

# Optical XXcellence

## Celebrating VM's 2012 Influential Women



NEW YORK—The optical industry, with its singular mix of fashion, technology and medicine, offers a multitude of career choices rivaled by few other fields. From board room to exam room to back office, the list of optical jobs is almost limitless.

Within this diverse spectrum, women occupy many positions of influence, often playing pivotal roles that shape the character of the companies and organizations in which they work. A select number of them, recognized and respected by colleagues and customers alike, comprise *VM*'s 2012 roster of Influential Women.

In the 10 years since *VM* inaugurated its annual Influential Women report, the roles of women in optical have evolved along with the industry itself. More women are entering the field of optometry today than ever before. A greater number of women now occupy upper management positions. Some are working in jobs that didn't exist a decade ago, such as social media strategists.

On a broader level, consumers' changing perception of eyewear as more of a fashion accessory and less of a medical device has allowed women who design, dispense, buy and sell eyewear to capitalize on their sense of style.

In this context we view our Influential Women—who are chosen from a large pool of nominees named by *VM* readers—and profile their accomplishments in the following roles:

- **Executive Suite:** Women who hold positions such as president, VP, CEO, CFO, CMO, CIO or COO and who guide their companies forward, inspire leadership among their teams and peers and achieve high performance.
- **Rising Stars:** 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:** 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:** 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 these profiles, we hope you'll learn something about each of these remarkable women and appreciate why they've earned a spot on our honor roll. They join a distinguished group of more than 400 Influential Women whom we've profiled since 2003.

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



## Bj Avery

### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Texas Optometric Association  
Austin, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "She is a leader in directing the Texas State Optometric Association on both a state and national level."



Leaving the University of Texas armed with a degree in Journalism, Bj Avery never expected to work in the optical field, let alone head up a major optometric association boasting some 2,000 members. However, she admits her early career experience in newspaper and television reporting have come in handy as she designs and implements statewide political strategies for eye doctors and regularly consults on legislative/third party issues in her role as executive director of the Texas Optometric Association.

Avery also conducts seminars on various topics and teaches Medicare/Medicaid/Third Party management, billing and coding, as well as leadership and teambuilding. She views working for the association as a team effort. "No one is a one-person show. The doctors call the shots and our association staff are unsung heroes working behind the scenes to keep the trains running on time. I am a facilitator, who not only tries to roll with the punches but sometimes manages to avert them. I try to find a middle ground whenever possible."

But make no mistake, Avery is an impressive leader in her own right. Over the last 10 years, she has served on various American Optometric Association (AOA) committees and from 2009 to 2010 she was president of the International Association of Optometric Executives. She is also active in a networking organization known as Texas Optometric Women's Network (TOWN), which allows local ECPs to socialize while comparing notes on how they run their practices and handle problems.

SHE SAYS... "I have had so many great, talented mentors, advisors and supporters. I am inspired by each and every one of them who gives of his or her time and effort on a voluntary basis to keep this profession strong and vibrant."

## Joan Blackwood

### SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, CMO

1-800 CONTACTS and Glasses.com  
Draper, Utah

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "As chief marketing officer, Joan is a member of the senior management team and is responsible for all retail web and phone-based sales of contact lenses."



It should come as no surprise that as chief marketing officer, Joan Blackwood's main focus is on the consumer. Managing the marketing side consists of brand marketing and media, social strategy and public relations, pricing and promotions, direct marketing, website management and application and mobile development. But what Blackwood really believes she provides is a service to vision-corrected consumers as much as delivering vision-care products.

"We have a responsibility to the optical customer in educating them on the importance of eye health and compliance, especially as it comes to their contact lenses and how to wear and care for them," she said.

After relaunching the brand in 2010, the company has driven up awareness, website traffic by 40 percent and web revenues by 20 percent. Through the use of customer relationship management, over 80 percent of revenue comes from repeat orders.

Blackwood predicts that technology will be the biggest driver of change in the optical industry as products improve and consumers enter that category earlier and stay longer. Among the technological advances she is involved with implementing are enabling consumers to use applications and mobile sites to interact. For

example, capabilities include downloading a prescription or scanning in a credit card.

Other ways she's involved with simplifying the ordering process is by tracking contact lens consumption and saving prescription information.

SHE SAYS... "It is always interesting to me to uncover the key insights that create the connection between a company's product or service and what drives the consumer's decisions. Creating that connection is what it's all about to me."

## Teresa Carter

### PRESIDENT

International Eyecare Center, Inc.  
Quincy, Illinois

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "She is the leader and driving force. Having been with the company for over 27 years, she has worked her way through the ranks and has held nearly every position within the company. Her dedication inspires the staff and doctors on a daily basis."



Drawing her work ethic from working on the family farm in Cohoka, Missouri, a 2,200 person town, Teresa Carter took her conviction for finishing projects and seeing things through into her career. Initially working double shifts as an LPN, Carter grabbed the opportunity to become an optician as soon as it hit her. "I fell in love with it, with the people, and the vision. The opportunities were there to learn more and to expand my knowledge, and that is something that I love to do." Liking the challenge, Carter "essentially learned every single department" until she made her way to president of International Eyecare Center (IEC), a nine-location business.

While working her way up the ranks, Carter became a NCLC certified technician, a certified laser

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technician, a Fellow of the National Academy of Opticianry (FNAO) and a motivational speaker on practice management. She also sings in the “praise team” at her church, and is involved with Relay for Life and the American Lung Association. “IEC has seen me through many hardships and they’ve never let me down. So, I try hard every day not to let them down.”

Carter says her ultimate responsibility is ensuring the 130 IEC family members and their families have a safe and secure future. By working the floor when possible to ensure her decisions are successful, along with her duties overseeing acquisitions, vendor/partner growth, management partnerships and onsite lab and Lasik centers, she still finds the most exciting part of opticianry to be working with people and helping them find a new look, and a new outlook. “The look on their faces when they can see...It’s an amazing, amazing thing.”

**SHE SAYS...**“If your passion for the industry begins with the difference you can make in the lives of others, your business decisions will have a strong compass.”

## Gail Elias

### DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

Henry Ford OptimEyes  
Madison Heights, Michigan

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...**“Gail oversaw the implementation of Electronic Medical Records for our 18 offices last year, smoothly and on time. At the same time, she managed our continued strong financial position as well as opened our seventh super vision center.”



After retiring from a 31-year finance and accounting career at Ford Motor Company, Gail Elias knew she didn’t want to stop working. While searching for a position that would allow use of

her skills as well as make a difference in peoples’ lives, Elias found Henry Ford OptimEyes and knew it was the perfect fit. “I was so inspired by the staff and everyone I interviewed with and the culture...I knew this is where I wanted to be,” Elias said.

For the past five years, while leading the finance, accounting and billing departments of Henry Ford OptimEyes, Elias has been responsible for overseeing 17 locations, including the opening of two satellite offices called Super Vision Centers which she describes as a “one stop shop” of services for patients and staff. She has also been involved in several initiatives to encourage and develop her staff and stores, such as the implementation of new billing and electronic medical records systems. The “exciting new software” is just one example of how Elias is always looking for new opportunities for growth and expansion. Additionally, she participates in a fundraising program through the Lions Club called KidSight which provides vision screenings for underprivileged children.

A strong believer in leading by example, Elias emphasizes getting to know her staff so that everyone is empowered and engaged. “I’m not sitting in a bubble. I make it a point to really relate to the staff as much as I can.”

**SHE SAYS...**“I hope that the difference I make is in supporting the Henry Ford OptimEyes team to be successful, with careers focused on excellence in customer service and patient care.”

## Stephanie Haenes

### OWNER AND CFO

Art of Optiks  
Wayzata, Minnesota

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...**“She is one of the few women business owners in optical. She started the company in her 20s and has created a unique business model. Art of Optiks combines one of the most techno-

logically advanced eyecare facilities with exclusive, high-end eyewear. Stephanie’s sense of design and passion for a holistic patient experience makes her a creative and dynamic innovator.”



Stephanie Haenes, ABOC began her career in optical at the ripe age of 21. With no optical training, she began working at Sears Optical in Appleton, Wis. in order to support herself and her child. When the manager and other staff member left one month later, Haenes was left to learn opticianry and manage the store, and she took off from there.

A self-proclaimed victor of “trial by fire,” within a year Haenes was recognized by Cole Vision as having the top producing store in the country for its size and was then recruited by Pearle Vision. She developed her selling abilities and knowledge of optical products, and soon moved on to InVision Optical in Edina, Minn. Once again, the young optician was recruited, this time to manage a luxury optical store. “I found that I was born to be in this industry,” Haenes said. “It was at this point that I started to really believe I had the ability and drive to open my own luxury optical.” Having made contacts over the years in multiple levels of the industry, Haenes and her husband opened their own store, Art of Optiks, where she acts as operations manager, accountant and optician. Her husband is the on-site optometrist.

“I excel at seeing the big picture,” Haenes said. “I have always been the type of person that does what is needed to keep things running smoothly.”

**SHE SAYS...**“I have changed my business over the years to more closely align myself with the changing values and buying patterns of our customers. I believe that most of my success has been due to this philosophy of changing with the times.”

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## Marjorie Knotts, OD

### PRESIDENT

Knotts Optometry  
Indianapolis, Indiana

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...**“Dr. Knotts was named the IOA Optometrist of the Year in 2009. She has also volunteered many hours to numerous other professional and community organizations. She enjoys spending time with her patients to ensure they receive the personal service they deserve.”



Marjorie Knotts, OD has been in practice for 28 years, and has owned her own private practice for 22. After graduating with honors from Indiana University School of Optometry in 1984 and spending time as a clinical assistant professor there for subsequent years, she has since left the faculty but remains heavily involved with the school.

Along with her service on the Dean's Advisory Board and the Dean Search Committee, Knotts has devoted considerable time to volunteer organizations. In addition to her participation with Prevent Blindness of Indiana, several state commissions and Vision USA, her biggest effort has been her 25 years volunteering for the Indiana Optometric Association (IOA). “It’s a lot of fun to get energized about giving back to the profession,” Knotts said.

Among her accomplishments, Knotts considers the best to be inspiring four women in her practice (one of whom is her associate) to become optometrists. Her inspiration? “I spent a lot of time with my local optometrist and ophthalmologist because I had histoplasmosis chorioretinopathy as a teenager,” she said. Many years later, she is a prime example of making the right choice, and offers these words of wisdom: “Practice where you are happy personally because it will show. Get involved. Make a difference in your profession.”

**SHE SAYS...** “It’s been a fantastic profession for me. The positive thing about the ‘three O’s’ is that we know how to adapt to changing environments economically. I think that’s what we’re really good at.”

## Mary Anne C. Murphy, OD

### CHAIR, U.S. NATIONAL COMMITTEE

Optometry Giving Sight  
Golden, Colorado

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...**“Dr. Murphy is a dynamic leader and charity champion. As Chair of the U.S. National Committee, she volunteers her services, time and extraordinary leadership skills to the Optometry Giving Sight team to influence change in the world.”



Even before her entry to optometry school Mary Anne Murphy worked full time as a certified optician at LensCrafters and continued to work part-time during her doctoral training. She

described her time there as “a wonderful experience and an amazing training ground for opticians.” Upon completion of her degree, she worked as an associate in private practice for four years before starting her own practice in 2006. Today, as founding optometrist and president of Front Range Eye Associates in Broomfield, Colo., Murphy’s practice has grown to three doctors and 15 staff and “we are proud members of the Vision Source network of premier practices,” she said.

These days, she cherishes her time and role at Optometry Giving Sight (OGS) as Chair of the U.S. National Committee which “allows me to create and develop relationships with vendors and doctors to raise money. These funds support the primary mission of the organization—to end refractive error blindness through delivery of eyecare services, training of eyecare professionals and the establishment of infrastructure dedicated to service delivery and train-

ing. During the past year, we have increased our fundraising by over 50 percent and have established domestic support in the U.S. with the Special Olympics while continuing to grow our international support.” The organization is currently funding projects in over 15 countries.

With four days a week at her practice and one day devoted to OGS, Murphy said she “is enjoying the ride while trying to set an example for my daughter. Working professionally and giving back on an international level is so rewarding.”

**SHE SAYS...**“I surround myself with people that are smarter and more motivated than I am. This constantly encourages me to do more. I excel only because I have the support of my family and co-workers.”

## Margaret M. Nekić

### CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

Advantica  
St. Louis, Missouri

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...**“Margaret is a seasoned, strategic and process-minded leader who helps others deliver measurable, cost-effective results; she has spearheaded a performance culture among diverse, talented individuals and has the skills to tap into the power of each team member.”



From her start as an entry-level claims manager to her position as COO, Nekić has worked in health care for both mid-sized and Fortune 500 insurance corporations for over 15 years. In addition to

her executive duties at Advantica, the vision care and dental benefit management company, she also is actively involved in the National Association of Vision Care Plans and the National Association of Specialty Health Organizations.

At the age of 13, without vision insurance, she put

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on eyeglasses for the first time and realized how clear everything could look. “I immediately understood all the things that I had been missing and wanted to share that realization with others,” she said. “I am now part of an organization that delivers that vital service to millions of individuals nationwide. Vision insurance takes a proactive approach by encouraging patients to get comprehensive vision care regularly.” Still, she never imagined her undergraduate degree in political science and MBA would lead to this area of the insurance industry.

“The managed vision care industry has traditionally been dominated by women in all facets of the business except for the executive suite,” she continued. “That is changing. We are seeing more women emerge as proven, valued and equal leaders.”

While she feels that women bring vital insights and strength to leadership, she believes it really boils down to the person regardless of their sex and that breaking stereotypes is the key to success as it brings about true equality in the workplace.

**SHE SAYS...**“I am inspired by positive individuals who drive corporate growth and professional development within their organization, people not only skilled in their field but highly motivated and results oriented. I have had a few mentors throughout my career who exemplified these characteristics, and today it is my goal to exhibit these attributes as well.”

## Georgette Pascale

### FOUNDER, CEO

Pascale Communications LLC.  
Fairfield, Connecticut

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...**“Seven years ago, after holding high-level positions at several top public relations firms, she launched her own virtual company, using a new business model, in order to address an underserved niche within health care public relations.”



Georgette Pascale studied communications at New York’s Fashion Institute of Technology with the intention of becoming a stylist. But after an internship at a public relations agency involved in the entertainment and music business, she fell in love with the fast-paced world of PR. She eventually ended up at the global PR leader, Hill & Knowlton, working with a variety of accounts in a range of businesses. But Pascale was always drawn to the idea of starting her own company. About eight years ago, she formed a “virtual team” of experts with different skill sets to serve clients in the health care arena at a time when diverse and digital communications were transforming the field.

Today, Pascale and her team works with such leading pharmaceutical, medical device and health care clients as Allergan, Acufocus, Abbot Medical Optics, Zeavision, Wavetec, Advance Vision Research, Iridex and many others. “It’s energizing to learn about their businesses, to strategize with the teams to relay a message that’s on target for our clients,” she said.

Pascale regularly lends her PR expertise to non-profits including Prevent Blindness America and Ophthalmic Women Leaders (OWL) where she holds an officer role as secretary.

**SHE SAYS...**“You’ve got to go for it, don’t be afraid but be creative. There are always challenges. But if you help people out, they’ll then help you.”

## Holly Rush

### SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, SALES

Luxottica USA

New York, New York

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...**“She is a great leader, with a clear vision and a management style that inspires people who work for her and with her to raise the bar, to do better, to aim for the bigger picture. An accomplished ex-

ecutive who entered the eyewear industry a scant 15 months ago, she has mastered the industry and its nuances in record time.”



Rush “swam her way through school” as a competitive swimmer, attending West Virginia University on a scholarship, coming to the Northeast after graduation with an interest in marketing. Exploring packaged goods companies’ training programs, she started what would be a nine-year stint at Duracell, rising from the field as a sales rep through various managerial posts, including national account manager for Target. She moved to a new startup business involved in reviving classic beauty product brands. Rush recalls, “It was entrepreneurial, and I was director of sales and business development, responsible for Walmart and other national players as well as many internal support functions.”

Rush joined L’Oreal for its niche professional/salon division brands. She recalls, “It was best of both worlds—a smaller division but the resources of a really big company.” She moved up within L’Oreal to be VP of education for two different medical skin brands. “When I was called to consider Luxottica’s wholesale division, I had not heard of the company, but within five weeks, I met Andrea (Dorigo), learned more about the challenge and I was in—thrown into the deep end!,” she said laughing.

Rush oversees Luxottica sales to independents, department stores and key accounts. New to a company, a culture and an industry, she said, “it’s about learning everything you can and really listening, leaning on key advisors and then, you go back to the basics, with the right teams in place.”

**SHE SAYS...**“You have to believe in yourself. Confidence doesn’t come overnight. But take responsibility for your own growth, you can’t always wait for someone to help. Talk to people you admire and respect and, sometimes, ask for help.”

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## Robin Scheer Ettinger

### VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING AMERICAS

Safilo Group  
Parsippany, New Jersey

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Robin demands excellence but is not afraid to get in the trenches and show people how to excel at their positions. She invests time and leadership with everyone she works with and has an amazing capability for bringing people together in a collaborative manner.”



Being responsible for all the marketing activities for licensed and house brands for an international company like Safilo in

the Americas—including all visual merchandising, PR, in-store activities, training and advertising—is a huge responsibility. Luckily, Robin Scheer Ettinger had a mentor whose behavior she could emulate.

“The woman that has made the deepest impression on me is Carmen DuBroc (VP, Girls Scouts’ board of directors). She taught me about always taking the high road with colleagues and competitors.

“Early in my career, I was nervous to walk a trade show and meet the competitors. Carmen walked up to each of them, introduced herself, shook their hand and complimented them on the great products they made. She was so gracious and genuine. I realized that was the way I wanted to conduct myself throughout my career, with grace and confidence,” said Scheer Ettinger.

And for the last 25 years, Scheer Ettinger has done so. “I love what I do and bring enthusiasm

and a positive point of view to most things. I believe in collaboration with my colleagues as it makes work more fun when you do it together.

“I am always open to learn; about new industries, new cultures, new brands, etc. I’m usually pretty good at figuring out each new challenge and then bringing the team along to meet it.”

She believes there is great opportunity in this industry. “The fact that we are made up of many independent optical doors means you can find your niche and prosper. Overall, this is a nice industry with real people—not just giant corporations,” she added.

**SHE SAYS...** “I’m not going to cure a serious disease or invent something critical but I can influence the people I come in contact with on a daily basis by creating a positive, caring environment where there is great respect for each person and everyone treats each other with kindness.”

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## Heather Campbell

### SALES AND MARKETING COORDINATOR

QSpex Technologies, Inc.  
Alpharetta, Georgia

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“Heather has guts! She sold her house and moved to Georgia to work for a start-up company. She’s admired for her fortitude, make-it-happen attitude, and willingness to jump in with two feet.”



When Heather Campbell heard about a job at Briot through a friend of her sister, she’d had no exposure to optometry. “I was amazed at the lens finishing process. I had no idea what went on behind the scenes in making a pair of glasses,” explained Campbell.

That was nine years ago. Today, Campbell is the sales and marketing coordinator for the start-up company, QSpex Technologies. “I’m more a jack-of-all-trades versus an expert in any one field,” said Campbell. “I think that’s why QSpex was interested in me.”

Her current responsibilities include executing the marketing plan including advertising, multimedia, creating programs and marketing collateral, providing product information, managing and attending the major trade shows, and supporting the sales team. Campbell loves the variety her job provides including working with different people. Working for an emerging company also has its challenges as things are constantly changing and evolving, however, that’s also what makes it exciting to Campbell.

When asked how the role of women has changed in the last 10 years, Campbell finds that women are embraced by the industry and viewed more equal to men than ever before. “I believe that the Optical Women’s Association has contributed greatly to this through their many programs and events,” said Campbell.

SHE SAYS...“I’m inspired by people who create a positive environment by bringing out the best in others. The encouragement and support I receive at QSpex motivates me to do the best that I can no matter how small the task or project.”

## Patience (Hansen) Cook

### GLOBAL BRAND MANAGER

Transitions Optical  
Pinellas Park, Florida

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“She is responsible for leading the global development and evolution of Transitions Optical’s brand equity.”



Patience Cook works closely with regional marketing teams to lead the development and execution of the company’s brand strategy. In partnership with the R&D and product marketing teams, she

oversees the brand positioning, commercial concept development and communications development for new key product initiatives.

“We have four global regions, and I have to empathize with each of them because of regional differences,” she explained. “I need to be there for them when they need to make a connection with corporate headquarters.”

Cook joined Transitions six years ago, working on North America marketing programs before taking on global marketing responsibilities a year-and-a-half ago. She cites Greg Marko, Transitions marketing director, Asia Pacific and Alexis Cardona, chief marketing officer, as mentors who helped enhance her understanding of the industry.

Cook led the development of Transitions’ global communications campaign “Life Well Lit,” including the creation of the TV commercial and print and digital elements for consumer and trade communications. “One of the things I love about Transitions is helping raise consumer awareness of the importance of eye

exams,” she said. She also took the lead in the creation of the Transitions Vantage integrated campaign.

SHE SAYS...“ Inspiration is seeing a child try on glasses for the first time and realizing that there is even more to their world than they ever imagined.”

## Tifani DeMaria

### SENIOR MANAGER, OPTOMETRIC CAREER SERVICES

Luxottica Retail  
Frisco, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“As a passionate advocate for the benefits of partnering with Luxottica Retail, Tifani is the primary contact point for doctors of optometry who are interested in affiliating with the company, and she leads all of its relationships with the key schools of optometry across North America.”



Although she spent 13 years in the jewelry industry before joining Pearle Vision as a field manager in the Philadelphia market in 2001, Tifani DeMaria said that she, “simply fell in love with this business.” Three years later she moved to the eyecare side of the business, and five years ago she began supporting all brands for doctor recruitment. Now she works closely with optometry schools, focusing on training and continuing education for doctors of optometry. For example, in 2011 she worked with a former president of the American Optometric Association, Peter Kehoe, OD, on developing a program regarding doctors’ responsibility to meet their patients’ need for sun protection.

She credits some of her success to several leaders who have helped her develop both personally and professionally. These mentors include Rupe Hansra, OD, senior eyecare director, LensCrafters Eye Care Center for Excellence, as someone she said, “has

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inspired my vision for the future of our industry and our company,” and her boss, Dave Plogmann, senior vice president, optical partnerships, whose “belief in me and support of me has allowed me to elevate the services that my department and I are able to provide both within and outside of Luxottica,” she said.

**SHE SAYS...**“What I’m given the opportunity to do makes a difference for people. I’m able to connect doctors of optometry with a vision care brand that will help support their career goals and allow them to succeed.”

## Candace Hunter

### OPERATIONS MANAGER

Luxe Laboratory  
Anaheim, California

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...**“She controls inventory, handles logistics, supervises employees and is developing strong leadership qualities. She possesses the skills to quickly and efficiently solve problems.”



At age eight, Candace Hunter got her first taste of the optical industry, cleaning trays at Multi-Facets, a California lab where her parents worked. At 18, she entered the lab business full-time, handled

shipping and receiving, data entry and customer service at West Coast Lens, where she worked her way up to operations manager.

Hunter currently runs the day-to-day operations of Luxe Laboratory, a boutique lab in Anaheim, Calif. that opened in March and caters to high-end optical. The lab is owned by Richard Wilhelm, formerly of West Coast Lens. Hunter credits him as a mentor, along with David Holland and Vila Holland of Multi-Facets and West Coast Lens, and Angela Powell of West Coast Lens.

Although Hunter has many skills, she said being

detail oriented is one of her primary strengths. “I seem to work well with organizing, indexing, finding discrepancies and so on. But I am also able to take a step back to see the whole picture.”

Hunter believes women will continue to influence the optical laboratory industry by taking on a more direct, one-on-one approach to service and education. “We as women tend to like to communicate, and this has enabled us to deliver higher levels of service to our customers when it comes to the latest optical fashion trends and newest technologies. This will all play a huge part in how we can effectively influence our customer base.”

**SHE SAYS...**“My advice to young women in optical is to be a sponge, absorb and learn about technology, fashion, culture, what makes others tick and where things are going in society. Don’t be afraid to take risks and make sure to be bold and brash.”

## Patricia Machado

### VICE PRESIDENT NEW BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Augen Optics  
San Diego, California

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...**“She is a multi-tasker and a role model for working moms.”



During high school and college days, Machado would hang out at the Augen laboratories in Mexico, working for her father, Dr. Marco Machado, who founded the business and whom she cites as an inspiration. After earning an undergraduate degree in physics and a masters degree in industrial administration, she helped her father develop the layout, hire staff and set up administrative functions for Augen’s new lens manufacturing plant in Ensenada, Mexico. She also made glass

molds for lens casting and later worked at Augen’s San Diego warehouse and distribution center on inventory control and customer service.

Machado left Augen to work at an irrigation company, an experience that increased her knowledge of operations management in manufacturing environments and lean manufacturing methods. She returned to Augen three-and-a-half years ago. Today, she is responsible for growing Augen’s brand presence and sales in the U.S. and other markets, overseeing marketing and sales efforts, attracting new business, developing and growing an internal free-form laboratory business to service U.S. laboratory partners and managing the administrative side of the U.S. business.

Machado said it can be challenging to adapt a non-American company with strong roots in its own country and culture to the U.S. market. “The ongoing challenge is how to maintain our Mexican heritage and ways of doing business yet blend into the American marketplace,” she remarked.

As a woman in a male-dominated industry, Machado is helping change how business is conducted by emphasizing negotiation, compromise and teamwork. “With more women in sales and management positions, discussions are moving from the technical aspects of the product to what’s best for the customer, business or industry,” she observed.

**SHE SAYS...**“Women tend to have a capacity to listen to all points of view and come up with a solution that’s good for all sides.”

## Karen March, OD

### CLINICAL OPTOMETRIST

General Leonard Wood Army  
Community Hospital  
Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...**“She provides valuable input regarding sound policies and operational guidance due to her tenure



at the same clinic. She is very convincing and convicted to high standards and the military does not suffer from a lack of sub-standard care with her at the watch.”



After graduating from Indiana University Optometry School in 2000, Karen March’s career took an unusual turn with stops along the way to Alaska, South Korea and then back to U.S. soil. She served as an active duty optometrist in the US Army from 2000 to 2004, first at Fort Wainwright in Alaska and then at Camp Casey in South Korea. Her experience in the field doing routine exams and providing trauma care to soldiers prepared March for her re-entry to civilian life with a brief stint at LensCrafters. But the Army was still “near and dear to her heart” and in 2005 she returned as a civilian clinical optometrist for the US Army at Fort Leonard Wood.

Currently working at the base hospital, March provides comprehensive eyecare including ocular disease and contact lens management for beneficiaries, pre- and post-operative refractive surgery co-management, as well as optometric consultation services to other medical providers as needed. “Providing optimal vision care for America’s military members and their families is my contribution and show of gratitude for the service and sacrifice they make daily.”

She recently received the “Everyday Hero” award from the hospital commander for outstanding customer service after a patient nominated her for providing the “best eye exam ever.” March feels her longevity at the hospital as well as her ability to establish ongoing relationships with her patients has been a winning combination.

Her advice for women considering a career in optical? “Have confidence in yourself and your skills, maintain integrity in all you do, and be receptive to the wisdom and experience of those around you.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Always do what’s required for the best interests of your patients and customers first, and guaranteed success will follow.”

## Priti Patel, OD

### VICE PRESIDENT PROFESSIONAL AFFAIRS AND OPERATIONS

FirstSight Vision Services, Inc./  
National Vision Inc.  
Upland, California

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “She has the ability to communicate to people in a manner that helps them feel comfortable with achieving set goals. She is a leader in her profession and fully understands the optical industry and guides her organization to stay ahead of trends.”



Since joining FirstSight Vision Services (FSVS) in 2010, Priti Patel, OD has been responsible for the strategic vision and operational execution of affiliated optometry offices throughout California while navigating the complex health plan regulations and challenges. In addition, she works with optometrists through training, coaching, and individual performance plans to set business goals while building key relationships with industry representatives and interacting with the parent company and its board of directors.

During her tenure at the company, she has designed, structured and implemented a strategic direction for FSVS, delivered an increase in comparable sales and increased engagement among providers and employees.

Prior to this position, she was responsible for leading Walmart’s U.S. professional affairs and business relationship with 3,000 optometrists, a role which evolved into overseeing all health and wellness professional affairs, the division that brought optometry, pharmacy and hospital clinic systems into one group.

A member of the American Optometric Association and the American Academy of Optometry, Patel sees the profession changing due to the increasing number of women and Asian optometrists entering

the profession and reaching leadership positions. She recommends that other women looking to build an optical career surround themselves with industry leaders, stay committed and work hard.

**SHE SAYS...** “I have been fortunate to have had a good support system, starting with my father and family, followed by professional mentors. Throughout my career, I have understood I would not become a leader merely by being around industry leaders. Rather, I have strived to develop my own leadership skills by listening, observing, asking questions, giving my input and asking for constructive criticism.”

## Daphne Reznik

### REPRESENTATIVE PROGRAM MANAGER

Vision Source  
Kingwood, Texas

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Daphne manages 110 Vision Source Representative groups across the U.S. and Canada, selects leaders for each group and helps with vendor sponsorship and programming for their individual meetings.”



Reznik likes all aspects of vision care. “I absolutely love the field of health care. Providing medical services and saving sight is a blessing to be a part of,” she said.

“The fashion is an added bonus to me. Additionally, the technology is exciting—from lenses to the equipment practices can utilize for their patients.”

With Vision Source for about two years, Reznik previously worked for VisionCare Associates in Michigan, where she was a founding member for Athena WIN, the largest professional women’s network in mid-Michigan. She remains on the organization’s steering committee. As a Vision Source repre-

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sentative facilitator, she won the Facilitator of the Year Award. Currently, she runs the Vision Source Representative Program, working toward increasing member success.

"It's a business, and we all need to be a part of that, no matter what day-to-day tasks we perform in the office," she said. "If we keep that in mind, focusing on what our patients want and need as well as how to deliver it as a team, success will be the result."

For women building a career in the optical field, she suggests finding a mentor, or several, in order to learn from women who have been there before. "By understanding numbers in addition to the needs of a business and combining that with the compassion and comprehension of patient needs, women will continue to be key players in the industry at the most local of levels as well as nationally and internationally," she said.

**SHE SAYS...** "The mission of Vision Source inspires me. Coming from a background of politics, then working in a locally owned optometry practice for seven years, I feel so strongly about the need for Vision Source and our programs, including staff training and networking to help local practices succeed. I'm humbled to have the opportunity to be a part of it."

## Kimberly Schuy

**DIRECTOR, U.S. VISION CARE MARKETING**  
Alcon Laboratories, Inc.  
Fort Worth, Texas

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Kim brings classic brand marketing and optical industry knowledge together to uncover growth opportunities. Her leadership in understanding the marketplace, patient and ECP trends, helps her identify growth opportunities for the optical industry, and bring new products to market."



With a BSBA in finance from the University of Texas at Austin and a MBA in marketing and strategy from The Wharton School, Kimberly Schuy uses her skills and education in her position as the director of U.S. Vision Care marketing for Alcon Laboratories, Inc.

She's responsible for marketing a variety of contact lens brands and lens care products including DAILIES, FreshLook, and OPTI-FREE and Clear Care. "There are two great things about my job. First, none of my days are the same, and second, marketing is a fantastic career for those who enjoy understanding people," said Schuy.

Her marketing responsibilities include brand positioning and targeting, brand awareness and trials, product launches and material development. Before Schuy was in the optical industry she worked in the skin care industry on Olay moisturizers. She was recruited to come work in optical and has been in the industry over eight years.

"I choose to stay in optical because our industry is like a family. Most of us who come to optical never leave," said Schuy. The unique combination of science with innovation plus helping people have better lives through better vision is what keeps Schuy excited about working in optical. In 2009, Essilor selected Schuy and Maureen Cavanagh to represent the U.S. at the Dannon Executive Women's Leadership Conference in Evain, France.

**SHE SAYS...** "Success often comes from being 'good' and 'lucky.' I consider myself very lucky to have had supportive bosses and a handful of inspirational women to show me what is possible for a woman to accomplish in the corporate world."

## Heather Smith

**SENIOR MARKETING MANAGER**  
VisionWeb  
Austin, Texas

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Heather is creative, innovative and very influential in the direction of VisionWeb. She is committed to the organization and consistently performs to exceed expectations. She has impacted not only how we approach marketing but other companies in the industry as well. She's a leader, isn't afraid to take risks and is very hard working."



"I got into in the optical field by chance, but I got interested in it in a different way," said Heather Smith. "I knew that I wanted to focus on B2B marketing and was lucky enough to get that opportunity from VisionWeb. Once I was here, I realized how much potential there was in this industry to really be creative and innovative."

Smith joined VisionWeb six years ago as a marketing coordinator on a three-member marketing team after helping clients develop marketing strategies at an Austin-based publishing company. "That was the start of my career in the optical industry. Today, I'm proud to say that I lead one the most creative, energetic and hardest working teams in the industry," she added. It's a team that has grown to four full-time employees and "a few of the best interns a company could ask for," according to Smith.

"Success is earned through hard work; it's not an entitlement—that's my personal philosophy. It inspires me to work hard and it's definitely applicable in this industry. I think that regardless of the industry, the second you just keep doing what is safe you're in trouble. You have to always look forward, try to innovate, try to improve and always strive to do more," Smith said.

"I'm mentored by women at every turn, particularly my dear friends Julia Medina and Juanita Burke (former honorees themselves). We've got an excellent support system for women in this industry and the best thing we can do is keep it going. I would be lying if I didn't say you need to work like crazy but it's the best way to enjoy what you do."

**SHE SAYS...** “Don’t waste the first three years trying to find your way. Jump in! Join the organizations, go to the events and get to know people. When someone stands out at the beginning, ask them about their experience, and ask them how they got involved.”

## Rachael Anne Wruble, OD, FAAO

### OPTOMETRIST

Summit Eye Associates  
Gastonia, North Carolina

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “In only two years, she has gained the respect and trust of patients and is now producing revenue at ‘partner level.’ She has quickly become recognized for her intelligence, her accountability and her ‘can do’ attitude.”



While playing on the Ferris State University Golf Team, Rachael Wruble’s coach was able to see her potential beyond the fairways and greens. As chief of medical and surgical service at the Michigan College of Optometry, he strongly encouraged her to apply for the program and the rest, as they say, was a hole in one. Her graduation from the school in 2009 was followed by a residency at the Salisbury VAMC in 2010 at which time she joined Summit Eye Associates.

In addition to her expertise in ocular disease management (dry eyes, glaucoma, macular degeneration, diabetes) she provides specialty contact lens exams and has tackled vendor negotiations and insurance fee schedule management in an effort to boost the practice’s bottom line. It is her clinical experience coupled with her people skills and head for numbers that has skyrocketed her career—she will become an official partner in the practice at year’s end.

“I think personal relationships make the difference: I am not just someone’s eye doctor they see once per year. I am a listener in the exam room, an educator to children and adults, a volunteer/leader in the community. I want to be there for my patients, both inside and outside the exam room.”

In the future she predicts we may not be seeing just a routine eye exam completed; it may be a physical or a wellness exam.” I am seeing a change in more supplements compared to prescription medications and people wanting a healthier lifestyle. I think that most women want this personally and can incorporate it into practice.”

Her advice for women today—“Imagine your dream, create your own happiness, and live your life to the fullest potential. Never stop learning.”

**SHE SAYS...** “My parents pushed me to reach for my potential and Dr. Ann Hoscheit gave me not only my first job, but also the wisdom, drive and knowledge that make me strive for more.”

*More* →

COVER TOPIC

# the **XXCELLENCE** FACTOR

*Passion x Dedication = Influential Women*

presented by VisionWeb & Vision Monday

Be they opticians or executives, doctors or designers, passionate and dedicated are repeatedly used to describe the women nominated for *Vision Monday's* Most Influential Women in Optical honor. To commemorate the feature's 10th anniversary, VM and VisionWeb have collaborated on a graphical snapshot of the impact women have on the industry...

- NOMINATIONS**
- executive suite
  - mentors
  - innovators
  - rising stars

**OVER 1,553**  
**NOMINATIONS**

(SINCE 2003)

**50**  
MOST INFLUENTIAL  
WOMEN  
IN OPTICAL  
2003

in **4** CATEGORIES



*because*

**WOMAN PLAY LOTS of ROLES!**

100%  
50%  
38%

**38%** of  
ODs in the U.S. are  
**WOMEN**

FACTS



**# OF FEMALE FULL-TIME FACULTY AT THE 20 SCHOOLS OF OPTOMETRY:**

50.9% OF FULL-TIME FACULTY ARE MALE AND 49.1% ARE FEMALE. THE NUMBER OF FULL-TIME FEMALE FACULTY INCREASED 8.2% IN 2011-2012.

**# OF DEANS OF OPTOMETRY SCHOOLS THAT ARE WOMEN:**

**3**

**2011**  
AOA APPOINTS  
**DORI CARLSON, OD**  
FIRST FEMALE  
PRESIDENT



**WHO'S the BOSS?**

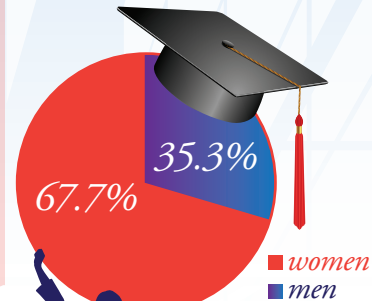
**38%**  
of FEMALE  
ODs ARE  
PARTNERS  
or OWNERS

**WOMEN**  
HOLD LEADERSHIP ROLES  
in these



NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

2010 Graduates



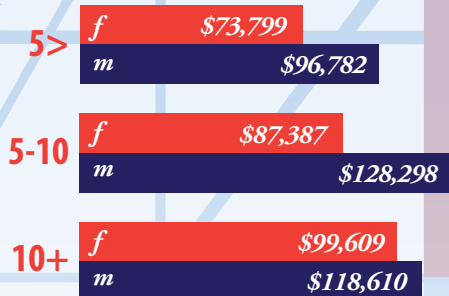
*facts:* From 2000 - 2010, the # of Female Graduating ODs Increased by 10%!

- AOA
- AOASA
- OAA
- Paraoptometric Section



## AVERAGE SALARY

years at position



**FACTS**

**39%** of WOMEN ODs HAVE NEVER NEGOTIATED or ASKED FOR A HIGHER SALARY

which may explain why ...

**I DESERVE MORE!**

**NEARLY HALF** of women ODs **49%** FEEL THE SAME

THAT'S WHY

**BE ACTIVE!**

we

HAVE

**OWA**  
OPTICAL WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION  
EST. 1998

**OWL**  
OPHTHALMIC WOMEN LEADERS  
EST. 2003

**WOMEN of VISION**  
EST. 2009

**INVOLVED**

**GET**

*So, that...*

Women's impact on the vision care field continues to reflect the time, passion and dedication so many women devote to it. Perhaps one day, you may see your name among the list of...



VM 10th Annual  
**Most Influential WOMEN**  
in optical 2012



- Vision Monday
- Women in Optometry
- Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO)
- American Optometric Association (AOA)

**SOURCES**



## Denise M. Capretta, COMT, LDO, ABOC

### TECHNICAL MARKETING AND EDUCATION MANAGER

VSP Optics Group  
Rancho Cordova, California

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“She is greatly respected for developing and training the VSP Optics Group sales, marketing and customer service personnel on optics and the art of dispensing.”



After working in the field of ophthalmology for 10 years, Denise Capretta's desire to open her own practice led her to pursue a degree in ophthalmic dispensing.

Since then she has been a certified ophthalmic medical technologist for 35 years, an Ohio licensed spectacle and contact lens optician for 25 years, and the owner of an Eye Express optical for 25 years, among many other positions and achievements. She was named the Bud Thoma Ohio Optician of the Year by the Opticians Association of Ohio in 2012 and the Ophthalmic Professional of the Year by the Cleveland Ophthalmic Personnel Society in 1993.

She said, “We are educating and graduating more female opticians and optometrists now more than ever.” She advises women working toward building a career in optical to find whatever niche they are passionate about in the industry and pursue that goal.

SHE SAYS...“Tell me and I forget; show me and I remember; involve me and I understand. My personal philosophy is in line with the VSP Optics Group mission statement, ‘To help millions of people see better.’”

## Jill Gerrick

### HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER

The Walman Optical Company  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“Her processes and guidance improve the leadership and compliance skills of all Walman managers, and she is the most valued resource in the company when it comes to developing the people on the team.”



Jill Gerrick is responsible for the HR training and development, and payroll/HRIS functions at Walman Optical. She acts as a trainer and mentor for supervisory and management people.

Although Gerrick has worked at Walman Optical for 13 years, she has had a 25-year career in human resources and payroll/accounting. Prior to her job at Walman, she worked for an electronic contract manufacturing company and a major retail home improvement company. She has achieved SPHR (Senior Professional in Human Resources) designation and maintains memberships in the Optical Women's Association, Society for Human Resource Management and Twin City Human Resource Association.

Gerrick believes employees find special motivation to come to work each day if they are performing important, meaningful work, adding, “I cannot think of many jobs that are more important or meaningful than improving the vision of the world. I feel fortunate that I get to support employees that perform this work.”

SHE SAYS...“In our efforts to accomplish more with less time and effort, women will find a way to get both their fashion and health needs met in the most efficient and practical way possible.”

## Vinita Allee Henry, OD

### DIRECTOR OF CLINICAL OPERATIONS AND RESIDENCIES

University of Missouri  
St. Louis College of Optometry  
St. Louis, Missouri

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“As director of clinical operations and director of residency programs as well as a clinical professor, she has been on the faculty of the University of Missouri-St. Louis since completing her residency 26 years ago.”



The accomplishments of Vinita Henry, OD, are numerous. She just completed her term as the chair of the Association of Optometric Contact Lens Educators. In 2005, she won the Chancellor's

Award for Excellence for Academic Non-Regular. She is a member of the American Optometric Association, the Association of Optometric Contact Lens Educators, the Fellowship of Christian Optometrists, the Missouri Optometric Association, the St. Louis Optometric Society and is a member and a Fellow of the American Academy of Optometry.

A clinical investigator in over 60 contact lens research studies, she authored or co-authored over 40 publications and book chapters, and is currently in the process of completing the fourth edition to the *Clinical Manual of Contact Lenses* textbook with co-author Edward Bennett, OD, MSEd.

Just as her role in optometry has advanced in the last two and a half decades so has that of women in general. “I benefited from having a well-respected male mentor who provided opportunities for me in lecturing, research and publications.”

SHE SAYS...“I have been blessed in life by those who have supported, encouraged and motivated me to help others—my parents, my husband, my three daughters and my mentor, Dr. Edward Bennett.”

More →



## Deb Klug

### NATIONAL SALES MANAGER

New York Eye  
Amityville, New York

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“Deb doesn’t see herself as a leader but as a teacher/supporter. She remains steady and supportive, always with a can-do attitude. She recognizes people’s achievements and constantly motivates with positive reinforcement.”



“‘If you obey all the rules, you miss all the fun.’ I love this Katharine Hepburn quote,” said Deb Klug. “That is the essence of what I am. I don’t follow all the rules, period. But I do have lots of fun, which for me is success. If you do everything like

somebody else, they don’t need you. If you want to find success, you need to forge your own road.”

Clearly, it’s a philosophy that makes a good mentor. “Mentoring is a passion for me; I want other people to be as amazing as they can be. I’ve mentored both men and women inside and outside of the industry. Helping others, and especially women, feel successful is such a great feeling. I also like to help people see how to work outside the box to achieve success.”

Klug got her start in the industry in 1975 in The Illinois College of Optometry Student Auxiliary and then co-owned an optometric practice in Michigan. She went on to work in sales for Wisconsin Optical Supply, L’Amy America and Aspex. She spent 12 years at Aspex and recently joined New York Eye as national sales manager, where she works with two other women, Jan Phillips and Lucy Korn, to oversee all of New York Eye’s sales reps.

“Today, there are more women leaders in the industry. It’s been exciting to see women slowly moving into leadership positions. I like to see the business

mind behind a female optometrist. I see them as smart buyers and smart business decision makers. This will continue to shape and positively affect our industry in the years to come.”

**SHE SAYS...**“Work smart, work often. I work until I get it done and I work hard. Look for successful women within the industry and pattern yourself after them. Ask anybody that you admire for help. Don’t be afraid to ask; most people are happy to help.”

## Millicent L. Knight, OD

### PRESIDENT AND CEO

North Shore Eye Center, Inc.  
Evanston, Illinois

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“She was awarded Optometrist of the Year 2011-2012 by the

*More* →



Illinois Optometric Association, appointed to the National Advisory Council of the National Eye Institute, and was featured in *Today's Chicago Woman* magazine as one of the 100 Women in Chicago Making a Difference.”



An optometrist, administrator and business woman, Millicent Knight, OD has it all. Following loosely in the footsteps of her mother, a retired CEO of a large mental health agency in Chicago, and showing an interest in the field since age 8, according to her father, Knight has been in practice for 25 years and owned her own practice for 20. “I needed glasses at a young age, and was in vision therapy,” Knight said. “My dad said he picked me up one day and I said very matter-of-factly, ‘Dad, I’m going to be an eye doctor.’”

So she did. After receiving her OD, BSVS from Illinois College of Optometry, Knight began her

medical career as an associate optometrist at South Chicago Hospital. She eventually started a private practice within an existing practice by buying out the smaller portion that was retiring. “I took a big leap as a then single woman, and relatively young...it was a scary decision, but a good business decision.”

Later, she established Knight Vision of Illinois Health Care Consulting, Inc., a corporation holding consulting contracts for speaking, coaching, research and consulting in the areas of contact lenses, contact lens solutions, pharmaceuticals and nutraceuticals. She also has teaching experience from the University of Alabama College of Optometry as a clinical instructor, and the Illinois College of Optometry as clinical instructor, business and practice management, and is completing a fellowship in the Academy of Anti-Aging Health Practitioners.

**SHE SAYS...**“I am a builder. My strengths lie in being a bridge across many different backgrounds that reach beyond different races, cul-

tures, and ideologies for a common good. When I am excited about something, I’m tenacious!”

## Patricia Kuhl, LDO, HFOAA

### PRESIDENT

Opticians Association of Ohio  
Cincinnati, Ohio

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...**“Pat has actively been involved in promoting and mentoring opticians for her entire life. Her passion, vision and dedication to opticians has inspired many.”



After becoming fascinated with opticianry during a college job as a receptionist, Pat Kuhl became an apprentice for an independent optician 30 years ago at SuperRx Optical Centers.

*More* →





She has since spent 17 years as marketing/operations manager of SupeRx, and is now a self-employed licensed optician.

Kuhl saw a need for part-time people in the field. "I realized there is a niche for this," she said. Thus, she became a "substitute" optician for several independently owned and operated businesses throughout the Cincinnati area.

In addition to being a self-employed optician, Kuhl is president of the Opticians Association of Ohio for which she has been a member for 30 years, and is on the board of directors of the Opticians Association of America (OAA), which she has been a part of for 20 years. She currently holds a leadership chair for the OAA and was recipient of the OAA State Leader of the Year in 2010. Inspired by the pride and passion of those in her field, she is motivated by the constant desire to have the field of opticianry recognized "as a true profession with equal status as other professional fields such as pharmacy, nursing, and optometry."

**SHE SAYS...** "I am a team player. I believe in unity and strive to embrace and respect all aspects of opticianry. I lead by example and am not afraid to take on a challenge, or assist others with their challenges."

## Mary Anne O'Toole

### SALES COORDINATOR AND MANAGER OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

Classic Optical Laboratories  
Youngstown, Ohio

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Mary Anne is a role model, mentor and friend. Her customer service team appreciates her open management style saying, 'She has truly made a difference in our lives—professionally and personally.'"



Years ago, Mary Anne O'Toole was promoted from an office manager to a sales position because her manager thought she could do the job. Years later, it happened again.

She was promoted to a position for which she had no previous experience and like before, O'Toole rose to the challenge. Today, she is the sales coordinator and manager of customer service for Classic Optical Laboratories. Prior to her position at Classic Optical, she had no experience in the optical field "besides having to wear glasses."

Today, O'Toole plays an active role in the management of Classic Optical with her fellow senior managers. One of her favorite aspects of the job is staff training and development. As a team, the customer service group works together to stay up-to-date on products, processes and communication tools. Because customer service requires more than just phone skills today, O'Toole makes sure her team is proficient in writing skills for crafting e-mails, text messaging and social media.

**SHE SAYS...** "It is very gratifying to me to 'manage' a group of 11 women that get along. Sometimes my best instinct is to just let them go their way and trust that they will do what is right. Watching them grow as a group and as individuals has been very rewarding."

## Kara Pasner, OD, MS

### ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, VISION CARE TECHNOLOGY

CUNY New York College of Technology  
New York, New York

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Dr. Pasner has served as a role model for aspiring opticians to either further their education and become optometrists, or to become more well-versed opticians by their understanding of the material she teaches them."



A full-time professor and doctor, Kara Pasner, OD, MS teaches and practices in the New York City area in an effort to give back to the industry. Descended from a father and grandfather who were eye doctors as well, Pasner believes the profession is in her blood and does everything she can to continue its legacy.

As a professor, which she has been for the past five of a 20-year career in optical, Pasner said she tries to guide students through the industry. "They're always curious, it's very different than practicing. You're spilling out what you know, taking in their questions, and re-evaluating what you know."

In addition to her dual career (she has a solo private practice with locations in Manhattan and Brooklyn, N.Y. and Ocean and Whiting, N.J.), she gives community service lectures and is involved in the glaucoma caucus. She is also a member of several organizations, including (but not limited to) the AOA, the New York State Optometric Association, the New Jersey Society of Optometric Physicians, both the New York and New Jersey Boards of Optometrists, and the National Federation of Opticianry Schools. "You make a name for yourself in this industry," she said. "It is a small industry and your reputation means a lot."

**SHE SAYS...** "If you think you are disadvantaged being a woman, you will be creating your own obstacles. I think if you set clear goals and work to achieve them, your chance to succeed is the same as anyone else's. Remember what Eleanor Roosevelt said: 'No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.'"

## Carol L. Schartner

### EDUCATION AND TRAINING CONSULTANT

Transitions Optical  
Pinellas Park, Florida

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CHOSEN BECAUSE...“Carol is like a great stage mom; there when you need her and stepping aside in the wings when you don’t. She has a keen ability to read her trainees and sense when they need additional help, even before they know it.”



In the optical business for 53 years, Carol Schartner spent her first 23 years as an optometric assistant in a private practice. “As a child, I was taken to an optometrist and I remember thinking I’d like to be that person who helped out the doctor,” said Schartner.

Early in her career, she was the founder and first president of the AOA Paraoptometric Section and the Pennsylvania Paraoptometric Association in 1978. She received the Pennsylvania Paraoptometric of the Year award in 1980 and the AOA Paraoptometric Special Service Award in 1993. From her job in a

private practice, Schartner moved to a job as a lens consultant, trainer and lecturer, joining Transitions Optical in 1994 where she was the customer training coordinator, senior lens consultant, Solution Team member, and education and training manager. She received the Transitions Optical Achieving Customer Excellence award four times and the Transitions Award of Distinction in 2008.

“I have been blessed with many mentors including Dr. Alvin Levin who encouraged me to develop my leadership skills; Phil Eichelberger who showed me the ins and outs of the wholesale laboratory business; Calvin Howell who mentored me on the manufacturing side of lenses; and Tim Fortner who encouraged me to become a member of the Transitions Team,” said Schartner.

**SHE SAYS...**“When I began my career I never had a woman call on my office in a sales capacity and most of the lab folks were men. Women didn’t own labs or weren’t in upper management

back then. How all that has changed!”

## Cindy Swain

### DIRECTOR OF PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN

Zyloware Corporation  
Port Chester, New York

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“Cindy is a true leader. She leads by example and is one of the hardest and smartest working people within the organization. Her team works at a fantastic pace due to her efforts.”



Cindy Swain started her career in optical dispensing back in high school and has worked over the last 26 years in everything from buying, sales and

manufacturing to her current role in product development and design for Zyloware. “In the six years that I have been with Zyloware, we have successfully launched Randy Jackson, Daisy Fuentes and had continued success with Sophia Loren and Stetson along with others, all with the help of a great team,” said Swain.

That team includes not only product development, but the quality assurance department as well. “I have a great team supporting me. Nurturing and growing them is important to me. Sharing my knowledge and helping them grow to be the best at their job. There is nothing more exciting than seeing potential in someone and helping them make it to the next level, to believe in them and watch them believe in themselves.”

One of the ways Swain leads is by example. “I strive to be the best I can be every day. I always push the limit and try to think outside the box. I look at everything from a different angle and I push my team to think the same way.”

“In the last decade, there have been amazing women that paved the way to show all of us that the optical industry is a great place for woman to excel at their careers. It has encouraged and supported woman to grow,” she concluded.

**SHE SAYS...**“Be passionate about what you do. I always speak my mind with passion and compassion. The optical business is ever changing and you must be willing to change with it. More importantly, try to be the innovator.”

## Christie Walker

### EDITOR

LabTalk Magazine  
New York, New York

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...**“As the Editor for *LabTalk Magazine* and a roving reporter and photographer for Jobson at trade shows, everyone knows and loves Christie. She always takes time to interact with people, welcoming newbies to optical and working with industry veterans.”



Christie Walker’s entry into the optical field was somewhat accidental when she applied for an editor’s position at Frames Data back in 1997. Although her degree and experience as a journalist and photographer were strong, she admitted she didn’t know a PAL from an ECP. “Three weeks after I was hired, it was baptism by fire when I attended my first Vision Expo.”

Today, as Editor of *LabTalk Magazine*, Walker is a seasoned veteran specializing in everything optical lab-related as well as contributing to *Vision Monday’s* Show Dailies and working as lead photographer in *20/20 Magazine’s* Street Seen features. Anyone who’s attended Vision Expo or read Jobson’s on-site pubs is more than familiar with her easy manner and eye catching photos.

Her shining moment came in 2011 when she was honored by the Optical Women’s Association (OWA) with the Pleiades Award, which spotlights an individual who has shown commitment to the mission of the OWA by fostering the growth of women in the industry. It was a touching and fitting tribute since the organization is near and dear to Walker’s heart.

“Joining the OWA was the single best thing I did to meet new people who were inspirational, influential and just plain great. All my best friends in the industry are OWA members.”

A “founding mother” of the Optical Women’s Association, Walker was a member of the organization’s original board and part of the team that created and named the Pleiades Award. Today, she oversees the organization’s annual Professional Optical Women’s Workshop event in Las Vegas.

“I bring quality speakers, information and inspiration to the women of the optical industry. It’s my small contribution.”

**SHE SAYS...**“Back when I was a newbie to the optical industry, I looked to women like VM’s Marge Axelrad, Corrine Hood at Katz and Klein, and Mimi Friedfeld for inspiration. These women were true leaders and inspired me to become more than just a reporter but to be actively involved.”

More →



## Maria Barnwell

### VP BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT – INTEGRATED HEALTHCARE MARKET SOLUTIONS

Essilor of America  
Dallas, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She has done an exceptional job in helping the entire industry better understand the dynamics of managed health care, and she’s providing documentation for ECPs via her white paper.”



With her degree in chemistry and biology, Barnwell had an eye on med school before she moved into mainstream health. She was an analytical chemist and associate scientist at an environmental engineering firm, then worked in pharmaceutical and capital equipment sales before moving into consulting, eventually setting up her own company which developed systems for specialty health care business units focusing on chronic illness. She wrote and published a book on chronic disease. Maria’s distinguished development work has been cited as *Best Practice for Chronic Disease Management Systems* by the American Accreditation Health Care Commission, URAC and it is featured in Harvard Business School’s Master of Business Administration, Case Study Program. She was pursued by Essilor to look at ways to leverage the role of ECPs into mainstream health care. Barnwell’s white paper makes the point that the ECP and the eye health exam is positioned to help identify chronic disease. “The eye exam is a micro-vessel examination performed by a doctoral level clinician. There’s a lot of power in that,” she notes.

**SHE SAYS...**“My father, Ernest Moore, 92, is my hero. He was an aeronautical/civil engineer, a missile scientist under Kennedy. He taught me people can either fear or respect you; your goal should always be respect.”

## Sheila Haile

### MANAGER, MARKETING AND CREATIVE SERVICES

ClearVision Optical  
Hauppauge, New York

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“Sheila is quick and a fast learner. She is driven and can see future trends and how to apply them to her company.”



After more than 15 years in advertising and marketing doing everything from running a fashion and beauty design agency in NYC to working on creative and branding projects for clients like John Frieda, Estee Lauder, Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson, Sheila Haile found herself in the optical industry four years ago “by chance.”

“The position presented itself as a great opportunity to learn a new field and expand my skills in new ways,” she said. “I have always been fortunate enough to find positions that marry my creative and strategic skills.” Its that kind of intrepid spirit that has earned her the honor of innovator and several other honors for ClearVision, including five Platinum, four Gold and four Honorable Mentions for the 2011 MarCom Awards, a 2011 EyeVote Award and a 2011 HOW Magazine In-HOWse Design Merrit Award.

“After 15 years on the agency side, I have no fear. I want to stay on the edge, and continue to do work that is relevant to today’s marketplace. I think I make a difference because what we do actually makes our customers lives better,” added Haile.

**SHE SAYS...**“Stay open and relevant. The more you bring to the table the better. Understand what the customer needs. Make sure your brands are where the consumer is.”

## Lisa Lorenz

### SENIOR BRAND MANAGER, COATINGS

Carl Zeiss Vision  
San Diego, California

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“Her innovation in the way Carl Zeiss Vision presents its products continues as her influence is being felt on all of the go-to-market plans for her team’s new product launches this year.”



Lorenz oversees the overall market activities of the Carl Zeiss Vision (CZV) coatings team which is responsible for anti-reflective products, self-tinting lenses, sun products, finished single vision lenses and Trivex for North America. Before joining Zeiss four years ago, she worked for Cadbury on Halls cough drops; prior to that she worked in magazine publishing and online content development. Her diverse background enables her to bring a fresh perspective to Zeiss,

“I became interested in CZV because of the potential of the Zeiss brand and because I enjoy working in marketing to promote products that make people’s lives better. CZV’s quality and technical innovation meant I could work with products that truly offered better vision choices to patients, and I find that very inspiring.”

As senior brand manager, coatings, Lorenz managed the debut of PhotoFusion self-tinting lenses in fall, 2011. “It was a big company initiative and a true team effort,” recalled Lorenz. “It was a successful launch because of all the hard work and collaboration between all of our cross-functional teams and our global teams and because it was a great product.”

**SHE SAYS...**“This is a unique industry because you have the rare opportunity to deliver strategic messaging and work one on one with companies and help them build their businesses.

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## Cynthia Shapiro

### OWNER/CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Europa International  
Buffalo Grove, Illinois

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“Cynthia founded Europa with her late husband and together they developed a unique business model. She started Cinzia Designs and was one of the few who foresaw the explosion of the reader market, particularly through the three Os.”



Without a doubt, my mentor in the optical industry was my partner and late husband, Alan Shapiro,” stated Cynthia Shapiro. “I’m also very blessed to have a strong group of advisors and supporters in Jerry Wolowicz, Janet O’Grady, my brother Chris and most recently my son, Scott. It stands to reason they’re so good at their jobs...Alan was their mentor too.”

In fact, Shapiro found her way into the optical industry thanks to her late husband. “Alan started his own wholesale optical company, and having some degree of office experience, he asked me to help him get it going. That was the beginning of a beautiful business partnership and marriage.”

Over the next 35 years, she worked in just about every position imaginable—designer, buyer, bookkeeper, inventory specialist, marketing director and everything in between. Currently, as creative director, Shapiro oversees all creative endeavors that represent Europa’s image that includes Cinzia Designs, which she found 10 years ago, that creates and distributes reading glasses, sunglasses and accessories to the optical and fashion industries. “It’s still one of my proudest accomplishments,” she added.

**SHE SAYS...**“Always put people first. Surround yourself with smart people who know more than you do. You can’t be and do everything yourself.”

## Janet Unger

### VP, BRANDS

Marchon Eyewear  
Melville, New York

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“Janet’s leadership of Marchon’s marketing initiatives for domestic brands continues to exceed expectations and solidify her as an innovator in her field.”



A Stonybrook undergrad with an MBA from New York University, Unger thought she’d work in the health care field, but was more fascinated by an American Express internship. She applied her financial skills in Citibank’s credit card and marketing/event planning businesses and then the liquor industry, in marketing and events for the Remy Martin/Cointreau brands. Unger then went to Bloomingdales, heading a new international and out-of-area marketing unit. She was recruited to Ray-Ban, when it was part of B + L, working on its fashion division.

She moved into the cosmetics field with Victoria’s Secret, building media plans across its fragrance and beauty businesses. Unger then began consulting for Federated Department Stores when she met Marchon’s co-founder, Al Berg. She soon started to work on the Donna Karan and DKNY business but took on other roles inside Marchon as VP of brands, including Coach, which she helped launch and oversee.

Unger soon oversaw Nautica, Sean John, the launch of DVF and Nine West and now, she oversees Calvin Klein as well. Her job is global in scope, building business plans with managers around the world as a key part of the company’s matrix organization. Unger’s mentors include Adrienne Cleere, VP international marketing at Bloomingdales, an “out of the box thinker,” Dave Whalen, who encouraged her at Ray-Ban, and Marchon’s SVP Mark Ginsberg, her current boss, “who gives people as much responsibility as they can carry, and has helped me stretch my skills.”

**SHE SAYS...**“Be who you are rather than trying to fit yourself into a preconceived mold; if you’re true to your beliefs, voice your opinions in an appropriate way and you’ll and be successful.”

## Verna Victoria

### MANAGER OF FINANCE AND OPERATIONS

Vision Essentials by Kaiser Permanente  
Pasadena, California

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“She manages finance, accounting, and inventory reporting and provides back-office support for Vision Essentials’ business operations. She is the human reference guide to policies and procedures.”



A 14-year veteran of Kaiser Permanente, Verna Victoria initially worked in the company’s hospital unit before transferring to Vision Essentials 12 years ago.

“We have the resources to offer many types of programs and products, but you have to be smart about it,” said Victoria. “I always ask, ‘Is that the right business decision?’” Victoria points to Vision Essential’s decision to develop in-house AR coating capability as a case in point. “It was a little daunting at first, but it makes sense because we can deliver our products with the quality and turnaround we wanted.”

Recently, she launched Vision Essentials’ Sun Fit program, which promotes the idea that everyone needs a quality pair of sunglasses. Polarized lens sales have nearly doubled due to her efforts. “Sun Fit is a program that really speaks to me, because it’s not just retail, there are health consequences,” said Victoria.

**SHE SAYS...**“It’s gratifying when one has an opportunity to help someone realize that there are many options to see better and look better. Eyewear is functional as well as fashionable.” ■