


#HerStory




 VM 2015
**MOST INFLUENTIAL
 WOMEN**
 IN OPTICAL

NEW YORK—Coming up with a theme for this Special Report year after year is no easy task. Some of us on the editorial team have been profiling optical's Influential Women since VM's Special Report began way back in 2003. The challenge is always the same: finding a theme that is fresh and dynamic, like the Influential Women themselves.

After thinking of—and rejecting—several possibilities, we hit upon this year's theme #HerStory, and it felt right. Because as writers, we all love telling a good story and this year's crop of honorees provided many opportunities to do just that.

So once again this year, we play the storyteller, painting vibrant portraits of women in today's optical landscape—giving you an idea of what it's like in the worlds of vision care, retailing, manufacturing, distribution, dispensing and designing.

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 others 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 enjoy their “stories” and come to know why they are being singled out for this honor. They join a distinguished group of nearly 500 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 #HerStory. Please visit 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

Laura Angelini

PRESIDENT

Johnson & Johnson Vision Care, Inc.
North America and Global Franchise
Development
Jacksonville, Florida

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "What best describes Laura is strong strategic thinking, energy and passion, and people focus. Laura always tries to put people first, whether patients, doctors, customers or employees. She likes to bring the right balance of mind and heart, with the right combination of IQ and EQ."



Laura Angelini joined Johnson & Johnson Vision Care in 2013, but has worked in the health care business for 24 years. Since joining Johnson & Johnson in 1991, she has held positions of growing responsibilities across health categories, in mature and emerging markets. After a successful career in Europe, she moved to the U.S. in 2012 as VP global strategic marketing for Ethicon, and was named president North America and global franchise development for Johnson & Johnson Vision Care in September 2013.

Earlier in her career in 1994-95, Angelini launched 1-Day Acuvue in her home country of Italy, the first ever daily disposable contact lens, when she was the marketing manager for Italy at the time.

Today, she leads the Johnson & Johnson Vision Care business and organization for North America as well as global franchise development, with responsibility for global strategic marketing, global insights and analytics, global professional affairs, global sales training, sales force effectiveness and sales operations.

"Our industry is complex and very dynamic. We see many transformations. We face a more challenging marketplace ... but a more interesting one as well. My greatest challenge is to make the right

bets for the future, so that Johnson & Johnson Vision Care can continue to transform this industry and provide extraordinary patient experience."

SHE SAYS... "I believe my responsibility is first to people, the doctors, our Acuvue patients and our Johnson & Johnson Vision Care employees, to bring healthy vision to everyone, everywhere, every day."

Susan Cooper, OD, FFAO

PRESIDENT

World Council of Optometry
Ontario, Canada

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "She has enabled a constructive environment making the WCO more professional, strategic and responsive to optometrists globally."



Susan Cooper, OD, is president of the World Council of Optometry whose vision is "a world where optometry makes high quality eye health and vision care accessible to all people."

The WCO's mission, she explained, is to facilitate the development of optometry worldwide and to support optometrists in promoting eye health through advocacy, education, policy development and humanitarian outreach. Under Cooper's leadership, the WCO is organizing the 1st World Congress of Optometry to be held Aug. 14 to 16 in Medellin, Colombia. It will provide a forum to share information, research and strategies designed to improve patient care.

Cooper has been in private practice in Ontario for 38 years, and is retired from the faculty of the University of Waterloo. Her international focus began there with her role as director of the International Optometric Bridging Program that

helped internationally educated ODs transition to practice in Canada. She was the first woman president of the Ontario College of Optometrists, and received the Cobean Award from the Ontario Association of Optometrists for outstanding contributions in education and regulatory work.

She credits the unwavering support of her colleagues, staff and her husband and four sons, as essential to her success. "Anything can be accomplished if you have the will to learn and work hard."

SHE SAYS... "I am inspired by Winston Churchill's quote: 'We make a living by what we get...we make a life by what we give.'"

Jan Cory

PRESIDENT, U.S.

Silhouette Optical, Ltd.
Green Island, New York

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Jan is a highly engaged leader. One who inspires, challenges and motivates her team, to achieve both personal and company goals."



Jan Cory cites Nick Caraway from *The Great Gatsby* as an early inspiration, who, in speaking about advice he'd received from his father said, "Whenever you feel like criticizing any one, just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had."

Some of Cory's advantages have included several years spent in retail buying and the fashion accessories market, before joining the optical industry in 1998 as vice president of department store sales for B+L. She then moved to Luxottica when they acquired Ray-Ban and then to Viva International. At Silhouette International, it is her responsibility to assure they have a growing and sustainable place to work while contributing to

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the well-being of their employees and community.

"In my first 10 months I am proud of the spirit of teamwork I have brought to the organization, looking to improve processes and prepare for growth," she said. "I have a passion for building high performing businesses and teams."

"I believe this is a historical time to be a part of the optical industry as it's part of the health care reforms," Cory concluded. "There is nothing more talked about than the change the U.S. is facing in this area."

SHE SAYS... "It's a vast industry with many working parts. Don't be limited by what you've already done—stay open to new possibilities. Never stop networking."

Sally M. Dillehay, OD, EdD

CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER

Vice President, Clinical & Regulatory Affairs
Visioneering Technologies, Inc.
Alpharetta, Georgia

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "She has the grit to get things done, she supports and encourages colleagues, and brings a creative 'let's try it a new way' approach to her job."



When Sally Dillehay was in sixth grade, her teacher showed a film about optometry in health class. "I knew immediately that was what I wanted to do, and I have loved every minute of my career," she said, looking back at her many accomplishments over nearly three decades in eyecare.

After earning OD and MS degrees in optometry and physiological optics from Ohio State University College of Optometry, Dillehay became a staff optometrist at The Vision Center of Central Ohio. She then joined the Ohio State faculty as an assis-

tant professor of optics, and served as chief of ophthalmic prescription services and associate chief of clinical services. She moved to Ciba Vision and became director of academic affairs, then took on various management roles in marketing, clinical trials and research.

In 2008, she joined Visioneering Technologies as chief medical officer and vice president of clinical and regulatory affairs, overseeing the clinical development of Visioneering's NaturalVue 1 Day Multifocal from its earliest stages to the final product ready for the market.

SHE SAYS... "I am inspired by a quote from *The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock* by T.S. Eliot, in which a man looking at his life, asks 'Do I dare disturb the universe?' It reminds me to strive for excellence and to never let the status quo be good enough."

Jennifer L. Geertz, OD

OWNER

Bird's Eye Optometry Ltd.
Batavia and Hodgkins, Illinois

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "She works endlessly to promote optometry within her own practice and within Walmart. She helped to found the Energyeyes Association because she saw a need for corporate optometrists to have their own organization."



In addition to staffing and managing two busy independent practices inside Walmart Vision Centers, with three full-time and two part-time doctors, Jennifer L. Geertz, OD is also a founding member of the Energyeyes Association and is about to become treasurer of the organization.

"I love that women have become so influential in optometry. I am thankful to see women, like me, on the boards of associations like Energyeyes, making significant contributions to advisory panels."

Geertz feels that her greatest challenge is to stand out from the crowd. "I have chosen to build my practices inside a corporate setting, and want to send a message to my patients as well as the industry, that I am practicing full scope optometry. As an independent doctor working in a corporate setting, I have the ability to practice optometry in its most wholesome form. I can advocate for my patient by recommending the very best for them."

Her personal philosophy is the same in her professional life as it is in her personal life. "I treat my patients, as I do my friends and family, with care, respect and kindness. My business slogan reads, 'See why caring is contagious.' I am thankful for all of the wonderful patients I have had the pleasure to serve and care for over the years."

SHE SAYS... "I am inspired by people who overcome great obstacles and adversity in life and handle themselves with grace, love and courage."

Ellen Haag

VICE PRESIDENT OF BRAND SALES AND DISPENSING SERVICES

Essilor of America
Dallas, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "She has implemented unique sales strategies that have reset the bar on success, particularly in practices that had not historically been successful with premium brands."



Ellen Haag broke into the optical industry in 1990 as a sales consultant for Tura. She rose through the sales organization to become regional manager, winning leadership awards in the process. She then moved to ClearVision Optical, where she was recognized for bringing the most new business to a territory.

In 2000, she joined the Spectacle Lens Group

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of Johnson & Johnson to be a part of the first sales organization for the then-new Definity progressive lens. When Essilor acquired the Definity lens business, she joined the transition team, working first for the Essilor Lab Group before heading up a new specialty team called the AR Business Consultants. This team has evolved to become the ECP Service Consultants, which now works with ECPs to execute on Essilor's "Doctor Driven Process," a comprehensive approach to vision solutions for patients at the dispensing table.

"Beyond any sales award or President's Club, my accomplishments have led to the greatest responsibility and opportunity of being in a position to instigate change and make an impact with a team of incredibly talented brand sales leadership, brand consultants and specialty consultants."

SHE SAYS... "My advice for women in the optical industry is that you should believe that every opportunity can be an opportunity for you. Benchmark yourself against the best of the best, regardless of gender."

Carol Interlandi

DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES

L'Amey America
Wilton, Connecticut

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Carol is very well respected and a wonderful support to our staff professionally and personally. We owe Carol a very big thank you for her fantastic enthusiasm, loyalty and incredible hard work over the last 25 years."



Carol Interlandi is celebrating 25 years with L'Amey but that wasn't always the plan. "I got into optical totally by chance," she explained. "I interviewed with L'Amey and from the first meeting knew it was an opportunity for change.

For me, it meant moving from a regimented 'Fortune 50' environment to a smaller company where the contributions of individuals are important to the success of a company. It just so happened that L'Amey was in the optical industry.

"I believe that my role is akin to that of a customer service representative," she explained. "Employees, as well as management, are my 'customers' and my role is to assist and support everyone and all departments within the organization.

"My most important strength is my passion for what I do and if I excel it's because I truly enjoy it. My role here is purposeful and that encourages me to do the best I can," she said.

"I'm dedicated to L'Amey and our employees and happy to be supporting both. The great variety of products and services that make up the 'optical business' all have one common goal; to provide something that better people's lives—that makes it a rewarding industry."

SHE SAYS... "There are many roles in the optical industry offering the opportunity to use your talents and creativity to do something that has a positive impact on people's lives, so find a position that you enjoy, one that plays to your talents and strengths, and you'll have a rewarding career."

Liz Lyons

CEO

Focal Pointe Eye Care
West Chester, Ohio

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Liz leads with passion and heart and has the business background to implement important strategic moves that have increased practice revenue."



When Liz Lyons co-founded Focal Pointe Eye Care in 2008 with her optometrist husband, Dr. Michael Lyons, her business credentials included experience

as a retail manager and small business owner. She also had a personal understanding of the importance of vision health. She is legally blind, having lost most of her vision in her early twenties. Lyons was misdiagnosed for years until a doctor detected hereditary juvenile macular degeneration. "Even the thought of that day brings tears to my eyes," she said, recalling when someone finally "got it!"

At Focal Pointe, Lyons strives passionately "to provide a patient centered atmosphere, where we listen and in turn, can help people see to the best of their abilities." She guides staff team building efforts to deliver the highest level of patient care, and oversees office administration. Under her leadership, the practice has grown substantially.

"I feel I can make a difference when I get the opportunity to talk with a fellow low vision patient," said Lyons. She refuses to let her lack of vision define her or restrict her goals. "I offer motivation to others who may be losing their vision."

SHE SAYS... "I am inspired by Eleanor Roosevelt's quote: 'In the long run, we shape our lives and we shape ourselves. The process never ends until we die. And the choices we make are ultimately our own responsibility.'"

Liduvina Martinez-Gonzalez

VICE PRESIDENT CLINICAL ADMINISTRATION AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

University Eye Center
State University of New York College of Optometry
New York, New York

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "As executive director of one of the largest eyecare clinics in the country, she has the ability to affect the eyecare of thousands of New Yorkers."

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Liduvina Martinez-Gonzalez is passionate about delivering quality health care and eyecare services to the New York City community. With over 27 years of experience in health care management, including 24 years at SUNY's College of Optometry, she has devoted her career to public health. Today, she is the school's first woman VP of Clinical Administration and the first non-optometrist executive director of the University Eye Center. Her advancement in a variety of administrative roles at the college has provided a broad understanding of the organization and its many components, preparing her for these challenging roles.

The University Eye Center has over 70,000 patient visits annually with a clinical staff of about 60 full-time and part-time optometrists, 11 opticians and 75 support personnel, and serves as a teaching facility for optometrists. Martinez-Gonzalez has introduced professional development programs for the staff and revamped the EMR and practice management systems. These efforts have increased revenue, employee engagement and patient satisfaction.

To be successful in your career and in life, Martinez-Gonzalez believes that you need to invest in your passion and in the people you work with. "Our most valuable asset is our staff," she noted.

SHE SAYS... "Don't let what you *can't* do get in the way of what you *can* do; I think about this when faced with a challenge which may seem daunting."

Donna J. Mikulecky

**VICE PRESIDENT,
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Vision Source
Kingwood, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Her role as vice president of professional development includes

leading, mentoring and overseeing over 170 doctor administrators who lead local regions within the Vision Source network, and she is a role model to both women and men in the company and across the membership."



A CPA in health care for over 25 years, Donna Mikulecky joined Vision Source in August of 2014. As vice president of professional development, she provides 170 administrators with the resources to effectively do their jobs and deliver value to members. "In the 10 months I have been with Vision Source, some of my major accomplishments have been the creation of a more robust onboarding and orientation program for our administrators, success factors/goals for our administrators and dashboards and metrics to help them evaluate their success," she said.

Her advice to other women in the optical field, "Do what you can to help other women succeed. Don't be afraid to ask a question. I often thought I had to know everything, but it is in asking questions you learn a lot more and create more opportunities."

She believes that optometry will have to evolve to meet consumer demands, many resulting from women. "Women will continue to demand customer-centric, affordable, convenient and easily accessible options for eyecare services and products."

SHE SAYS... "I've always been motivated to do the best I can at whatever I am doing. Now that I have two children, I tell them to always be and give their best at everything they do, so I try to lead by example."

Sherry Lanier Pugh

VICE PRESIDENT

Optical Prescription Lab (OPL)
Optical Supply Co-op (OSC)
Pelham, Alabama

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "She stays on top of technology with digital processing so ECPs can have the best lens possible with quick turnaround time to ensure that they retain their customers."



Sherry Lanier Pugh started in the lab business at age 14 when her mother started Optical Prescription Lab (OPL) in 1977. Although somewhat reluctant at first, she learned the business as she gradually took on more responsibility.

By her own description, Pugh is "extremely detail oriented, an excellent troubleshooter, and does not easily accept no for an answer." Those qualities have enabled her to play a key role in growing the business into one of the most successful independent labs earning Optical Prescription Lab's many awards, including *Vision Monday's* Top 20 Labs 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012.

Currently, she oversees the daily operations at OPL and Optical Supply Co-op (OSC) a buying group for labs that she created in 1997. She manages accounts receivable and payable for OPL and OSC, is the purchasing and ultimate decision maker for OPL, and negotiates pricing and special offerings for OSC. Pugh takes pride in providing employment and a career for 21 people who support families, many of whom have insufficient education to secure a career with an opportunity for advancement.

SHE SAYS... "Show up and be persistent; face time is invaluable. Always be on time. Attempt to go above and beyond your customer's expectations. Always deliver on your promises. There is no traffic in the extra mile."

Tonya Reynoldson, OD

**CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD, TENNESSEE
ASSOCIATION OF OPTOMETRIC PHYSICIANS**

Vision Source/ River Valley Eye Clinic
Waverly, Tennessee

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CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Tonya has made a significant impact on optometry in Tennessee and is an excellent candidate for further office in regional and national associations.”



While most people would say that their biggest accomplishment is success in their business, Tonya Reynoldson, OD, believes that her biggest accomplishment is “having an open mind to learn each day from my staff, patients and peers.”

Reynoldson, a mother of three, has been in practice for 14 years. After finishing a residency in ocular disease and working as center director for cataract referral in Jackson, Tenn. for two years, she opened a practice from scratch, and nine months later, she purchased an existing practice. Now, along with her business partner, Michelle Harrison, they have four practices between them.

When it comes to the optical field, Reynoldson believes that it is always personal. Whether it’s seeing a patient after hours or giving up personal time to work with vision therapy patients, she takes great strides to reach out.

“I think we do these things because it’s personal, and we all hold a personal stake in each of our communities and patients’ lives,” she said.

Juggling work and family might be Reynoldson’s biggest challenge, but her biggest strength is dreaming big. To other women in the field, she advises them to never quit. She noted that the percentage of women in optometry has grown past “our male counterparts.”

“Last year, when I became president of our state association, I was the second female to be president in our state. The first female was 20 years ago...women are becoming leaders and innovators in our profession.”

SHE SAYS... “You give love, you get love.”

Debbie Schmitz

PRESIDENT

LensWorks Optical Labs
Plymouth, Minnesota

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Labs all over the world have implemented a lot of processes and procedures with Debbie’s fingerprints all over them. Her influence is widespread.”



It only takes a moment of talking with Debbie Schmitz to realize she’s a people person. “My favorite thing is talking with customers, troubleshooting problems and recommending solutions for their patients,” she said. “Opticians really struggle sometimes, and they need a sounding board. I love being able to help them. As an independent lab owner, I can sell them what’s going to work best for them, and offer a personal touch.”

Schmitz’s expert advice is based on nearly three decades of experience in the lab business. She began her career as a data entry operator at Twin City Optical in Minnesota, where she learned how to stock, surface and finish lenses. In 2006, she and her partners Lyle Olson and Brian Workman, founded LensWorks Optical Labs. Today, the lab has 17 employees and serves customers throughout Wisconsin, Minnesota and South Dakota.

A hands-on manager, Schmitz is involved with all aspects of the lab, including manufacturing, sales and marketing, product management, customer service and inventory control. She has taken on the role of the lab’s system manager, including their DVI system, remote ordering systems and digital surfacing processes. She has the knowledge and the desire to optimize all processes involving the lab, which includes helping DVI design and test new software.

SHE SAYS... “My inspiration comes from my pas-

sion for business, customer service and ever changing technology.”

Lisa Stann

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT & CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

SVS Vision
Mt. Clemens, Michigan

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She is a born leader and a detailed-minded executive who allows people the room to operate and function on their own while maintaining specific guidelines for their actions.”



With a career of 20 years with SVS Vision, Lisa Stann has helped guide the company through challenging times and periods of growth, sometimes simultaneously. Starting as an optician, she steadily worked through the ranks to district manager, director of retail operations, VP of retail operations, and now, EVP/COO. After she helped grow the company during the bankruptcy of both GM and Chrysler, SVS has seen double-digit sales growth over the past five years, opening more than 10 offices with plans to open 10 more this year alone.

Taking a customer-centric approach to everything, Stann always knew she wanted to help people, so it was a no-brainer when the opportunity to work as an optician came about. “I’ve enjoyed assisting patients with their eyecare needs and educating them on the importance of their eye health,” she said. “To this day, the desire and passion to serve our patients is what drives me.”

She also assisted in restructuring the executive team to align each functional area with the same retail focus that was instrumental in the rebranding of the company and the launch of its new EyeDef Lenses.”

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SHE SAYS... “Empowerment breeds success. When empowered, not only do you accept the responsibility for failure, you are given the opportunity to succeed. Whoever offers the best customer service wins.”

Lorraine Voorhees, OD, MS

VICE PRESIDENT FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS

Marshall B. Ketchum University
Fullerton, California

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “For nearly 40 years, Lorraine has worked with optometry students as an educator, admissions director, dean and now vice president for student affairs.”



As an optometry student, Lorraine Voorhees, OD, assumed she would enter clinical practice after graduation. However, when faculty members encouraged her to consider academia, she changed directions. Looking back over her long and successful career as an educator and academic administrator, she has never regretted that decision.

“Optometry is a wonderful and fulfilling career with many opportunities,” said Voorhees. She began her career as a faculty member at Southern California College of Optometry, and then became an administrator in student affairs. Today, with SCCO’s transition as part of Marshall B. Ket-

cham University, she is vice president for Student Affairs, working with optometry and physician assistant students, and future pharmacy students.

Voorhees has witnessed the dramatic rise of women in optical over the last 40 years. She was the only woman in her graduating class of optometry students; today, over 60 percent of the optometric students are women. “They bring enthusiasm for the profession, honest caring for their patients and a desire to see the profession move forward.”

Voorhees sees a strong inclination in today’s young optometric professionals to get involved in community service, locally and with foreign medical mission trips.

SHE SAYS... “I am inspired by all of the optometry students, past and current, that I have known, especially their passion for the profession and their genuine goodness and caring for others.”

Christine Yeh

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

20/20 Magazine
New York, New York

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Christine manages, edits, reports, writes and energizes 20/20, the optical industry’s leading publication for products, trending, lens tech and style. 20/20 impacts optical, but Christine impacts 20/20.”



For Christine Yeh, the road to *20/20 Magazine* was a circuitous one, but has been well worth the trip. Armed with a B.S. in management/marketing, she joined Jobson Medical Information’s marketing department and moved into the Optical Group as a special projects coordinator. After a promotion to marketing manager she went on to become senior marketing manager, eventually managing all optical marketing operations.

During her stint in marketing she contributed guest columns for *20/20* and articles in *20/20’s* Upfront section. In 2010, Yeh joined the *20/20* editorial team as managing editor and in 2014, was promoted to executive editor.

“For me, *20/20* is the best of many worlds; it’s more than an eyewear magazine—it’s fashion, it’s product, it’s lens tech, it’s education—and I get to work with all of it on a daily basis,” Yeh said.

Today, she is responsible for managing and editing all pages in *20/20*. Her *20/20* career highlights include cover feature stories with makeup artist/eyewear designer Bobbi Brown and Oakland A’s infielder Eric Sogard. Recently, she interviewed fashion designer Diane von Furstenberg on camera for an episode of the reality show “House of DVF.”

SHE SAYS... “I didn’t choose the optical field—it chose me. After being at Jobson for 15 years and experiencing the ins and outs, I’d say there’s no other place I’d rather be.”

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RISING STARS

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

Jill Burrowes

DIRECTOR OF KEY ACCOUNTS

Europa International
Buffalo Grove, Illinois

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Jill's ability to inspire other professionals to strive for success is invaluable. She has an analytical, results-driven approach to business, and her outgoing personality makes working with her an absolute joy."



"Though I didn't realize it would be the start of a long-term career, my first job in the industry came at 17 years old, when I was hired at what is still one of the most successful optometric practices in San Antonio," explained Jill Burrowes. "My mother, Loretta Lemoine, has enjoyed a fruitful career in this industry since I was in junior high school, so I'm proud to be a second generation optical professional."

"Over the years I've been fortunate enough to learn from the best in our industry," said Burrowes. "I learned what makes a successful optometric practice continue to thrive from my first employer, Dr. Paul Darrow, and as a gas perm contact lens rep, Richard Dorer taught me essential sales techniques I still use. The knowledge eventually led me to Europa, where independent thought is encouraged and successes are celebrated. Every day I'm grateful for the support of our executive team."

Burrowes has been the director of key accounts at Europa since 2012. "As a fascinating hybrid of health care, engineering and fashion, this business provides exciting opportunities for people of varying backgrounds. It rewards those with integrity and a willingness to serve their customers well, and affords countless opportunities for giving back generously."

SHE SAYS... "Do it with passion or not at all!"

Courtney Dryer, OD

4 EYES OPTOMETRY, A VISION SOURCE MEMBER

Charlotte, North Carolina

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "She opened her own practice shortly after graduating, founded Indieeyes Consulting, writes for NewGradOptometry.com and encourages entrepreneurship for new OD grads."



Courtney Dryer, OD, has been on a fast track since graduating from optometry school in 2011. Following a short stint working as an associate doctor, she opened her own private practice in 2013 called 4 Eyes Optometry, a Vision Source member. She also co-founded and is a partner in the consulting group called Indieeyes Consulting. Its purpose, said Dryer, is to "empower the independent optometrist to open a practice economically, succeed in today's marketplace and maximize retail sales."

Dryer believes that being independent in all aspects of her optometric practice is strategically important. "My practice is built around using independent eyewear, labs, and contact lens companies that support independent practitioners," she said. "I think it's imperative that independent ODs spend their money with companies who support us."

In addition to her consulting business, Courtney writes for the website, NewGradOptometry.com, which provides a platform to educate new graduates on resources they need to be successful in practice and in life. Her advice to new ODs: "With creativity, resourcefulness and innovation, it is possible to graduate optometry school with student loans and still open the practice of your dreams."

SHE SAYS... "I am passionate about independent

business and hope to help encourage other optometrists to pursue their own independent practice goals."

Brooke Edwards

GENERAL MANAGER

Brokea Inc dba Pearle Vision
Maple Grove, Minnesota

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "She is GM of the top-grossing Pearle Vision franchise, motivating a team of 30 professionals and constantly upgrading the patient experience."



As general manager of the #1 grossing Pearle Vision store in North America for four years in a row, Brooke Edwards knows it takes a team to drive success and accomplish great things.

She works closely with her managers to develop employees' knowledge and sales skills, and to help them achieve their personal career goals. Always ready to listen, she encourages feedback, noting: "My employees are invested in what we do because they have a say in it."

Edwards entered the optical world at the age of 15 when her mother, a successful frame representative, got her a job as a Pearle Vision receptionist. She developed a love for the business because "every day was different and I was always learning." After college, she worked at a PR agency handling an eyewear account, and then joined the sales team at Soderberg Ophthalmic Laboratory, eventually becoming marketing manager. In 2011, she assumed her current position.

A career in optical "has limitless possibilities and it's ever changing," said Edwards. She is grateful for having great bosses as mentors, noting that they allowed her to grow and encouraged her to take chances.

SHE SAYS... "What inspires me is seeing my staff

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RISING STARS

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

succeed, smile while they work and truly enjoy interacting with our patients and one another.”

Linda Fitzgerald

SALES CONSULTANT AND LICENSED OPTICIAN
Modern Optical International
Austintown, Ohio

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Linda is a rising star—an innovative mover and shaker. Her passion for the industry clearly is demonstrated on a daily basis. There is nothing that she will not attempt if it enhances the world of opticianry.”



At 14 years old, Linda Fitzgerald knew she wanted to work in the optical field. After her optician made her feel proud of wearing contacts and glasses, showing her how each frame could make her feel different she knew that’s what she wanted to do, and 40 years later, she has succeeded in doing just that.

Fitzgerald works full time as a sales representative for Western Pennsylvania and Western Ohio, exhibits at their state, national and regional shows and is now the president of the Opticians Association of Ohio.

After being a dual licensed optician in Ohio for more than 30 years, Fitzgerald mostly saw a male dominated field and realized that she would make a good optician. For women just starting out, Fitzgerald’s advice to them would be to educate yourself to the best of your ability and pass it along.

“Women have worked hard and are at the forefront of our marketplace demonstrating dedication and success,” she said.

SHE SAYS... “I believe that we should mentor the younger generation helping them attain the most education possible, making them the best educated

person they can be. We have to be the absolute best in our profession and help others to do the same.”

Colleen Galanti

CREATOR
Opticians on Facebook

OPTICAL MANAGER
Pascarella Eye Care & Contact Lenses
Newtown, Pennsylvania

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She is the lead optician with loyal patients at Pascarella Eye Care, and she is the creator of Opticians on Facebook, a growing social media network.”



In 2013, optician Colleen Galanti created the first closed social media network for opticians, called Opticians on Facebook. The group provides members with an online forum to share experiences, seek advice, provide helpful information and just vent. To date, over 2,000 opticians from novices to seasoned professionals have joined the blossoming network.

The inspiration to create a web-based social group came after Galanti searched the internet without success for an online portal to obtain professional advice. This underscored the need for a network that would link opticians across the country, enabling them to communicate easily and quickly. Opticians on Facebook filled that void. “A member will post a situation and within seconds, they are given useful information that may have taken hours or days of researching on the internet.”

Galanti has been an optician for over 29 years, working in a variety of optical settings including private and corporate practices. She joined Pascarella Eye Care in 2012 as optical manager of the practice’s dispensary. “In the last 10 years, I am seeing many more women as optical managers and successful business owners,” she said. “When I

started in 1986, it was a male dominated field and now that has completely changed. There are no closed doors for women in optical today.

SHE SAYS... “Life is too short to wear ugly glasses.”

Patrice Leslie, ABOC

SENIOR CONTENT MANAGER, ELEARNING
Carl Zeiss Vision
Winnsboro, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Patrice is an early adopter of new technology. She’s an excellent trainer who leads the Zeiss sales team to develop iPad skills, and its ‘Go Digital’ initiative.”



A decade ago, while still a college student, Patrice Leslie volunteered at a Medicare/Medicaid optometric office in New Orleans. Following graduation, she began studying at the University of Houston College of Optometry while working at an optometric office as an optician and optometric assistant. Although she embarked on a career in education, including a brief stint abroad, she returned to the U.S. and began working again in an optometric practice.

After becoming an ABO-certified optician, she joined Carl Zeiss Vision and has spent the past four years fulfilling different roles on the company’s sales team. Most recently, she moved into a new role as senior content manager, eLearning, responsible for producing content for web-based trainings that benefits everyday activities of opticians and other ECPs.

“As a former educator, I know the value of exploration and discovery. I provide a variety of innovative tools to help engage learners. I have an affinity for technology and enjoy finding new ways to employ it, but others are not the same way. By offering a variety of solutions, users are able to explore the tools and discover the way to employ them that suits them best.

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RISING STARS

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

We all know that everyone learns in their own unique way, the same is true for selling and training.”

SHE SAYS... “The transfer of knowledge and confidence are two of the greatest gifts you can bestow upon someone. How this is achieved may vary greatly, but when the two go hand-in-hand, it often has the greatest impact on a person.”

Sarah McGee

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

Pearle Vision Division of Luxottica
Mason, Ohio

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Sarah, a passionate and driven professional with seven years of experience in the communications field, joined the brand in late 2012, quickly immersing herself in the fields of retail, optometry and internal communications.”



“I have always had a passion for challenge and helping others become educated about their health,” said Sarah McGee. “When I learned of the business transformation taking place at

Pearle Vision I knew I wanted to be a part of the brand’s journey forward. The brand’s clear strategy for success in a complex, competitive market, coupled with the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of optical patients was the perfect fit.”

Less than a year with the company, McGee was promoted to director of communications, added to the general manager’s direct team, invited to formally join Pearle Vision’s leadership team, became a manager and was asked to help lead one of the brand’s learning and strategic development initiatives.

During her years with the brand, McGee has taken on its communication challenges with a high sense of ownership, great attitude and utter professionalism. For the next three years, she has been tasked with

developing and executing the brand’s culture and recognition programs.

“As the optical industry looks to the future, it’s critical that our care, services and products align with the values and needs of this audience.”

SHE SAYS... “If you’re not innovating, you’re falling behind. If we don’t create the experiences and solutions our licensed operators and patients seek, someone else will.”

Meghan Murphy, PhD

BIOMEDICAL ENGINEER

The Shop @ VSP Global
Sacramento, California

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She represents a new wave of rising stars whose background and experience extends beyond the traditional optical fields and is helping change the way the optical industry as a whole is perceived.”



At 26 years old, Meghan Murphy is the youngest PhD among all 6,000 employees at VSP Global. She earned her doctorate in biomedical engineering from the University of California, Davis in 2014 while completing an initial internship with VSP’s innovation lab, The Shop. Murphy now works full-time at The Shop, developing sensor-embedded eyewear and the acquiring and translating biometric data obtained from the head.

“I was excited about the efforts underway within The Shop to create consumer-focused technology designed to improve health in the population,” she said. “I am very interested in the unique position of the optical industry at the intersection of health and consumer products and the potential to harness links between eye health and systemic health.”

Murphy’s primary focus is helping to develop VSP’s Project Genesis, a sensor-equipped eyeglass frame. She aids in the development of software algo-

rithms for activity recognition and, when necessary, even serves as a human test subject for various incarnations of the frames throughout the beta testing process. Murphy works side-by-side with the software development team on how the health information gets displayed to the end-user. She also spearheads and leads the relationships with academic partners for Project Genesis, including the most recent collaboration with USC’s venerable Center for Body Computing.

SHE SAYS... “I believe it is critical that as females in the industry, we continue to promote early STEM (Science Technology Engineering Mathematics) education and mentorship opportunities for females to ensure their continued presence and growth in the field.”

Janelle Pauli

MARKETING MANAGER

VisionWeb
Austin, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Working her way up from marketing assistant to marketing manager in just over three years, Janelle has been instrumental in the development of innovative programs that allow VisionWeb to deliver useful content to the industry.”



Janelle Pauli has spent her entire career in optical with VisionWeb, quickly rising through the ranks to become marketing manager, responsible for the company’s blog content strategy and managing social media pages and trade show preparation.

She also became leader of the company’s internship program, bringing on talented students. “Being able to pass on the knowledge that I have learned while also learning a lot from the students in return has really been a great experience,” she said.

Here creative spirit and competitive nature have

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RISING STARS

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

served her well in her position. "I get bored in the comfort of a routine. Doing something new and creative every day helps keep me on my toes and always looking for the next big thing," she said. "I've learned to be in competition with myself to be better every day, or do something better than I did it the day before. A little healthy competition is a great way to empower women."

A three-year member of the Optical Women's Association, she currently serves on the Digital Marketing Committee for the organization.

SHE SAYS... "I have been lucky enough to have managers and a team that believe in creativity, fun and thinking outside the box...and outside of our industry. Creative freedom is a big reason why I love my job and is what inspires me to accomplish my goals."

**Jennifer Smith Zolman,
OD, FCOVD**

CO-OWNER

Draisin Vision Group
Charleston, South Carolina

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Jennifer has helped build Draisin Vision into a multimillion dollar operation. She serves as chairman of Special Olympics screening and initiated the InfantSEE program in South Carolina. She hit the ground running."



Although Jennifer Smith Zolman, OD, has received many accolades, it is her love of optometry that really shines through everything she does. "I started shadowing a husband and wife optometry team as a freshman in high school and fell in love with optometry... I knew that when I grew up, this is how I wanted to spend my life."

Zolman was honored as the Southern Council of Optometrists (SECO) Young Optometrist of the Year in 2013. In addition to her duties at Draisin Vision, she is a clinical adjunct professor and residency supervisor for several colleges of optometry. "I love to teach the future generation about our wonderful profession and to help the students develop an understanding for organized optometry, such as the AOA and legislative issues.

"I feel that I make a difference in my state by pushing for what is best for our profession as a whole. This wonderful profession has given so much to me and I feel it is my duty to give back to it and protect it."

SHE SAYS... "To see the successes in vision therapy, to see one of my patients 'see' depth and 3D for the first time, to see a child find self-esteem after completing vision therapy... that is why I do what I do every day."

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MENTORS

WOMEN WHO ARE TEAM BUILDERS AND DEVELOPERS OF TALENT

Debra Bulken

REGIONAL SALES DIRECTOR

Luxottica Group USA
Glen Allen, Virginia

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "With more than 25 years in the business and knowledge of the customer base all over the country, Debra has built strong relationships with industry influencers and all the major alliances. Over the past year, she has taken Luxottica's message on the road, training customers on everything from retailing to premium sun selling, all while being a coach inside Luxottica and the mother of two."



With sales in her blood after working alongside her father in his Upstate New York boutique, Debra Bulken entered the optical field after being contacted in 1986 to fill a sales position for a new company, Ciba Vision. After 29 years in the industry, she now leads six district sales managers and 75 consultants that she helps inspire to support the independent three Os. Prior to Luxottica, she spent 23 years in sales with Ciba, two years at Hydrogel Vision, and two years with Marcolin USA.

Bulken attributes her success to: Steve Schuster, former president of Ciba, Bausch + Lomb and Hydrogel Vision, who hired her into the business along with regional manager, Ron Weiss; Angel Alvarez, founder/CEO, ABB Concise; Nicola Perini, VP sales, Luxottica; and Holly Rush, president, Luxottica North America.

"The role of women has evolved over the past decade, and we are fortunate to be a part of an industry that has embraced women at all levels," she said. "Opportunities abound for savvy women who want to make a difference in the quality of life for our mutual consumer/patient."

SHE SAYS... "Do what you love, surround yourself with mentors, embrace change, lead with your heart, be your unique self, work passionately and success will come!"

Lori Carter

MIDWEST REGIONAL SALES MANAGER

Safilo
Minneapolis, Minnesota

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Lori takes charge and does not take no for an answer. She is always looking for ways to motivate and lead her team."



"Leave everybody better than you found them" is the mantra with which Lori Carter begins her day, and it's something she truly works toward in her life and career. Inspired by the idea of possibility, Carter strives toward taking the industry into the future.

Carter, who got started in the industry in 1986 as a key account representative for a small Connecticut company, has been a regional sales manager with Safilo since 2003, but thinks that right now is a great time for women to get started in optical.

"I believe that women are multi-dimensional. This will naturally expand the optical experience. It will deepen the experience in all facets of the industry. Thinking about what's next and what's possible is part of our DNA," she said.

It is this idea of endless possibility and the potential that people possess that inspires Carter, along with this, she attributes her mother who "is a completely independent thinker who fearlessly looks life squarely in the eye" with being her greatest inspiration. Helping others live that way is what Carter seeks to do in her career.

"If I can help lead anyone to tap into their potential and creativity, success will just unfold

from there. Humans have boundless potential and just being a part of people's journeys is awe-inspiring to me," she said.

SHE SAYS... "Leave everybody better than you found them."

Rachel "Stacey" Coulter, OD

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

Nova Southeastern University
Fort Lauderdale, Florida

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Rachel 'Stacey' Coulter publishes scientific research, teaches full time at NOVA and participates fully in the Academy and COVD. She is a leader among her peers."



The biggest challenge that Rachel "Stacey" Coulter, OD faces is that a day only has 24 hours. Coulter, who has been an optometric educator, clinician and clinical investigator for over 20 years makes a difference by focusing on children's vision which is a critical component of their developmental success.

Currently, Coulter teaches pediatric optometry in the clinic and classroom as a faculty member at Nova Southeastern University. She also serves as a principal investigator for the CITT-Attention and Reading Trial, which is a five-year study funded by the National Eye Institute.

She has been an integral part of the post-education residency program, mentoring many students and residents in pediatric vision. She has also initiated research about the impacts of vision on children with autism and co-founded a school in Broward County dedicated to educating autistic children.

One of her favorite quotes by Ernest Hemingway, "The world breaks everyone and afterward

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MENTORS

WOMEN WHO ARE TEAM BUILDERS AND DEVELOPERS OF TALENT

many are strong at the broken places” inspires Coulter as it speaks to overcoming setbacks. For women entering the field, she advises them to not only know yourself and be confident, but be open to taking risks.

SHE SAYS... “Developing resilience and learning how to overcome setbacks is critical to long-term success. Not only will you eventually succeed, but others will look at you and not give up.”

Jennifer DaQuano

MANAGER

NuVue Optical in Vision Source Studio 20/20’s (Two Locations)
Charlotte, North Carolina

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Jennifer is the cultural leader and visionary behind NuVue

Optical’s rise to become Charlotte’s destination for unique and exclusive eyewear.”



Jennifer DaQuano’s co-workers share similar glowing accolades when describing her talents as a team builder and professional development leader. She is called the Optical Guru, who inspires them all to provide every client with the best possible eyewear selection experience. As manager of NuVue Optical located within Vision Source Studio 20/20’s two Charlotte locations, her primary focus is on building the expertise and confidence of her staff. “My greatest accomplishments are the successes of my team when they move a client from viewing eyewear as an insurance-coverage-only purchase to an investment in seeing, looking and feeling great,” said DaQuano.

Her 20+ years of experience in a variety of optical settings, including lab and retail sales, having honed her skills as an eyewear consultant and manager. Before joining NuVue Optical in 2006, she worked in optometry and ophthalmology practices, as well as corporate and private businesses. Her diverse background helped build the communication techniques and knowledge of eyewear design and technologies that she shares today in staff training sessions.

Her passion for the eyewear business is reflected in her philosophy: “Stop trying to sell eyewear and instead, engage clients like friends you are helping to select eyeglasses that make them smile and feel confident about their appearance.”

SHE SAYS... “I truly feel the only time I’m not working is when I’m helping someone select eyewear. It’s amazingly fun!”

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MENTORS

WOMEN WHO ARE TEAM BUILDERS AND DEVELOPERS OF TALENT

Patti Gertzen

REGIONAL DIRECTOR OF SALES

ClearVision Optical
Hauppauge, New York

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Patti is well-respected by her team, which spans across a broad geography. She is always in recruiting mode and has an eye for identifying strong sales talent. Through her leadership, she has cultivated a winning team including four of our top sales consultants and the highest company performer.”



After 25 years in the apparel industry, Patti Gertzen made the move to optical with stints at Luxottica in the late 80s, Fratelli Lozza in the mid-90s

and ClearVision (CVO) since 2002. She currently manages 14 sales reps in 11 states. “I hire, train, coach, cajole and push,” she explained. “I have been successful in retaining a long-term veteran sales force in the Midwest. I want people on my team to shine at all times. I am not intimidated by other’s successes, I celebrate them.

“The business has changed so much since I started. Even from last year,” she said. “I am not afraid of change. Some people have a tendency to shy away from ‘new’ things. I embrace them. I change with the times but also look for new ways to lead, accomplish and make things better.

“I advocate my positions with a sense of shared purpose. I create a buy in. I believe building these relationships have strengthened my career.”

SHE SAYS... “Women must have the confidence and ability to make a sale and not settle for a

‘No.’ Women make the decisions in most of the important purchases a family makes. Carry that ‘influence’ into the workplace.”

Jenney Rivard, FCLA

INSTRUCTOR AND LICENSED OPTICIAN

Middlesex Community College
Middletown, Connecticut

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Jenney is a lively and energetic teacher who brings real world problems into the classroom to allow students the opportunity to use her experiences for first-hand learning. She encourages her students to do and be their best and is a shining example of women in her profession.”

More →



What inspires Jenney Rivard the most are the students who come into her class with no optical knowledge and end up with careers they could only dream of. “Many of my students overcome

obstacles I can only imagine and become successful professionals,” Rivard said.

After entering the optical industry accidentally 38 years ago, Rivard has worked in high end optical shops and within ophthalmology, but began her teaching career in 1992. Among her accomplishments, Rivard was the first female president of the Connecticut Opticians Association, and after serving for four years, became their first executive director for the next 10 years. She has been honored with the optician of the year award, a lifetime achievement award and an outstanding achievement in education award from Middlesex Community College where she is an instructor.

“When I first started my career, most women

were receptionists, rarely opticians. Now, my classrooms are primarily female, a big difference from even 10 years ago. It’s a wonderful opportunity for women as there are many different avenues that can be taken,” she said.

SHE SAYS... “Women are an integral part of the optical industry. We are smart, loyal and dedicated to our careers and our profession.”

Jill M. Saxon, OD

DIRECTOR, PROFESSIONAL STRATEGY

Bausch + Lomb
Bridgewater, New Jersey

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Jill is recognized as one of the pre-eminent leaders in vision care. She is a dynamic public speaker who can successfully navigate between technical and commercial topics.”



You could say that optometry runs through Jill Saxon’s blood. She considers it a privilege being part of a family providing medical care. Her grandfather was the owner of the “locally

famous” Stan Beck’s Pharmacy, her father is a practicing optometrist, both of her uncles are optometrists and her younger brother is now a licensed optometrist.

Before embarking on her six-year stint as a private practice optometrist, Saxon began her career as a Lieutenant in the US Navy serving as a staff optometrist at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md. While in the military, Saxon was awarded the Navy Achievement Medal, the Meritorious Unit Citation and the National Defense Service Medal.

Today, at Bausch + Lomb, she is responsible for proactive engagement with optometric professionals specifically related to contact lenses and lens

care, and provides education around “B+L’s novel advancements in material technology. I provide guidance to the marketing team from the voice of the OD, and ensure that what we provide to the community fits the needs of our patients.”

SHE SAYS... “I have four recommendations for women in optical: Listen. Be passionate and authentic in everything you do. Embrace change, always be ready to learn and adapt to the world around you. Be courageous, make a goal, reach even higher, and then go for it.”

Michele Self, ABOC, FNAO

OPTICIAN SUPERVISOR-OPTICAL EDUCATION SUPERVISOR

University of Alabama Birmingham
School of Optometry

Birmingham, Alabama

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She has taught optometry students at UAB for 16 years, is an outstanding example of excellence in patient care and a great role model.”



Michele Self has served on the Board of the National Academy of Opticianry since 2005, and in 2015, became the first female chair of the American Board of Opticianry, a testament to her dedication to the profession. She helped the Board get the ABO competency test available in Spanish, and introduced a practical exam to the ABO test. She has been in “this wonderful business” for 23 years, and continues to find joy in her career every day. This includes teaching 3rd and 4th year optometry students at UAB’s School of Optometry, where she designed the only university-based

hands-on dispensary management program for 4th year students.

Along with teaching, Self manages the University’s retail optical dispensary where some 1,200 patients are seen monthly. The key to her success in these multiple professional roles is simple: “I show students and customers my love of what I do. If you show joy, you get joy in return.” Despite her hectic schedule, she has found time to accompany optometric students and faculty on 15 international mission trips to do eye exams and dispense eyeglasses in Central and South America.

“Women have brought a new edge to optical dispensaries. We are more fashion-oriented and take buying eyewear to a whole new level.”

SHE SAYS... “My husband is my inspiration. He has encouraged me every step of the way throughout my career. He is my rock.”

More →



Caroline Curry

COFOUNDER AND HEAD OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND COMMUNICATIONS

Frameri
Cincinnati, Ohio

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Caroline makes sure that every single Frameri customer has an amazing and happy experience and personally reaches out to everyone to see if they have any questions. She’s a big part of the reason customers love buying from Frameri.”



“I am inspired by change and the people that lay the groundwork to allow that change to happen. Being a visionary and imagining how things could be is fantastic, but actually getting in there, working and creating that change—that is something special,” said Caroline Curry, co-founder of the innovative interchangeable frames and lenses system company, Frameri.

“Frameri is my first experience in optical. I was intrigued by the challenge of creating something new. From the beginning, I knew our founder, Konrad Billetz, wanted to build a product that had the customer in mind. Even before we had the frames and lenses system figured out, we knew the idea was solid.”

Two years in and Curry has figured out some important things. “The optical business should function with the customer in mind. That should be true when it comes to pricing, style offerings, convenience and customer service. Optical businesses should strive for innovation and change, but still within the goal of making things better for people on a daily basis,” she concluded.

SHE SAYS... “Don’t be intimidated by those that have decades of experience in optical. You can learn from them and start a career in this industry at any point. Having passion for your work will take you far.”

Weslie M. Hamada, OD, FAAO

PRINCIPAL RESEARCH OPTOMETRIST

Johnson & Johnson Vision Care, Inc.
Jacksonville, Florida

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She made the leap from private practice to successful contact lens researcher at J&J, and is past president of the Hawaii Optometric Association.”



As a second-generation optometrist, Weslie Hamada gained an insider’s view of the optical world at an early age. Her first job was working in her father’s ophthalmic supply distribution company, and she was inspired by the efforts of her father and his colleagues in moving the optometric profession forward. After graduating in 2001 from Marshall B. Ketchum University School of Optometry (SCCO), Hamada worked in private practice for 11 years in Oahu, Hawaii.

In 2013, Hamada changed career paths and entered the corporate world, joining Johnson & Johnson Vision Care as a research optometrist responsible for the clinical development of astigmatism contact lens products. “Joining JJVC has made me feel like a student again. I am learning from experts such as optical engineers, scientists and chemists, which helps to make me a better clinician in the long run.” Hamada points out the similarities between patient care and product research in providing positive outcomes for patients. “When I was actively practicing, I helped make a difference with patients by educating them about eye health. Now, I am developing products to improve their vision and their lifestyles. That’s exciting.”

SHE SAYS... “Discover the leader within. We are leaders in our workplaces, our communities, our churches and our households. We all have these qualities but sometimes fail to recognize them.”

Amy Larson

VP, MARKETING & ECOMMERCE

Glasses.com division of Luxottica
Draper, Utah

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She developed game-changing industry technologies such as virtual try-on for apps, and she is also developing e-commerce for independent doctors working with EyeMed and Luxottica wholesale.”



In marketing and e-commerce for 15 years, 11 of those in optical, Amy Larson has won numerous awards and presented at many industry events. For Glasses.com, she achieved the following last year—drove a 40 percent increase in revenue with a 50 percent decrease in the marketing budget, oversaw the successful rebranding of Glasses.com, and replatformed on a new e-commerce engine in six weeks.

She advises women in the field, “Nothing can help you more than being authentic. Be bold and true to who you are. Don’t allow yourself to be limited by gender, age or ethnicity. Different perspectives are what make this industry interesting and fun.”

Among her current challenges are changing people’s perspectives about glasses from “must wear” to “love to wear,” she said. “Like shoes, glasses serve a functional purpose, but they shouldn’t be limited to that. Embrace them as another way to express who you are.”

She described one way she hopes to achieve this: “I constantly strive to see the process through the eyes of the customer and use that to shape the direction for everything we do.”

SHE SAYS... “I can make a difference by supporting our vision, inspiring and empowering through self-expression, and our mission, which is to change the way the world sees glasses.”

INNOVATORS

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

Jennifer Lyerly, OD

AUTHOR AND EDITOR

Eyedolatri Blog
Cary, North Carolina

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Jennifer’s website is a great hub for patient friendly ocular health resources, as well as comprehensive guides and tips for new ODs on topics ranging from scleral lens fitting to vision therapy.”



Every time patients or readers of her blog, Eyedolatri, comment that they’ve learned something about their eyes or health, Jennifer Lyerly, OD feels re-energized by the optometric profession. After graduating from South-

ern College of Optometry in 2011, Lyerly has been practicing at Triangle Visions Optometry as well as running her blog full time. Additionally, she is a member of the AOA, the North Carolina State Optometric Society and currently serves as the Cary District Key Person for the NCSOS Eastern district.

Running a growing blog and working in the field isn’t easy, and although she doesn’t consider herself the most technical writer, her blog’s success comes from her ability to allow readers to easily understand the more complicated aspects of eyecare. “My goal with Eyedolatri is to give people a starting place to learn more in a format that’s not intimidating and open to discussion,” she said.

“As long as you find yourself doing something that you love, you will be successful because passion is the driving force that keeps you going, even when you are tired or stressed,” she said.

SHE SAYS... “In the next decade of optometry we won’t be just ‘women in optometry.’ The numbers are clear that we *will* be optometry, and I can’t wait to see how the industry changes with more of our voices being heard.”

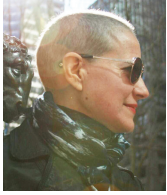
Connie Reiss

WORLDWIDE BUSINESS UNIT MANAGER

Columbia Eyewear
L’Amy America
Wilton, Connecticut

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Connie is passionate and works tirelessly on behalf of her brand. She assiduously analyzes the data from her brand and the eyewear market to explore new opportunities to expand her business.

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“I’ve been in the eyewear business for 17 years. Wow, that’s a long time,” said Connie Reiss. “When on a roll of the dice, I moved to Miami and without much buying experience I got a job at Sunglass Hut responsible for over \$90 million in sales.”

“Now, among other corporate marketing responsibilities, my primary function is global brand manager for Columbia Eyewear,” she explained. “I also help secure and develop new brands for L’Amy America’s portfolio. A brand manager must always have a clear, end-goal product or brand vision and then work backward to achieve it. I am incredibly persistent/stubborn and am not afraid to get dirty and work hard.”

That attitude has served her well. “The universe always reminds me, I am only as old as I feel. The limitations I face are those constructed

by my own mind. After a battle with cancer this year, I am acutely aware that every single day we are given the gift of youth. Every day, regardless of age, I am able to take a new chance, try something different, reinvent myself, make new friends, heal old wounds and make good stuff happen.”

SHE SAYS... “It’s a rewardingly small and close-knit industry, so I would recommend eyewear as a career to other women. My advice: Make friends, especially with competitors.”

Diane B. Whitaker, OD

**CHIEF, VISION REHABILITATION SERVICE
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF OPHTHALMOLOGY**
Duke Eye Center
Durham, North Carolina

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She is leader in her field and is influential by bringing the latest in technology including developing new apps and treatment options for patients severely limited by low vision.”



Diane Whitaker has been practicing optometry for some 17 years, starting out in a private ophthalmic surgical practice before moving to UNC Chapel Hill as assistant professor of ophthalmology. She’s spent the last nine years at Duke as assistant professor of ophthalmology and inaugural chief of the Vision Rehabilitation Service. As a clinical professor she oversees the didactic and clinical instruction of ophthalmology residents, geriatric medicine fellows and vision rehabilitation therapists. And as chief of vision rehab she’s fiscally responsi-

INNOVATORS

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

ble for all aspects of service and is a member of the executive committee of department of ophthalmology.

“I make a difference because I am training the eyecare providers of the future and changing misperceptions about the different roles professionals play in eyecare. I also provide trainees with practical skills and knowledge of clinical optical principles that will serve them for their professional lifetime, regardless of subspecialty.”

She advises women to “refuse to be defined by stereotypes and preconceptions. Stay current and always try to know more than anyone else about your area of expertise.”

SHE SAYS... “Vision is our most cherished sense. Eyes are elegant, fascinating sensory organs and can be windows through which extensions of other systems can be viewed.” ■

Methodology for Most Influential Women in Optical

This year’s request for nominations was structured like the 2014 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.

To view past year’s Special Reports about Influential Women in Optical, go to VisionMonday.com and click on VM Reports.