjoyed helping people to see more clearly ever since," she said.

With over 35 years of experience, Bauer-Robertson loves being an optician because "we are rewarded every day by providing the gift of better vision." She remembers the first time she made eyeglasses for a child. "His mother called to say that her son not only could see, but now realized that "Big Bird" was a yellow bird and not just a yellow moving part on the TV!" Managing the Ruff Eyes dispensary, Bauer-Robertson enjoys helping patients select eyeglasses that complement their coloring and lifestyle preferences, a talent that utilizes her strong people skills and builds patient loyalty.

From 2009 to 2011, she served as president of the

Opticians Association of Virginia, with a strong commitment to education and mentorship. Her emphasis on helping others traces back to her own career mentors, including Robert Flippin and Shelby Powers, and to her family for inspiring her "to always be who I am and never settle for less." Bauer-Robertson encourages women "to become involved in their professional associations, help each other succeed and give back to a profession that has given so much."

**SHE SAYS...** "You can never have enough eyeglasses!"

## Mary Anne Stangby

### SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT AND GENERAL MANAGER

Sears Optical, a division of Luxottica  
Mason, Ohio

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Building and mentoring a great team of leaders to take smart risks that lead to results, she's comfortable handling over responsibility and making everyone feel they are contributing while setting an authentic example for other women."



With 20 years of experience in optical, including well over a decade at the executive level with Luxottica Retail, Mary Anne Stangby was the first female general manager in North American optical brands in Luxottica and won the 2013 Ohio National Diversity Council's Glass Ceiling Award recognizing women and minorities in business who are breaking barriers at the top. She started with Lens-Crafters in a training role, led the training organization for Luxottica North America, moved into store operations for Sunglass Hut, and then led the business and segment development group for Sunglass Hut. In December 2012, she was asked to lead the Sears Optical brand and continues in that role today.

Her advice to women: "It's important to let your perspective be heard. I've seen capable women in business soften their language. We make much better decisions when everyone can fully participate, so dive into the conversation! Mentor others; you learn as much, sometimes more, in that journey."

She observes a stronger presence for women in optical over the last decade. "From the OD and optician community to thought leaders and executives, not only are women simply more present, we are rising to the top of organizations in optical retail and driving change and innovation," she said. "Of the four major Luxottica Retail optical brands in North America, two are led by women. This wasn't the case 10 years ago. It's an exciting change, and we still have room to grow."

**SHE SAYS...** "This industry is about helping the world see—every interaction I have with people in the industry confirms that this is a unique blend of our business and our calling."

## Karen Stotz, ABOC, NCLEC

### EDUCATOR

Pech Optical  
Sioux City, Iowa

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Through her many CE webinars, she has touched many lives with the quest to deepen their own knowledge base in our industry."



Some 36 years ago, Karen Stotz began working as a receptionist in a private optometrist's practice. "While working with and helping patients to see better, and watching the joy of them walking out the door with a new sight on life, so to speak, I fell in love with our industry," she said. "One cannot image the excitement of a patient who has a need and you are able to help give them the desired results that they

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need to simply do daily functions. I was hooked.”

Stotz moved up to managing an ophthalmology practice that had a dispensary. Since joining wholesale lab Pech Optical 20 years ago, she has worked in many different positions, including customer service, to marketing, to quality control, finally becoming a member of Pech Optical’s education department.

Stotz has been instrumental in developing the lab’s internal education curriculum, as well as training employees who work in the surfacing and finish departments, office and customer service. She has helped to develop Pech Optical’s quality assurance department, including implementing auditing procedures. An accredited speaker for both general and technical ABOC and NCLEC, she delivers monthly webinars for the company’s accounts and quarterly ABO webinars for dispensers.

She enjoys the constant swirl of activity that goes on in a large lab like Pech. “There’s never a day when I do the same thing twice. Every day involves something new,” she said.

**SHE SAYS...** “We must maintain the highest level of perfection to provide the best sight possible to satisfy every man, women and child wearing a product of our industry. This is the challenge.”

## Barbara S. Wagner

### MARKETING MANAGER

Santinelli International  
Hauppauge, New York

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “As the daughter of optical pioneer Joe Santinelli, Barbara is immersed in an industry she has passion for, and excels at all levels.”



Santinelli International is indeed a family affair and as marketing manager for the company, Barbara Wagner has been an integral part of the business dynamic for the

last 12 years. Wagner said she was “born and raised in the optical industry. My father, who founded the company when I was young, initially worked from home so when other kids were playing with ABC blocks, we Santinelli kids were playing with lens blocks.”

Today, she oversees the company’s brand development, advertising and promotion, and efforts surrounding the website, social media and public relations. In addition, Wagner orchestrates Santinelli’s involvement surrounding some 25 trade shows and special events, including International Vision Expo, SECO as well as many local and state shows for various organizations.

“I’d like to think I have a good balance of strategic, outcome-focused thinking and come from the creative, ‘unabashed idea’ generation. Thinking outside of the box, remaining enthusiastic and coming up with innovative solutions with actionable plans are all key.

“Being in the optical business allows each of us to improve the sight of millions of Americans which in itself is so rewarding. Each sector plays a role, be it in medical/diagnostic, lenses, equipment or frames. Together, we make a huge difference in people’s every day activities. I never thought I’d love it as much as I do.”

**SHE SAYS...** “It’s a great industry—incorporating medical, technology and fashion, so there are many options within optical to choose from and excel in. Find the one you love—because as the saying goes, ‘choose a job you love and you will never have to work a day in your life.’”

## Karla Zadnik, OD, PhD

### DEAN

The Ohio State University  
College of Optometry  
Columbus, Ohio

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “She is a mentor and an inspiration, always striving to achieve

more and contribute to the advancement of optometry.”



After graduating from the University of California, Berkeley School of Optometry, in 1982, Karla Zadnik, OD, PhD, worked at UC Davis for six years, and then returned to Berkeley for a PhD in physiological optics. Recruited to Ohio State in 1996 as an assistant professor, she is now the dean of the College of Optometry. “I am most proud of my Glenn A. Fry Award from the American Academy of Optometry in 1995, my Mert Flom Teaching Award from Berkeley Optometry in 2011, and being inducted into the National Optometry Hall of Fame in 2014,” Zadnik said.

Zadnik’s accomplishments are many, including chairing the first-ever multicenter study funded by the National Eye Institute (NEI) in optometry, the Collaborative Longitudinal Evaluation of Keratoconus (CLEK) Study; chairing a 20-year, NEI-funded study of risk factors for myopia development—the Collaborative Longitudinal Evaluation of Ethnicity and Refractive Error (CLEERE) Study—which discovered the connection between outdoor activity and myopia onset; advising seven ODs through their PhDs in vision science at Ohio State; and since 2000, chairing the biannual summer research institute, co-funded by the AOA and the American Academy of Optometry, which has resulted in \$78 million in extramural funding for optometric research.

Zadnik takes pride in her role as mentor. “I love seeing people I mentor achieve their potential. I create, encourage, cajole, inspire and motivate. I think I often get the very best out of the people who work with me,” she said.

**SHE SAYS...** “Women will sustain, nurture and develop the optometric profession in ways I can only now just imagine.”

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# INNOVATORS

WOMEN WHO HAVE INITIATED NEW PRODUCTS, PROGRAMS OR IDEAS MARKING SUCCESS

## Laura Askew

### NEW PRODUCTS PROJECT MANAGER

Transitions Optical  
Pinellas Park, Florida

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Her expertise in bringing a product to market and her ability to succinctly distill the key features and benefits of a product make her an integral part of Transitions Optical’s product leadership team.”



Laura Askew has worked in the optical industry for 20 years, all with Transitions Optical. She has served in various capacities, including process engineer, process engineering team leader, product marketing manager, production manager and training manager.

Since 2009, she has been a new products project manager on the company’s product leadership team. Askew is responsible for managing new products from research and development through launch, and working with all appropriate functional teams. She has worked with Transitions Optical’s global marketing team on product tests and clinical trials. Most recently, she was the global project manager for Transitions Signature VII.

“What first attracted me to Transitions Optical was their sense of entrepreneurship and a corporate culture of inclusion,” she said. “The philosophy of having people involved in the work they do and the decisions that affect them really appealed to me. I really didn’t know much about the optical industry back then but the more I’ve learned, the more I want to stay. Our industry offers personalized unique products that allow people to best use their most important sense—sight.”

Askew credits her father with influencing her interest in understanding how things work. “He was the fix-it man around the house. I helped him do a lot of things like tuning up the car, which I really enjoyed.”

Prior to Transitions Optical, Askew worked in manufacturing engineering and product development roles

with Reflectone, Polaroid and Gillette.

SHE SAYS... “Choose to soar with the eagles, even though it’s easier to quack with the ducks.”

## Kristan Gross

### DIRECTOR, CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

Essilor of America, Inc.  
Dallas, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Kristan works closely with her executive team to communicate Essilor’s vision to the eye health industry and consumers. In addition to developing and implementing a clear communications strategy she serves as corporate spokesperson and collaborates regularly with the global corporate communications team of Essilor International.”



Kristan Gross joined the optical industry eight years ago, with a prior background in marketing/public relations/communications that included health care, education and engineering. For the past four years, she has represented Essilor on the Vision Council’s MarComm Committee and was an integral part of the national launch of Think About Your Eyes in 2010. Her U.S. and global communications function spans marketing communications; media relations; public affairs; crisis and reputation management; brand management; content management for internal and external websites and social media channels; and internal communications.

Gross launched an industry-first news center providing media-rich content for reporters, influencers and consumers. From seasonal stories around polarized sunglasses, to broader health stories like “How to Stop a Twitching Eye,” she’s helped establish a digital media presence for Essilor designed to generate positive news coverage and public conversation. The combined corporate and agency team operates like a news

organization, producing five articles per week using internal and external sources, guest bloggers and industry partners.

“I like to believe my strengths lie in being a good storyteller and communicator with a passion to educate others on the importance of vision health. I’m empowered to excel in this area because, along with some 55,000 Essilor employees, I truly embrace the mission of improving lives by improving sight.”

SHE SAYS... “I’ve had opportunities to see the faces of children whose lives were changed by their first pair of glasses, to celebrate wins with Special Olympics athletes—wins that resulted from clear vision. The beautiful smiles brought about by clearly seeing the world are an inspiration to us all.”

## Dawne Hanks

### CHANNEL MARKETING MANAGER

Oakley Inc.  
Foothill Ranch, California

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She’s taken a brand synonymous with men and developed it into one that is now successfully marketed to women. She believes in the power of women and does everything to drive that belief forward.”



“I got started by accident—not only was I unfamiliar with the optical industry, I had never heard of Oakley,” admitted Dawne Hanks. “An opportunity presented itself to work here because of Becky Wilkinson and I fell in love with the challenge of a category few other people were familiar with. I was able to learn, build and discover so much because she saw something in me that I didn’t.”

At Oakley, Hanks has since created go-to-market strategies across multiple categories and when the company identified the need to connect with their best accounts and the industry in a stronger way, she was integral to the process. “We created an alternative to

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# INNOVATORS

WOMEN WHO HAVE INITIATED NEW PRODUCTS, PROGRAMS OR IDEAS MARKING SUCCESS

trade shows by producing a large scale brand immersion event focused on top accounts that generated an additional \$2.5 million in revenue in 2013," she said.

She also turned an internal presentation into a national speaking tour on women's shopping and buying habits which contributed to 38 percent growth of the women's category over the prior year.

"Women in this industry inspire me every day," she added. "I spent years learning from them and they've helped me find my voice and passion. Without that, I would never have found my mission—to building a culture of strong women who stand up, speak out, promote and uplift other women so we can all become agents for change."

**SHE SAYS...** "This industry, though vast, is still really small and familial. You have to be kind, supportive and curious about everyone you meet. You never know what exciting opportunities will come your way because of the relationships you build."

## Cindy Hussey

### FOUNDER

Velvet Eyewear  
New York, New York

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Cindy is the rainmaker at Velvet Eyewear. Her ideas drive the team to build a benchmark company. In just three years, she has taken an exceptional 'must-have' product to market and pioneered marketing campaigns that are groundbreaking for the optical industry."



The optical industry was a "natural fit" for Cindy Hussey. "I discovered it at the very early age of 6," she said. "I have a very high RX of -6.00 and have worn a correction since the first grade."

She has been in the industry in various capacities since 1987 including retail owner, buyer, optician,

wholesale founder and designer. "In 1999, I made the transition from retail to wholesale with Velvet, specializing in action sports for women, specifically sunglasses and snowboarding goggles. I developed many proprietary technologies and products while pioneering the female optical action sports market. I sold Velvet to K2, the ski giant, but in 2009, I purchased the Velvet trademarks back from K2 and launched Velvet into the female fashion optical and sunglass markets," said Hussey.

Currently, as the founder and creative director of Velvet, she oversees all aspects of product development, sales, marketing and the direction of the Velvet brand, and she has lofty goals. "Personally, as a woman, my goal is for the optical sunglass industry to take a piece of the billion dollar cosmetic industry and claim it as our own," she stated. "Good sunglasses with 100 percent UV protection are as important in the defense against crow's feet, fine lines and wrinkles as any cream on the market. I've started this crusade with our Velvet {BB} Lens."

**SHE SAYS...** "If you are lucky enough to find a place in the industry, hang on...it's a rewarding industry with a lot of upside and stability."

## Cathy Ives

### CO-OWNER

The Optical Vision Site  
San Diego, California

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Cathy's passion, creativity and willingness to share her knowledge of the latest trends, technologies, and fashion helped many optical companies kick start their social media programs."



In the optical industry for nearly 35 years and blogging about it since 2008 before it became trendy, Cathy Ives strives to be unique and encourages ECPs to differentiate

their practices. She started grinding lenses in a small surfacing lab, graduated to selling lenses and then moved into selling eyewear and managing sales reps, with some marketing thrown in.

"My passion for the optical industry came when I moved into eyewear, being in the field, selling fashion, meeting great people, and having lots of fun while earning a living," she said. "What more could you want, finding something you love, making friends, having fun, being creative and making money."

Currently, she manages three blogs – [www.opticalvisionresources.com](http://www.opticalvisionresources.com), [www.theopticalvisionsite.com](http://www.theopticalvisionsite.com), and [www.greenecoservices.com](http://www.greenecoservices.com). She is a member of The Vision Council and the Optical Women's Association. Her advice to women: "Be patient and work toward a position you love. Surround yourself with positive, passionate people who will motivate and challenge you. Strive to educate and better yourself, mentally, emotionally and physically."

She feels that the role of women in optical has changed greatly over the last 35 years. "This is one industry in which women can compete fairly and financially with men. I see more women optometrists and opticians, as well as women involved in media, marketing and sales. Over the last 10 years, in social media, there are more women bloggers, and opportunities abound for designers and writers of fashion and tech."

**SHE SAYS...** "Do not lie, steal, cheat or deceive. Constantly strive to be unique. Think positive and find a way to give back to society."

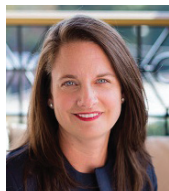
## Angela McCoy

### VP, OPERATIONAL SYSTEMS

Eye Care Associates  
Raleigh, North Carolina

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Angela applies technologies to our business execution that have increased revenues consistently while managing profit margins."

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There are few retail/IT positions that Angela McCoy hasn't held since 2002 when she joined Eye Care Associates, an optical chain with 27 locations (acquired this month by MyEyeDr). She has

been an optical consultant, office manager, IT assistant, managed vision care manager and company trainer, and was named Outstanding Associate in 2009. This experience has provided a solid foundation for her current role as vice president of operational systems, with oversight for IT, training and development, and managed vision care.

McCoy is a true innovator at heart, seeking to use technology in new and creative ways to reduce costs and boost revenue, while keeping patient care the number one priority. She helped introduce a new Point of Sale System, upgrading the company's IT platforms to combine insurance claims, medical records, lab data and distributor orders into one integrated system for greater efficiency. She also coordinates the training of 60+ associates and is responsible for \$15 million in annual insurance receivables, with 16,000 claims processed each month.

How does she accomplish all this? "I look at problems in unique ways, that is how my analytical brain is wired. If I can communicate those solutions effectively, I can help solve complicated problems." Her business philosophy is simple: "Take care of the patients and they will take care of you. If they have a good patient experience, they will come back."

For women looking to succeed in the optical industry, McCoy offers this advice: "The career ladder is crooked. Instead of always looking for a better job, look for ways to further develop your skill set. Understand what is missing from your toolbox and seek opportunities to learn those skills."

**SHE SAYS...** "Don't be afraid to fail, be afraid not to try."

## Tami Ortiz

### SENIOR MANAGER, MARKETING

Altair Eyewear  
Rancho Cordova, California

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Tami spearheaded the development of Altair Inventory Management (AIM) which features a user-friendly interface that enables doctors to use their computer or mobile device to manage their inventory. She also led the development of AltairEyewear.com."



"I graduated from California State University Sacramento with degrees in journalism and graphic design. After the dot com bubble burst in 2001, I searched for my next career move. I've worn glasses since I was seven years old and always had VSP Vision Insurance. VSP is headquartered in my region and I had heard it was a great company to work for, so I decided to explore job opportunities," Tami Ortiz explained when asked how she got into the optical industry.

"I was hired as a marketing specialist in 2001 when we had two licensed brands and a couple of house brands. I was a one-woman show for a handful of years which empowered me to acquire an array of new skills and learn the industry quickly." Some 13 years later, she has assembled a team of talented marketing professionals, weathered a corporate acquisition and aided in the launch of three new house brands and seven new licensed brands.

"I am privileged to work with a group of engaging, creative professionals that make coming to work each day a true joy. We celebrate successes as a team and learn from failures together. I alone cannot assume credit for the work that comes from this team. I am humbled by their talent, work ethic and loyalty," Ortiz concluded.

**SHE SAYS...** "Life is much larger than a 'job.' Peo-

ple have goals and dreams that extend beyond the cubicle walls. It is my role to create opportunities for goals and dreams to be achieved. Good leaders are constantly reflecting, evolving and asking 'How can I help you achieve your goals?'"

## Carey Reynolds

### SENIOR MARKETING MANAGER

Allergan, Inc.  
Irvine, California

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "She is a creative leader who has consistently developed unique programs and services to support the eyecare professional."



Carey Reynolds has more than 11 years of management experience in the field of eyecare, including roles as the marketing director of a sub-specialty ophthalmology practice (Manatee Sarasota Eye Clinic in Sarasota, Florida) and as a practice management consultant with Allergan's Eye Care Business Advisory Group. She is a Certified Ophthalmic Executive (COE), American Society of Ophthalmic Administrators and an Ophthalmic Coding Specialist (OCS), American Society of Ophthalmic Administrators.

In her current role at Allergan, Reynolds is responsible for development and implementation of professional marketing plans for optometry to drive success across the company's eyecare portfolio, including the dry eye, glaucoma and allergy franchises. She develops marketing strategies to promote Allergan's eyecare pharmaceutical portfolio, including branding, advocacy and customer support initiatives.

She also developed and launched Optometry Jumpstart, Allergan's new graduate support program, which connects newly practicing optometrists with patient care resources; a majority of optometry school graduates choose to join Optometry Jumpstart each year since its launch in 2012.

"I view my role as channeling the voice of optome-  
*More* →



# INNOVATORS

WOMEN WHO HAVE INITIATED NEW PRODUCTS, PROGRAMS OR IDEAS MARKING SUCCESS

try at Allergan,” said Reynolds. “While my customers are working hard every day to preserve and improve their patients’ vision, it’s my job to ensure that Allergan makes that easier through innovative products and programs designed to support their practices.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Since women are the primary health care decision makers for families, the optometric profession has an opportunity to leverage the female perspective to learn how to elevate eye-care in the minds of patients. I think the challenge for optometry now is to ensure we have strategies in place to leverage that perspective.”

## Janelle Routhier, OD, FAAO, FBCLA

**SENIOR DIRECTOR, CUSTOMER DEVELOPMENT**  
Essilor of America  
Dallas, Texas

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Janelle Routhier develops and introduces key programs to ODs and is very involved in Essilor’s professional relations programs. She carries out this role very successfully for one of the largest spectacle lens companies in the world.”



Janelle Routhier, OD, has been a part of the optical business since childhood when she worked with her grandfather in his optometry practice. Since then, she’s worn many hats including optometric

technician, independent optometrist and academic clinical faculty member. She has worked for two major players in the ophthalmic industry—a two-year stint at Johnson & Johnson Vision Care, Inc. before moving on to Essilor of America in July 2013.

Her current responsibilities at Essilor include creating and driving the strategies behind the company’s professional relations and customer education teams, along with managing strategic, innovative programs aimed at helping ODs run a smarter business opera-

tion. She cites being trusted with the responsibility of leading a team of up to 11 people as one of her major accomplishments.

In addition to handling the P&L for Essilor’s on-site optical dispensary for employees and their families, Routhier spent the better part of a year helping to develop and launch a new mobile app, AskAboutEyes, to help consumers find relevant information on individual issues or concerns about their eyes prior to visiting their ECP. “It was a special project outside my regular scope of responsibilities, but that’s what helps set Essilor apart—it’s an innovative company that encourages its employees to be entrepreneurial.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Motivating others to excel is what inspires me. People are capable of so much more than they think, and finding creative ways to tap into that and push them to be their best is one of the most rewarding things I can think of.”

## Shirleen Steele

**PURCHASING DIRECTOR**  
Henry Ford Optimeyes  
Madison Heights, Michigan

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “She guides the purchasing for a fast growing, high volume organization and she implements tech systems to raise efficiency while coordinating opportunities created by the introduction of new products to increase the customer base and member satisfaction.”



In the industry for 36 years, Shirleen Steele began her career as an optician at Detroit Optometric Centers, with 11 years at Tuckerman Optical as an area manager and training consultant and the last 25 years in her current position with Henry Ford Optimeyes. She’s also been an instructor for Ross Medical’s optician program. Over the years, she’s been named

area manager of the year for Tuckerman Optical and employee of the month for Henry Optimeyes. She is ABO and NCLE certified.

Steele cites “many wonderful mentors over the years.” In particular, “I count Nanette Michaels, our VP and the person that hired me for Henry Ford Optimeyes, to be an invaluable resource. She is always there for me,” she said.

Her biggest challenge, she feels, is achieving balance. “Everyone needs that to be successful in the long term. I hope I can make a difference by the level of care and sense of responsibility I feel for our team and patients.”

Her advice to women trying to build a career in the industry is to know their strengths. “There are so many incredible opportunities for women in the optical industry,” she said. “It is important to find your passion, and from there all good things come.”

**SHE SAYS...** “I never forget that the optical field is a helping business, and I have always been inspired by the desire to help patients see and look their best on any budget. Any measure of success I have had through the years has come from a strong work ethic, personal integrity and the ability to communicate in relatable ways.”

## METHODOLOGY

This year’s request for nominations was structured like the 2013 Report in that we continued to expand the scope of women recognized in the report, who make leadership contributions throughout the ECP, retail, supplier, lab, managed care and association landscapes.

Readers were asked to make up to three nominations per the following categories: **Executive Suite, Rising Stars, Mentors and Innovators.**

The “Influential Women” process is not designed to be a vote or a ranking. Nominations were reviewed and categorized by *Vision Monday’s* editors. The “Chosen Because...” selections are drawn from the nominations submitted for each candidate. Honorees are organized alphabetically by category.