

# #Luminaries



NEW YORK—We hear the term “above and beyond” being bandied about a lot these days, especially in light of the pandemic as it pertains to frontline health care “warriors” and essential workers who take care of the everyday tasks to keep the world humming.

But there’s another definition of going above and beyond and it has to do with much more than showing up for work every day. It’s about giving 110% to the job, mentoring colleagues and those just starting out, and finding ways to be innovative and pivot at a moment’s notice, all in the name of eyecare and eyewear, and everything in between.

Coincidentally, *VM* added a new category to this year’s Report

called *Above & Beyond*, honoring women who have led the way in giving back to the industry, their patients and their communities.

*VM*’s Most Influential Women in Optical Report is marking its 18th year. The *VM* editors had more than 200 nominees to choose from and we selected 51 very well deserving women. This year’s group of influential women is made up of executives, sales and marketing professionals, ECPs, administrators, researchers and teachers.

In our book, they are all indeed #Luminaries and in this Special Report we shine a spotlight on their achievements and celebrate their talent, character and love of all things optical. ■

—The Editors

# Above and Beyond

WOMEN WHO HAVE LED THE WAY IN GIVING BACK TO THE INDUSTRY, THEIR PATIENTS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

## Lisa Adams-Mahepath, OD

**STERLING OPTICAL**  
St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Dr. Lisa Adams-Mahepath expanded the scope of practice of Optometry in the Virgin Islands with the Therapeutic Pharmaceutical Optometric Act (Act No. 7376).”



Dr. Lisa Adams-Mahepath, who received her Bachelor of Science in Medical Technology from Fairleigh Dickinson University and her Doctor of Optometry from Pennsylvania College of Optometry, is the first local optometrist to practice in the U.S. Virgin Islands. She is also the first female and local to serve on the Board of Optometrical Examiners in the U.S. Virgin Islands, from October 2004 to present.

In July 1997, Dr. Adams-Mahepath, along with her husband Joel, opened Sterling Optical Virgin Islands on St. Croix. A year later, they opened a second location on St. Thomas. “With the opening of Sterling Optical, a monopoly in the eyecare industry was broken in the U.S. Virgin Islands,” Dr. Adams-Mahepath said. “The goal was to provide quality and affordable eyecare for the community.”

In 2001, the couple started the foot-

print for Cohen Fashion Optical in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

In less than five years, there were three offices on three different islands.

Dr. Adams-Mahepath also worked with the legislative branch of government to expand the scope of the practice of optometry in the Virgin Islands, with the introduction of the Therapeutic Pharmaceutical Optometric Act (Act No. 7376) in 2012.

One of Dr. Adams-Mahepath’s personal philosophies and mantras as it pertains to patient care is to “treat patients as if they are family members.” Her philosophies have kept her in business for 23 years and counting.

**SHE SAYS...** “My mother was my first and most significant mentor. She was a simple woman with a minimum of a junior high school certificate, yet she viewed education as a path for upward mobility, financial stability, and independence for her daughters. My Mom instilled the values of hard work and perseverance, and these two attributes drive me to work 6 days a week with 10 to 12 hour days.”

## Amanda L. Barker-Assell, OD

**OWNER**

Advanced Family Eye Care  
Denver, North Carolina

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Deeply involved in mission work, Dr. Barker-Assell is also passionate about serving the community—especially patients who have vision-related learning problems.”



Dr. Amanda Barker-Assell knew from a very young age that she wanted to have a career in health care and to be involved in some kind of mission work. “Well I am a Type A, high myope (-9D to be exact), so I started visiting the eye doctor at a very young age. Like many other high myopes, my first glasses and more importantly my first contacts were life changing. It seemed natural to me to take an interest in a field that would allow me to protect this most precious sense of vision for others,” she said.

She opened her eyecare practice with her husband in January 2004, just two years after they graduated from the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Optometry. While she treats patients of all ages, she has a primary emphasis in vision therapy and rehabilitation for pediatric patients, as well as traumatic brain injury patients.

“My strengths are likely also my flaws. I am driven, dedicated, and willing to work hard. Developing and executing plans and strategies are some of my strengths. I would say these characteristics lead to a successful practice, but sometimes it is hard for me to stop and enjoy the small victories,” she said.

Over the years, she’s been involved in various mission projects in many countries. During one of these vision-related mission trips, they met Khaleda, an 8-year-old girl they would soon adopt and who suffered from a life-

threatening blood disease.

“Through Dr. Barker-Assell’s experience with her daughter, she gained a personal understanding of the power of literacy, as well as a passion for serving underprivileged populations through providing vision and literacy services—which has become a major pillar in their practice,” said Steve Rosinski, OD, who nominated Dr. Barker-Assell.

Sadly, Khaleda passed away in 2016, but her memory lives on through Blind-Sight, a nonprofit that Dr. Barker-Assell and her husband started in her honor. “The focus of our non-profit is to serve vision and literacy needs domestically and abroad,” Dr. Barker-Assell said.

**SHE SAYS...** “At the end of my career, I hope I will have led by example and been an encouragement to others.”

## Patricia Bobilin

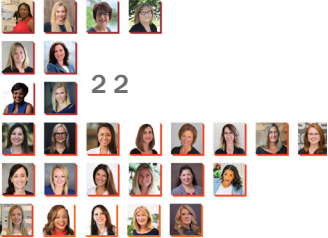
**MANAGING DIRECTOR  
SOUTHERN REGION**  
Eye Designs Group  
Trappe, Pennsylvania

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Patricia is a consistent star in sales and assisting clients above and beyond the normal sale of a product. She literally works seven days a week to make sure her clients have the best tools to deliver the most complete and effective patient experience in today’s competitive optical marketplace. She brings knowledge, experience and complete integrity to every relationship she forms and once a client works with her, they’ll work with her for the rest of their career.”

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Read previous *Most Influential Women in Optical* Special Reports on [VisionMonday.com](http://VisionMonday.com).  
See an Alphabetical List of prior years’ honorees and a complete PDF of this year’s feature.



# Above and Beyond

WOMEN WHO HAVE LED THE WAY IN GIVING BACK TO THE INDUSTRY, THEIR PATIENTS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES



## Elaine Booth

**REGIONAL VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS**  
Eyemart Express  
Farmers Branch, Texas

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Elaine Booth joined Eyemart Express more than 25 years ago and worked her way up to the VP level after serving as a store manager and district manager. Over the years, she has personally taken on associates from all levels as mentees, and has helped them grow. She recognizes strengths and opportunities in team members, and works one-on-one with each person to benefit their long-term career path.”



Elaine Booth, a longtime Eyemart Express employee, said she was inspired early in her career by her mentor Teresa Mason, who is now vice president of product merchandising at Eyemart Express. “She was my store manager at the time, and pushed me to see myself as she did,” Booth said. “She encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone to develop leadership skills. I strive to pass that support on to others who may not recognize their own special talents.”

Booth actually began her optical career more than 30 years ago while working at Pearle Vision. She subse-

quently worked at Eyemart Express’ Sherman store for 12 years. “As my knowledge increased, I became ABO certified, and my optical career progressed. There is not a single job at the store I have not done,” Booth said.

She used her in-store and in-depth experience to move up to a position at the Eyemart Express home office as a region vice president of operations in 2005. In this role, she assists in managing the overall store operations for 118 Eyemart Express locations, which includes overseeing training, financial records, inventory controls, and personnel administration and she makes sure these procedures remain consistent throughout the region.

**SHE SAYS...** “I am passionate about sharing my knowledge and mentoring others. If you think of the mentoring process like a construction project, I work closely with our associates to create a solid foundation, and then serve as a support system between their building blocks of knowledge and experience. It is gratifying to see them proudly stand tall at the end of that journey.”

## Melanie Denton Dombrowski, OD, MBA, FAAO

**FOUNDER AND CEO**

Salisbury Eyecare and Eyewear  
Salisbury, North Carolina

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Dr. Denton has a passion for patient care and recognizes the eyes as the window to a person’s overall health. After closing her office to all but emer-

gency and urgent visits during the pandemic, she used her YouTube channel to keep her patients educated and engaged during this difficult time.”



Dr. Denton Dombrowski became an OD because she’s a -4.00 Rx—and because of her great uncle, an optometrist himself, who convinced her to take the OAT. Today, she owns and runs her own practice, which she said “started at zero patients and grew very rapidly.” She and her team make sure to “slow down and take the time to ensure our patients not only have a thorough exam, but also have a full understanding of their condition and treatment plan.”

By utilizing social media, particularly YouTube, Dr. Denton Dombrowski has made her local, independent office internationally accessible, spreading important eye health information to all who need it. “My team is incredibly talented at their jobs and they work so well together. We’re truly providing a one of a kind patient experience and we change something almost every single day to make it better.”

But local impact is important, too, Dr. Denton Dombrowski said. “My involvement has become more local and community based since starting a practice. I’ve been on the county board of health, chamber board, and our local Rotary Club. I am of course an AOA and AAO member, as well as my state society.

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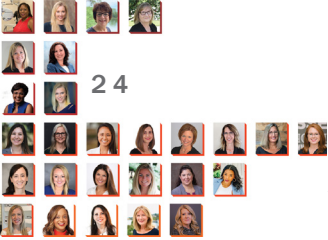
Patricia Bobilin has spent 31 years in the optical industry, growing from one of the first female district managers at Marchon to her current role at Eye Designs Group. At Eye Designs, she oversees nine southern states in the creation of new and renovated ophthalmic environments, providing solutions in custom furniture and displays, and assists in marketing and product development.

For Bobilin, the most important part of her work is helping ODs understand the retail aspect of their business. She said, “I work diligently to impart good information to them so that they feel they are making the best decision.” Through her work, Bobilin has consistently helped doctors achieve double-digit sales increases.

For Bobilin, success comes through hard work, but also careful listening and genuine honesty. She said, “It’s amazing what you’ll learn if you just listen. I think I have a great passion for what I do and I think it shows. I think that’s why I excel at this.” A member of the Optical Women’s Association, Bobilin believes women will “lead change together, and support each other in the process.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Always be truthful with your staff and your patients, your clients and in life. You don’t need a good memory if you’re always being truthful. Be an empathetic listener and be yourself!”





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I've been in OSSO and Women of Vision and on their boards in the past."

**SHE SAYS...** "Accept nothing less than excellence from yourself and your team. Don't listen to the word no, it's not an endpoint. Consider looking to other industries to gain inspiration for what may be possible in your own career/clinic. Dream big and work hard. Figure out what's most important to you, and achieving that is success."

## Kathie Sapnas

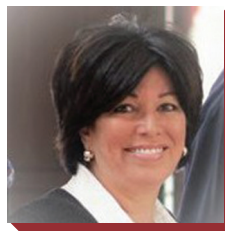
**REGIONAL SALES MANAGER**  
Luxottica  
Collegetville, Pennsylvania

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Kathie is focused on engaging women and

developing leadership potential. She takes every opportunity to give back in her personal and business life."

Kathie Sapnas said her daughter might be the reason she joined the optical field. "Not long after my daughter was born I started to experience difficulty with my vision," said Sapnas, who started her career in sales management in the cosmetics industry. "This was the first time I had ever had changes in my vision that required correction."

After visiting her ECP, she went to an optical dispensary and fell in love with several frames. This visit had a huge impact on her because shortly after purchasing three pairs of glasses (two ophthalmic and one sun) she began to seriously think about a



career in the optical field.

"A few months later, I took the plunge and applied for a position with Luxottica. I made the attempt to change my career focus, knowing that it was going to be a whole new world and I was excited about the possibilities," said Sapnas.

At Luxottica, Sapnas has led a team of sales consultants for Luxury and Premium Fashion brands in the New York and Pennsylvania (NYPA) market for the past five years. Her team serves the needs of their customers, learns about their business models and strategies, and then recommends a course of action using Luxot-

tica products to grow their business.

"My goal is to become more than a vendor, through honest business conversations and listening to the challenges that they face, I strive to become a trusted partner and advisor. I was fortunate to be contacted for an interview and to this day I remember being asked what I wanted in my next position."

Her philosophy when it comes to her role in the optical field is "Leave it better than you found it."

**SHE SAYS...** "Each day, I have the opportunity to interact with many people—my team, my accounts and my coworkers. I strive to help bring out the best in each personal interaction through active listening and asking probing questions to uncover their needs and have a meaningful conversation." ■



# Congratulations Patricia!

**We're glad you are part of our team!**

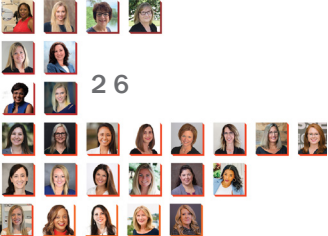
**Congratulations to all of the women being recognized by Vision Monday.**

**We are especially proud of our colleague and friend, Patricia Bobilin, who embodies the definition of leadership and excellence through her dedication, influence and success in the eye care industry.**



**Patricia Bobilin**  
Managing Director,  
Southern Region





# Executive Suite

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

## Lori Archer

**CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER**  
UnitedHealthcare Vision  
Indianapolis, Indiana

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She has helped UHC Vision become one of the leading providers of managed vision care. She is also responsible for numerous philanthropic efforts on behalf of the underserved population.”



Lori Archer has spent 23 of her 25 years in the eyecare field with UnitedHealthcare. She was recognized by VM in 2008's Most Influential Women in Optical as a Mentor, when Archer oversaw account management and product development. In her current role as COO, she is responsible for management, operations and growth to help serve the eyecare needs of more than 20 million Americans in collaboration with a vision network that includes more than 30,000 health care professionals at more than 106,000 access points.

She works with a team of nearly 200 colleagues to strengthen relationships with eyecare providers and develop UnitedHealthcare's vision products and services, including employer-sponsored, government-sponsored, and individual plans; integrated medical/vision plans, and innovative new pediatric and maternity eyecare benefits.

Archer is also proud of the group's response to COVID-19, including establishing a \$2 million fund for certain independent eyecare professionals to help support these practices amid pandemic-related financial challenges. Mentoring is still critically important to her. “At UnitedHealthcare, we strive to cultivate traditional mentorships and work to facilitate ‘reverse mentorship’ opportunities, which help us share ideas across the organization and support a diversity of opinions.”

She is also a certified UnitedHealthcare “culture facilitator” across the organization. Archer is a member of the Optical Women's Association.

**SHE SAYS...** “Believe in yourself first. Regardless of position or career stage, it is important to stay curious, take well-reasoned risks and set ambitious goals for yourself and your organization. Develop and nurture a strong network of friends and family. Make time for them and never take them for granted—they will be your best source of support, guidance and inspiration.”

## Dibby Bartlett

**PRESIDENT**  
Opticians Association of  
America  
Marshfield, Massachusetts

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Dibby has the unique talent of bringing people together: she inspires people to be the best version of themselves, and is never afraid to roll up her sleeves and jump in to help get things done.”



Dibby Bartlett began her optical career like so many: unintentionally. After graduating from Clark University in 1980 with a major in Chinese politics, she took a receptionist position at an optometry office, soon becoming the optical manager and then a licensed optician. After 32 years, she moved into a sales rep position with what is today De Rigo REM, followed by Safilo.

During this time, Bartlett joined the Opticians Association of Massachusetts (OAM) and the Opticians Association of America (OAA), eventually becoming president of both organizations. She still wrestles with understanding prism, but is passionate about teaching, as an adjunct professor at the Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology. There, she designs and instructs the Optical Business course, bridging technical skills with operational, financial, administrative, and promotional considerations.

At OAA, Bartlett is most proud of the successful communication she has developed to engage members nationwide, along with the organization's Leadership Conference which has continued to evolve into an “extraordinary, life-changing event.” Prior to her leadership roles, she received the President's Award from the OAM and was named State Leader of the Year by the OAA. VM's 2018 Most Influential Women in Optical report recognized Bartlett as COO of Todd Rogers Eyewear.

**SHE SAYS...** Bartlett encourages women developing careers in the optical industry to “Jump in—and if you don't find a spot, create one. Do it, even if you are afraid.” During the COVID-19 pandemic, she continually seeks opportunities to innovate and forge new trails in service delivery, quoting Mary Oliver: “Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”

## Maureen Beddis

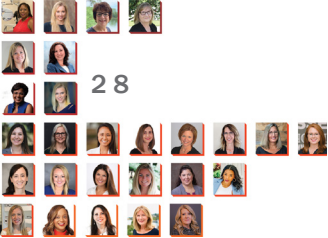
**VICE PRESIDENT,  
MARKETING AND MEMBERSHIP**  
The Vision Council  
Alexandria, Virginia

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “As a leader and a role model inside The Vision Council, Maureen's influence on the association, the membership and the consumer's impression on vision care cannot be measured. She is modest and seeks only to take the smart, right and most impactful course of action, and her judgment and accomplishments has earned her the respect and trust of everyone who works with her.”



Maureen Beddis has overseen the marketing and communications efforts at The Vision Council since fall of 2006. Last year, her role expanded to include oversight of Vision Expo social media and public relations. She said, “Earlier this year, my role expanded to include

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oversight of the organization's membership and market research programs. My proud accomplishments include the Eye Health Summit of 2009, which led to the industry-wide Think About Your Eyes consumer campaign, and the viral/trending National Sunglasses Day campaign.

Beddis' first optical job was in marketing with Carl Zeiss Vision (2002) focusing on progressive lenses and coatings. Early in her career, she was a certified children's vision screener and volunteered with the local Prevent Blindness chapter. "I also volunteered to handle the media relations for the Optical Women's Association (OWA)—imagine having access to that many female leaders and mentors at such a young age when I was so new to the industry!"

Her managerial style is clear and direct. "I have always set clear expectations for the quality and delivery of work for anyone on my team or external partners. When expectations are set early and clearly, there is little room for misunderstanding and everyone ends up satisfied. I've also found that a little humor can go a long way, as can empathy and understanding."

Looking back, she credits Ed Greene, former CEO of The Vision Council, as a trusted mentor and advisor "If it weren't for Ed Greene, I would not be where I am today. He was an incredible leader and introduced me to so many members of the industry early on in my career. I'm grateful to him every day."

**SHE SAYS...** "Prioritization is so important. Focus on your strengths and not your weaknesses. Early on, a supervisor gave me a copy of Don Clifton's 'Now Go Discover Your Strengths.' It still sits on the bookshelf behind me in my home office."

## Jill Bryant, OD, MPH, FAAO, FSLs

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
National Board of Examiners  
in Optometry  
Charlotte, North Carolina

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "She manages a team of dedicated staffers who coordinate with content experts to develop test questions, ensure appropriate standards for scoring, and manage security to protect the integrity of the exam process."



As executive director of the National Board of Examiners in Optometry (NBOE), the national licensing exam organization in optometry, Dr. Bryant supports the NBEO Board of Directors, which is comprised of appointees from the Association of Regulatory Boards of Optometry, the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry, and one public member.

She navigates a multitude of interests, including a diverse board of directors, key leaders from the schools and colleges of optometry, and ultimately supports the interests and requirements of the state regulatory boards of optometry to ensure the testing process is fair and representative. Consumers and the public can be assured that candidates who pass the NBEO exam are knowledgeable and competent to

become licensed to practice optometry.

Asked what drew her to optometry, Dr. Bryant explained, "I have always had a love for science and math, coupled with an internal desire to help others. Optometry and public health have been an excellent landing spot for me. It is a privilege to contribute to patient care in various ways."

**SHE SAYS...** "Maintain your sense of purpose and integrity. These principles serve as a guiding light through challenging times. Make confident decisions and communicate them for understanding by others. Do not be afraid to change or shift direction when necessary. Dedicate yourself to devoting completely to everything you touch and do not be afraid to stretch yourself beyond what you imagine possible."

## Tiffanie Burkhalter

**CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, VSP VENTURES**  
VSP Global  
Rancho Cordova, Calif.

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Tiffanie Burkhalter is that rare combination of executive leadership, operational master, and passionate team member. She works hard and tirelessly for the entire team. Her skills and capabilities also extend to readily collaborate with business partners to ensure success. Her passionate style is effective at challenging the team to elevate their performance and contribution for the betterment of the whole."

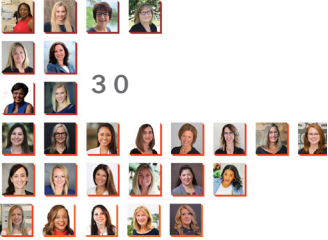


Tiffanie Burkhalter joined VSP Global in 2011, and has held positions in finance, e-commerce and operations, and helped launch VSP Ventures in March 2019 as the chief operating officer. Prior to 2011, she managed a client portfolio spanning multiple industries and led local and international client service teams at Ernst & Young. She is a licensed CPA and was recognized as one of Sacramento's 40 Under 40 in 2019. She also serves on the board of GLAM-4GOOD in addition to volunteering with several community-based organizations.

"I was introduced to the optical field through joining the VSP Global team over nine years ago," she said. "I immediately gained an appreciation for the common thread throughout the optical industry of improving the quality of life of others through access to quality eyecare and eyewear. VSP's success and business decisions have a clearly defined purpose which is beyond generating shareholder profit and I found that to be particularly appealing and a powerful differentiator in today's market. This enables us to make decisions with short-and-long range outcomes in mind."

In March 2019, she joined Steve Baker to launch VSP Ventures and has worked to partner with practice owners and their staff as they transition to providing patient care under VSP ownership. "It has been incredible to bring together so many talented doctors and

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staff to reimagine practice operations with the support of VSP,” she said. “My background in finance and optical operations was helpful in launching the business, but the team of talented professionals supporting Ventures is the key to its ongoing success.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Nothing is impossible, the word itself says I'm possible.”  
—Audrey Hepburn

## Cheryl Canning

**VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING AND BRAND DEVELOPMENT FASHION**

L’Amy America  
Norwalk, Connecticut

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Cheryl has been with L’Amy America since 1997 and has been very influential in supporting and helping L’Amy America achieve wonderful growth over those 23 years. She is a great team player, works incredibly hard and executes every plan precisely.”



For Cheryl Canning, the key to success is to keep evolving. She started at L’Amy America 23 years ago, and in that time she has spearheaded the development of the company’s website, overseen its marketing, developed its corporate fit campaign and built the Nicole Miller business into a multilayered brand.

Initially interested in the international aspect of L’Amy, Canning now directly manages the fashion brand segment of L’Amy’s business, and leans on her personal philosophy—“don’t stand still and keep evolving! Look around at what’s going on not just within the optical industry but outside the industry as consumer expectations and ways of doing business are evolving faster than ever”—to ensure she and L’Amy stay on top of the game. A vital part of that is to keep communication clear and constant. She explained, “My motto is ‘always say what you’re going to do and then do what you say you’re going to do.’”

Canning finds this constant evolution inspiring, too. She said, “I’m inspired by the constant changes and evolution I see occurring in the industry both from a product point of view, such as new materials and new technology, and an industry point of view.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Keep learning not just within your own area of expertise but get to know all aspects of the eye-wear business. The optical industry is very different from other industries—it’s like having an extended family so learn from everyone, even your competitors!”

## Christine Dellecave

**CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER**  
MyEyeDr.  
Vienna, Virginia

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “As chief people officer at MyEyeDr., Christine Dellecave oversees all centers of excellence related to our most important company resource: our people. She has

woven together an incredible team of brilliant leaders to manage talent acquisition, human resources administration, learning and talent development, and compensation and benefits.”



Christine Dellecave is a seasoned executive who has spent time leading people strategy in a variety of organizations and industries. She thrives in situations that require transformation, and brings vision, planning and execution to bare. Her 24-year career spans many Fortune 500 companies, including Marriott, Ritz-Carlton and American Express, as well as mid-sized companies going through various phases of growth and transformation.

“We are proud of the work we have done to grow talent in the organization, introduce new language about our purpose and values, as well as successfully navigate the temporary closure of our business during the pandemic in a way that helped take care of both our associates and our business, allowing it to return stronger than ever several months later,” Dellecave said.

She noted that one piece of advice about leadership that she has followed comes from the publisher, columnist and public speaker Charles S. Lauer: “Leaders don’t force people to follow, they invite them on the journey.”

Dellecave also is passionate about using talent strategies to solve business

problems, and helping individuals, teams and organizations grow in parallel.

In addition to her work at MyEyeDr., she invests time in the development of others, with a particular focus on women and girls through her work with various local nonprofit leadership organizations, including a role as board chair for a women’s leadership nonprofit organization.

**SHE SAYS...** “Understand your why—be clear about what is important to you and then learn every aspect of the business and tie what you do to driving positive outcomes.”

## Ruth Domber

**CO-OWNER**  
10/10 Optics  
New York, New York

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Ruth founded and operates one of the most impressive stores in the country. Her methods of leadership to her staff are second to none.”



Known for her unfailing eye, the collections she curates, the enthusiasm she brings to her work and the long term bonds she establishes with clients and her team, Ruth Domber prides herself on “always learning” during 40-plus years in optical.

“Business, world events, history and a review of the day were always dis-

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ussed around our dinner table. Both of my parents came from family owned businesses,” she said. Her first professional mentor and guru was business educator and speaker, Harriet Stein. “She taught us to use the phrase ‘I understand.’”

Years later, Domber cites the consulting of Silkin Management Group as a game-changer for the business. “Like most kids of my generation, we went to work at an early age. By 16, I was a receptionist at our local optometrist after school and on weekends. That led to a jump to an assistant optician spot at EB Meyrowitz and then to LensCrafters.

“This carried me from high school through Adelphi University but instead of law school, I decided to lean into a career in optics, having worked with some incredible optical talent. Among them was Dr. Stephen Rozenberg, OD, who ultimately became my best friend, business partner and later, my husband. Today, I’m honored to be a member of the SPEC GROUP (Strategic Partnership of Eyewear Companies), an organization of non-competing eyecare professionals—basically a brain trust of the best business practices for the optical industry. It’s been extraordinary!”

**SHE SAYS...** “The growth of our business is based on a code of ethics and the knowledge that a handshake is to be honored. From that principle, it’s good to surround oneself with like-minded people who may be trusted to learn, do their best and contribute all while feeling safe and valued.”

## Emilia Flamini

**CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER**  
Luxottica North America  
New York, New York

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Emilia Flamini has been an exceptional role model for women at all levels of the company. In addition to inspiring a team of top finance talent in N.A., she has led the company’s regional efforts to shine a light on female employees and create opportunities for women to engage with the company in new ways. Specifically, she has anchored early efforts to bring the women of Luxottica and Essilor together to build relationships and network.”



Emilia Flamini started her career in 1999 in Procter & Gamble Italy as a financial analyst. She has subsequently worked for other multinational companies (including General Electric and Coca Cola) in four different countries. She received her MBA at Paris’ INSEAD in 2003 (where she also met her husband). In 2014, she joined Luxottica in Milan as corporate controller for wholesale, then moved into corporate controller for all business units and finally moved to New York City as chief financial officer of Luxottica in NA in 2017.

“My biggest strength is my passion: I truly love what I do,” she said. “I feel blessed to sit in the finance executive role. This gives me visibility into so many areas of the company and helps me recommend the right course of actions. As I always tell my kids when I leave for

work in the morning, while I am sad to leave my two boys and my girl, I also have a big smile on my face as I know that I will have 10 to 12 hours to focus on what I love.”

She added, “This helped me progress in my career as I never was thinking about the next promotion but on what I was doing every day. This allowed me to achieve great results.”

**SHE SAYS...** “My advice [to women in optical] is to leverage the great network of women in this industry. It is a fascinating sector in constant evolution with very different stakeholders and there are so many women who have grown and developed for decades in the sector. Don’t be shy, reach out.”

## Bettina Friedl, PhD

**VICE PRESIDENT**  
**VISION TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS**  
Zeiss Vision Care  
Aalen, Germany

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “She is a strong and influential leader with an excellent capacity for technical and business development activity.”



Bettina Friedl leads a global business unit responsible for developing and implementing technology solutions that assist the practice with comprehensive

eye exams and dispensing eyewear. These digital solutions enable the consumer to be more intimately engaged and informed through the process.

She works closely with the Zeiss Vision board and Zeiss Medical division to understand how ODs and patients can be better served and supported with technical and digital solutions for better care outcomes and a better experience.

Prior to her current role, Dr. Friedl lived and worked in the U.S., where she was responsible for customer service and support. As a PhD physicist she has also directly supported the chairman and CEO of Carl Zeiss GmbH with strategic and business planning initiatives.

“Through my work, I want to help enable ECPs to become more digital and competitive across rapidly expanding online and omni-channel environments,” she explained. “With my global team I strive to help them to create unique patient solutions which offer both state-of-the-art care and truly innovative customer experiences.

“Today, I think a lot of caregivers in our industry are feeling overwhelmed by the abundance of technological offers with new apps, online tests and telemedicine solutions popping up almost daily. Working for a leading company with a highly trusted brand name like Zeiss, I want to help eyecare providers navigate the “technological maze.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Do not get discouraged by setbacks. They are part of every great career. It is a matter of drawing conclusions from the setbacks and adjusting going forward.”

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# Executive Suite

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

## Sherianne James

**CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER AND SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE**

Essilor of America  
Dallas, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Her deep understanding of how Essilor products are utilized by independent ECPs and experienced by consumers guides her approach to marketing them effectively.”



Sherianne James is responsible for the end-to-end customer experience, including marketing, customer service and sales optimization. She has shifted EOA’s messaging approach from an individual brand approach to an Essilor umbrella lens approach. “This simplifies yet crystallizes how the consumers understand our products by enabling them to recognize that one superior lens corrects, protects and enhances their vision so they can see their best,” she noted.

“Our consumer advertising drives patients to seek out an independent eyecare professional with a desire to get the best lenses not only to correct their vision but enhance it, making it seamless for an optician to trade them up to one lens solution without the patient feeling like multiple lenses are being imposed upon them.”

The daughter of a chemical engineer,

James is a self-described “STEM kid” who pursued her interest in science, earning a degree in chemical engineering from the University of Florida and later an MBA from Kellogg Graduate School of Management. She credits her science training for her “peel the onion” way of thinking which informs her systematic, data-driven approach to marketing.

James joined Essilor of America in 2016 from Transitions Optical where she held several marketing roles over a five-year span, her last being vice president, global marketing.

**SHE SAYS...** “Our industry should be three times the size it is today, and there is value for everyone by focusing on growing the entire size of the industry and ensuring that everyone in the world has access to their best vision.”

## Erika Jurrens

**SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF STRATEGY AND COMMERCIALIZATION**

ABB Optical Group  
Coral Springs, Florida

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She instills confidence in those around her and her enthusiasm for continuous improvement, strategy and achieving tomorrow’s success is contagious.”



Erika Jurrens leads ABB’s corporate strategy, marketing, communications

and runs the company’s business solutions portfolio. Among her recent achievements is rebranding ABB into a trusted, world-class optical platform. Under her direction, the company has launched six new-to-market or new-to-world business solutions to grow optical practice revenue, decrease operating expense and stay competitive in a highly competitive, complex environment.

Her philosophy when it comes to the optical business is “Be the change! Always act from personal power and take accountability for your world. One of my earliest mentors used to say: When you hear yourself saying, ‘someone should do something about that’... that someone is you.”

Although Jurrens is a relative newcomer to optical—she joined ABB in 2019—she draws on a strong health care background, having previously served as vice president for Cardinal Health, a Fortune 15 company with revenues topping \$100 billion and brand strategy lead at GlaxoSmithKline, a Top 5 big pharma company.

Asked what inspires her as a team leader, she replied, “It’s the people who ask intriguing questions without easy answers. People who challenge others. People who fight to open doors for others. People who wish and work to offer more. People who care like crazy. Those are my people. Those people inspire me, and fortunately they are my teammates at ABB.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Find your own strength and champion it, in big ways and small ones. Find others who will champion it. Rinse repeat. Rinse repeat. Never quit.”

## Jessica Kozak

**SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, ECP SALES**

Essilor of America  
Marietta, Georgia

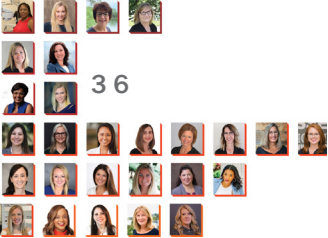
CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Jessica is a respected, proven leader who has contributed to the success of Essilor’s customers in each position she has held. Her passion and advocacy for her customers is an inspiration.”



As leader of the independent ECP channel commercial sales organization in the U.S. for Essilor of America, Jessica Kozak is responsible for developing and executing the sales strategy for over 25,000 independent eyecare professionals. Under her direction, her team actively partners with ECPs to create lens and lab solutions for their patients.

Kozak’s strong background in optical retailing makes her ideally suited for her job. She entered the field at age 16 when she began working in an optometry office. “I instantly fell in love with the field and the science of light and lenses,” she recalled. “Being an eyeglasses wearer since the age of one, I personally understand the difference vision care can make in your life.” Kozak later worked at other eyecare practices and at LensCrafters, where she gained valuable experience in all aspects of the business.

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# Executive Suite

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

After joining Essilor in 2007 as a field level sales consultant, she rose through multiple levels of leadership before taking on her current role in March, 2020. Along the way, she led some of Essilor's highest performing sales teams and was recognized in 2015, 2016, 2018, and 2019 for outstanding sales results.

**SHE SAYS...** "Women bring diversity of thought and create a culture of inclusivity. Diversity and inclusivity feed a positive culture and that builds a productive and successful work environment."

## Mary Loranger

### DIRECTOR OF VENDOR RELATIONS

ADO Practice Solutions  
A Division of Walman Optical  
Denver, Colorado

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Mary has been influencing the success and development of programs as an advocate in the industry for over 30 years. She is passionate about the IECP business."



During her storied career, Mary Loranger, MBA, has held various sales and marketing leadership roles with Wesley Jessen, CIBA Vision, Alcon, SynergEyes, ODG Distribution and ABB Optical Group. Today, as director of Vendor Relations for ADO Practice Solutions, she

works to develop cost-savings programs for independent ECPs, adding value and increasing profitability. Loranger's focus on communication, programming and partnerships has built and sustained over 150 vendor relationships, while strengthening ADO's messaging and market positioning as a Doctor Alliance with buying group benefits.

Loranger names the late Kevin Ryan of Wesley Jessen as a key mentor. Some of the "Kevinisms" she carries with her: "Develop a vision and strategic objective, then boil it down to the essentials to communicate effectively; prioritize ELM (ethical/legal/moral) considerations; Cash is King—make spending decisions like it's your own money; and Culture Matters." She noted, "Listening for understanding allows me to turn on my creativity and problem-solving engine."

Loranger challenges herself to "stay focused on key targets in an opportunity-rich environment," balancing determination to meet goals with the wisdom to know when to consider pivoting. Her advice for women developing careers in the optical industry: "Don't sit on the sidelines."

**SHE SAYS...** "I always see the glass as half full. We are all fortunate to be in an industry where people build powerful connections that can last a lifetime. At ADO/Walman, I love the culture, can-do attitude, and being part of an employee stock ownership plan."

## Sara Osculati

### CHIEF BRAND AND PRODUCT OFFICER

Thélios  
Paris France

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "With longstanding expertise in luxury eyewear, she's played a considerable role in the foundation of Thélios, the eyewear business of the world's largest luxury player, the LVMH Group."



After graduating from Bocconi University in Milan, Sara Osculati worked in the eyewear industry for almost 20 years, holding various leadership roles. She was eyewear department director for Dior from 2012 to 2017 and helped advance eyewear among the central categories in the Maison/house's strategy. Osculati said, "I was hooked by the concept of eyewear, combining design with functionality. It offers endless possibilities and is a unique expression of the brand."

The philosophy is how Thélios approaches the market, she noted, "We are not licensors; with our collections we are expressing the essence of each Maison and respond to the demands of the different segments of their consumers." Osculati took on her current role in 2017, among the founding members of Thélios, with responsibility for a large team of brand management, design, communication, retail management and product development.

Osculati cites the help and inspiration of many mentors. "They have pushed me to go beyond my comfort zone. To name just a few: Sidney Toledano, CEO

and chairman LVMH Fashion Group, has always brought his passion for the product and respect for the brands he is working with. Serge Brunschwig, CEO of Fendi, and Dominique de Longevialle, CEO of John Galliano taught me much. Last, but not least, Gianni Zoppas, CEO of Thélios, is a seasoned industry leader with deep knowledge of the industry."

**SHE SAYS...** "I truly believe in the statement 'The future is female.' Our industry gathers very talented and bold young women, who will push the eyewear sector forward and drive innovation. Women have the ability to overcome their own boundaries and to find the synthesis in every situation."

## Becky Palm

### PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

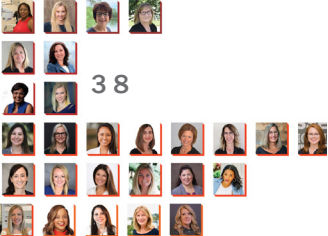
Essilor Vision Foundation  
Dallas, Texas

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "She leads a dedicated and driven team at EVF that creates and executes programs and awareness initiatives that educate parents, loved ones and communities about the importance of vision care, and provides people in need with free vision services. Under her leadership, EVF's fundraising, exams and eyewear dispensed has risen exponentially."

Becky Palm started her career as a transactional attorney at a Dallas law firm that provided outside legal support to Essilor of America, among other clients. In 2012, she joined Essilor of America and then spent the next 6.5 years as a member of its legal team providing legal

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# Executive Suite

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



**SHE SAYS...** “The [optical] world is your oyster—think about what you are good at, what brings you joy and how you can add value when you marry the two. It is a beautiful thing when career and passion come together!”

## Nicole Rush, OD OWNER

Bandon & Coquille Vision Centers  
Bandon, Oregon

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “A tireless volunteer and successful practitioner, she is more than worthy of this honor from *Vision Monday*. As president of Oregon Optometric Physicians Association’s board of directors, she personifies the word ‘leader.’ A graduate of Pacific University College of Optometry, as well as an adjunct clinical professor at PUCO, Dr. Rush has given back to the optometric industry through her inspiring career.”



## Selima Salaun

### CREATIVE DIRECTOR AND FOUNDER

Selima Optique  
New York, New York

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “She is a true independent retailer serving the elite of New York and Paris and a very successful wholesale eyewear designer who mentors new talent. Her heart is huge.”

A unique force and passionate personality, Selima Salaun has carved a singular approach to her signature optical boutiques in NYC, Paris, her website ([www.SelimaOptique.com](http://www.SelimaOptique.com)), her spirited collections and vintage eyewear finds. Salaun, born in Tunisia, recalls, “My mother, who opened the first lens factory in North Africa, is the one who propelled me in this career. I was supposed to be a veterinarian but instead followed the path she traced. After school in Morez (where I learned about the factories), I went to work for Royal Optique where I mastered the art of bespoke eyewear.”



Selima Salaun (www.SelimaOptique.com), her spirited collections and vintage eyewear finds. Salaun, born in Tunisia, recalls, “My mother, who opened the first lens factory in North Africa, is the one who propelled me in this career. I was supposed to be a veterinarian but instead followed the path she traced. After school in Morez (where I learned about the factories), I went to work for Royal Optique where I mastered the art of bespoke eyewear.”

Salaun became an opticienne-lunetiere and an optometrist. “I did the eye exams, the lab work and sales. My colleagues then let me buy product. I fell in love with a collection from a new young designer, Alain Mikli, placed an opening order and the next week sold the 36 pieces to a celebrity. That sales rep was Frederic Ferrant who mentioned that Mikli was opening a retail store, and I would be the perfect candidate. I did end up doing that and later, I arrived in NYC to open Mikli’s first store here. I fell madly in love with the city and decided to stay.”

Her design collabs range from June Ambrose to Iris Apfel. She has long been involved in the Council of Fashion Designers and is on the EDCFDA board.

**SHE SAYS...** “Do not be afraid to take risks—people will appreciate you even more for that. If you make mistakes, it is OK. Let your personality shine through.” ■

and volunteer support to Essilor Vision Foundation (EVF). It soon became clear that a sense of community service and volunteerism was always in her blood.

Today, as president of EVF she oversees Essilor’s mission of improving lives by improving sight to communities, non-profit partners, industry players, employees and more with the intent to inspire others to help a brother or sister in need; to give them a better life through better sight, which is literally, the EVF motto.

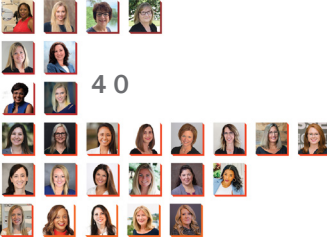
Palm was responsible for the promotion and expansion of Changing Life through Lenses (CLTL), EVF’s charitable glasses program that provides free lenses and frames to people in need, that launched when she joined EVF in the fall of 2018. “In July 2019, we provided our one millionth pair of glasses to a person in need—six-year-old Khloe—and we celebrated this accomplishment with our “One Million Magic Moments” campaign.”

These days, Palm is spearheading the partnership between EVF and Essilor of America to provide more than 100,000 pieces of protective equipment to local hospitals and first responders in Texas and Ohio, OD schools, and ECPs.

As for her management style, Palm said, “I want to be the manager/leader who people believe in, who will challenge them and, when they reflect back, who provided them with pivotal career growth.”

Dr. Nicole Rush has been practicing optometry in Southern Oregon for nearly 20 years. She started practicing straight out of optometry school and was eventually bought in as a partner in two practices. The practice now has two associate doctors and they have added a vision therapy office and plan to add another office location.

Dr. Rush credits her father, Dr. John Rush, “who allowed me to be involved



# Rising Stars

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

## Betty Barrs

**SENIOR PRODUCT OWNER**  
VisionWeb  
Austin, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Betty Barrs is able to listen and learn from the needs of the industry and then translate those needs into software features that she then communicates to a development team to build and execute.”



Betty Barrs, who's been at VisionWeb since October 2017, is a senior product owner at VisionWeb where she plays an important role in the development of Uprise EHR and practice management software. She works closely with developers, customer support, and subject matter experts to build the product roadmap for the development of Uprise EHR.

“One of my favorite aspects of my job is working with an array of industry and subject matter experts to create innovative solutions to an ever-changing landscape,” Barrs said. “Working with Uprise, I'm able to help optimize practice workflows and user experience within the EHR software, enabling optometrists to focus more on the patient in their exam lane than on documentation.”

Barrs' journey into health care began in 2013 after graduating from the Uni-

versity of Texas and receiving a Health Information Technology Certification. In 2014, she worked for eMDs where she started her career in product management, designing, collaborating, and creating innovative solutions to improve patient care.

“I really enjoyed being challenged and loved learning, so I took on a new opportunity with VisionWeb in 2017,” she said.

Barrs said her current role as a senior product owner allows her to act as a bridge between patient care, interoperability, and industry regulation.

**SHE SAYS...** “My goal is to not only create software that is intuitive to use but results in better patient care.”

## Katja Beier

**MARKETING MANAGER**  
OGI Eyewear  
North Minneapolis, Minnesota

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “OGI Eyewear is going through a major reboot as a company, and Katja is instrumental in transforming our customers' experience, adapting new interactive digital experiences, AR and VTO technologies. Her work will set the standard in our industry for efficient and productive B2B business relationships.”

With over a decade of experience specializing in digital marketing strategy and brand transformation management for global and multinational companies and a Masters' Degree in International Business, Katja Beier's passions for innovation, sustainability, marketing, and cus-



experience from other industries. I enjoy working with people and understanding the unfulfilled needs they express that the OGI Eyewear team can explore and deliver.”

## Jennifer K. Chinn, OD

**CO-OWNER**  
Dr. Chinn's Vision Care  
San Diego, California

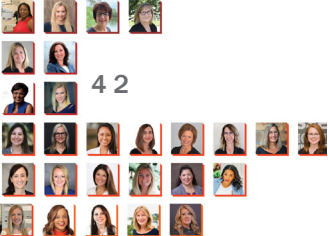
CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She is innovative—bringing creative ideas to improve the patient experience, advocating for eyecare and helping to educate people through social media.”



Jennifer Chinn grew up loving fashion, and since her father is an optometrist, she also grew up in the industry. “I realized that eyecare is the only medical health industry where fashion is strongly intertwined with medicine,” she said. “I grew up wearing glasses and never felt confident. It's now my passion to help people not only see better, but feel confident in their eyewear.”

As the managing doctor at Dr. Chinn's Vision Care, Chinn not only does clinical care, she organizes team training and implements new processes to improve patient care and flow. She's very hands-on with the practice, and her unique vision has redesigned

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# Rising Stars

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

the company values and the physical space. She encourages all team members to pursue their passions and learn new skills inside and outside of the eyecare industry.

Not surprisingly, Dr. Chinn's commitment spreads far beyond the office. After hours, she donates her time to providing eyecare services to underserved communities both locally and abroad. She's also a passionate advocate for eyecare and education, regularly mentoring pre-optometry and optometry students, and helps educate people through social media, videos, blogs, radio shows and live presentations.

She serves as a trustee on the local San Diego County Optometric Society and leads the San Diego Chapter of Young ODs of America. She was recognized as one of *EyeCare Business Magazine's* Game Changers in 2019 and was a Transitions Brand Ambassador Award Finalist in 2020.

**SHE SAYS...** "I'm always open to change—never satisfied with the status quo. This helps me learn from my mistakes and find new paths to success. My advice to others: build your network and stay true to your passion."

## Jessica Connor

**DIRECTOR,  
MEMBER MARKETING  
& OPERATIONS**  
EyeMed Vision Care

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Jessica is influential given the breadth of her role, but more importantly

how she manages many competing demands and priorities into a single vision for EyeMed members.

She demonstrates this daily and just this year, she has managed to not only keep EyeMed members informed about COVID-19 challenges but also delivered a number of key digital steps forward during this challenging time."



Jessica Connor has been in the vision industry for almost seven years, all of which have been at EyeMed. She is currently a director and is managing a team of marketing, operations and digital experts who work to constantly enhance the member experience. "My goal is to always ensure our members are able find the information they need, when they need it and make using their vision benefits seamless and easy," she said.

She feels a special bond with eyecare because she was born with strabismus and had to have surgery to correct her right eye when she was two years old. This resulted in many follow-up eyecare appointments throughout her childhood. She recalls, "I always had very fond memories of watching the light with cartoon characters bounce before my eyes and getting to yell out letters on a chart. As an adult, I was lucky to be able to collide my love of vision care with my passion for digital technologies and marketing."

Looking back, Connor says she also feels blessed to have had two strong mentors during her career. The first was an executive vice president at her first job out of college. "He saw a talent in me and helped me grow immensely." Later in her career, she was fortunate to find mentorship in her current supervisor, Matt MacDonald, senior vice president of operations at EyeMed. "His sound advice and level-headed approach to tackle any obstacle has guided me through various situations in my career," she said.

**SHE SAYS...** "Women are in one of the most challenging times of their lives right now trying to work from home while taking care of children and keeping their families safe during the pandemic. Many women are having to make the difficult choice to leave the workforce right now. Stay the course and don't give up."

## Stacey Curcio

**REGIONAL VICE PRESIDENT,  
UNITY CONTACT LENSES**  
Harmony, Pennsylvania

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Stacey's at the forefront of promoting and selling a brand new line of products. She's applying her incredible work ethic, leadership qualities and strategic thinking to get this new product off the ground in an extremely competitive market."

For Stacey Curcio, what started as a simple response to a job ad has turned into satisfying 20-year career in an industry she loves. After beginning her career as a brand consultant for



Essilor, she later joined VSP and moved up the ranks before landing in her current leadership role.

As VSP's regional VP for the Eastern half of the U.S., Curcio leads a team of sales professionals who are responsible for the promotion and sales of VSP's newly launched Unity contact lens products. Their goal is to educate doctors and staff on VSP's proprietary contact lens that's unique by being exclusive to the VSP network doctors and not sold online. With COVID-19, she's had to pivot strategy and lead her team to work remotely while still achieving sales goals set earlier this year.

She believes that having a winning team boils down to trust. She leads with honesty and transparency—nurturing and celebrating people's strengths rather than looking for weaknesses. She also knows the power of teamwork.

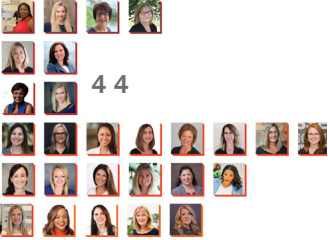
"Success is never a result of one person. We're all in this together," she said. "I'll never ask my team to do something I'm not willing to do." Her insightful leadership has paid off. "I feel fortunate to have helped build some of our industry's fastest growing brands in history," she said.

She's a proud member of the Optical Women's Association and a VSP Optics Group President's Club winner.

**SHE SAYS...** "What inspires me most

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# Rising Stars

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

as a manager and coach is watching a team member go beyond their comfort zone, learn, grow in their confidence and thrive—both personally and professionally.”

## Jill Eldridge

**SOUTH CENTRAL REGIONAL SALES MANAGER**  
ClearVision Optical  
Hauppauge, New York

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Jill has always been revered by others as strategic, driven, and incredibly customer-centric in her consultative approach.”



Jill Eldridge is a seasoned professional with 23 years of optical industry expertise, including the last 13 with ClearVision Optical. She’s a savvy businesswoman, who proudly represented the Arizona/Nevada territory as a sales consultant until being promoted to regional sales manager in August 2019. Today, she’s responsible for hiring, training and coaching 17 sales consultants and developing their territories in 15 states.

As a competitive athlete and a half-marathoner, Eldridge has always been a natural coach, challenging others to do their personal best. For years before assuming this sales leadership role, Eldridge was looked to by others for

best practices and would groom junior talent based on her recipe of proven results.

“Over 23 years of knowledge, a highly diverse skill set, trust in teammates, performance under pressure, willingness to be coached and achieving goals both individually and as a team are all the qualities that enable me to excel as a sales manager,” she said.

By challenging others to seek top performance for themselves and helping to foster sales capabilities, Eldridge encourages her team of sales consultants to successfully open new accounts, maximize territory development, sell programs, and surpass sales goals.

Being a competitive individual with a warm heart, Eldridge makes it easy to approach her and seek her perspective. She is known amongst her peers for being an intelligent, caring person who always has a positive attitude.

As a President’s Council member, Eldridge has emerged as a trusted advisor to many colleagues across the industry and generously shares her insight to help others succeed.

**SHE SAYS...** “Leading by example, I inspire my team to be the best people they can be and perform their jobs more efficiently and successfully.”

## Brooke Hargrove

**CO-OWNER**  
Empire Optical  
Tulsa, Oklahoma

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Brooke and her husband have put together

a very forward-thinking retail optical experience in Tulsa. From the build-out to the experiential-based layout, Brooke definitely has an eye on moving things forward.”



Brooke Hargrove gave up her nursing career 15 years ago to work with her husband in the retail optical world—joining a third-generation family business that’s 55 years old. She’s not only a co-owner, she also wears the hat of HR, marketing specialist, bookkeeper, staff scheduler and staff encourager.

“My biggest strength is my sense of humor,” she said. “I find a way to laugh—and more importantly, make someone else laugh, or at least smile, every day.”

Behind the scenes, Hargrove is involved in everything from frame selection to overseeing sales and service. Empire Optical is a very large shop—complete with its own very high-tech surfacing and finishing lab—and Hargrove is always looking for ways to stay ahead of the curve and ahead of her competition.

Her intelligence and creativity serve the business well. Among the store’s numerous awards, last year her 6,000-square-foot retail store won second place in *Invision magazine’s* ranking of best stores in the nation.

No doubt, Hargrove’s personal phi-

losophy plays a role. She tries to give every customer a fantastic experience that doesn’t feel like a doctor’s office or an online transaction. She welcomes guests into her store like she would into her home. She treats staff and customers like friends. She hosts numerous events to keep the retail optical world relevant. And most importantly, finds one good thing about each and every person she encounters.

**SHE SAYS...** “Think WAY outside the box. Why say no if you can find a way to say yes?”

## Mollie Tavel Kaback

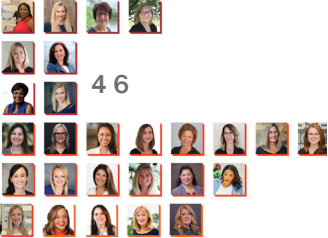
**DIRECTOR OF GROWTH INITIATIVES & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**  
Dr. Tavel Family Eye Care  
Indianapolis, Indiana

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Mollie dedicates herself 100% to supporting practices, products and non-profits that help people in need access vision care.”



As the child, niece and grandchild of eye doctors, Mollie Tavel Kaback has worked on and off in optical throughout her life, realizing her passion for vision and eyewear as a young adult

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# Rising Stars

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

during stints in the lab, reception and dispensing for the Dr. Tavel group of 22 Indiana eyecare offices. After college she moved into health care marketing and public relations, supporting sight-related pharmaceuticals and consumer education initiatives, counting Transitions Optical and Essilor of America as clients.

Tavel Kaback was then recruited by Essilor to support Transitions lenses and broader product initiatives, followed by her current role at Dr. Tavel where she melds communications expertise and optical insight.

Her responsibilities include creating community-focused partnerships throughout Indiana to help Hoosiers see better, and directing Dr. Tavel's internal and external communications including their "Eyes on Safety" initiative, which promotes ways to keep eyecare practices and their patients safe during the COVID era. Colleague Kent Iglehart calls Tavel Kaback's efforts to drive culture and engagement "essential to our organization's success," highlighting her use of social media to build meaningful connections with other influential thinkers.

Tavel Kaback, a Transitions Change Agent and member of The Vision Council's Emerging Optical Leaders committee, excels at developing synergistic relationships and empowering others to bring their visions to life. She continuously seeks opportunities to build upon the 80-year reputation established by the three Doctors Tavel, with effectual projects that serve the greater good: "As the third generation in the family business, I aspire to make an impact at least as great as theirs."

**SHE SAYS...** "Persistence is omnipotent, and passion helps me excel. I am fueled by a personal connection to my business and a persistent commitment to address unmet need."

## Melissa Kiewe

**VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING, NORTH AMERICA**

(at press time Melissa Kiewe was promoted)

CooperVision  
Victor, New York

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Melissa is a rising star: committed to discovering new ways to contribute to the industry, expanding her scope, and most importantly, bringing innovative, actionable solutions to customers to help them grow their businesses and benefit the entire optical community."



Melissa Kiewe, who was recruited to act as a change agent, is the chief liaison between CooperVision's U.S. corporate accounts sales organization and its marketing team. She has spearheaded innovative customer marketing programs, marketing initiatives, and high-profile product introductions to meet the industry's growing needs and help customers grow their businesses.

She strives to be a valued advisor and partner for customers, helping to

guide them through their decision-making process, resulting in enhanced category management and growth.

Prior to joining CooperVision in 2016, she spent more than 20 years in both optical and consumer product goods companies including B+L, Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer. Kiewe is also a graduate of the LEAD Leadership Program from WOMEN Unlimited and has acted as a mentor and a coach for emerging women in leadership.

Kiewe feels her impact in the optical industry comes from her commitment to keeping CooperVision's customers and patients at the core of everything she does for the company, as well as staying connected to the pulse of change in the business world.

**SHE SAYS...** "This has been particularly important in recent months, as practices are facing unprecedented challenges triggered by the COVID-19 global pandemic and are searching for new ways to reignite their businesses. Now more than ever, customers need partners to help them capture exams and purchases as omni-channel demands and integration of technology grow."

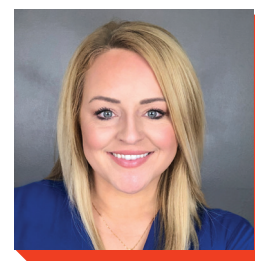
## Erin Meyer

**DIRECTOR OF MARKETING**

Opti-Port/CLX  
St. Louis, Missouri

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Erin brings a unique combination of qualities that make her an asset to all the teams and projects in which she is involved: a strong work ethic, a commitment to teamwork, an en-

trepreneurial 'can-do' mindset, and a focus on continuous learning."



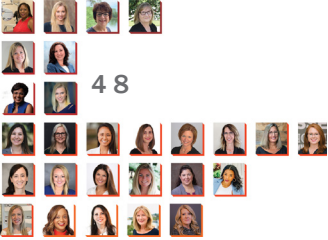
Since joining the optical industry in 2013, Erin Meyer has proven her leadership and management skills at Opti-Port and CLX. Meyer, who studied journalism at the University of Missouri, was hired in an entry-level marketing position, but quickly displayed the skills and know how that allowed her to take on additional responsibility. She's worn many hats at Opti-Port and CLX in marketing, events and product management.

Meyer, who currently directs and leads a team on execution of marketing strategy for the Opti-Port alliance and the CLX System, has many accomplishments under her belt. This includes establishing and leading a marketing study group and an annual marketing conference for Opti-Port member practices, leading the CLX System's marketing strategy to define and communicate CLX's contact lens capture strategy, and working alongside CLX's product development team to optimize the system's patient contact lens marketing features.

When it comes to the optical business, Meyer's personal philosophy is "Think about the patient every day."

**SHE SAYS...** "Not working in a practice, you have to actively make an

More →



# Rising Stars

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

effort to remind yourself regularly of our shared goal in this industry: to help people see better. Keeping this top of mind both motivates me and makes my day-to-day feel much more meaningful.”

## Amy Moore

### VICE PRESIDENT OF PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

The McGee Group  
Marietta, Georgia

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Amy has enjoyed a successful career path in the optical industry since her start at B. Robinson in 2003. Each company move, strategic to her growth, allowed her more responsibilities and opportunities to further her development. She is a mentor to her team, and an inspiration to those she worked for.”



Seventeen years ago, Amy Moore responded to an ad in *Women's Wear Daily*. It was for an associate director of product development at B. Robinson, and specifically asked for candidates without prior eyewear experience, but who had experience in design or product development. She got the job—and has become an integral member of the optical com-

munity ever since.

Today as VP of product development for The McGee Group, Moore is responsible for designs under Badgley Mischka, Vera Bradley and Life is Good brands, and she manages the product development and design team at the Group.

Moore felt at home in the optical industry right away, and that hasn't changed. She said, “The optical industry is an amazing industry, filled with members that continuously support, lean on, and learn from one another. I have a high level of gratitude and respect for this industry, and how we continue to look out for one another.”

Moore goes above and beyond—and makes sure to lead by example for her team, both in terms of hard work and in respect. She explains, “As a manager of a team of six, I work hard to make sure that I lead by example. I strongly believe in the simple adage ‘treat others as you would want them to treat you.’ Also, understand that your actions have everlasting effects, and the chances are high that you will one day come into contact, in some way, with others from your past.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Grab every opportunity you can! If there is an event within the optical industry, such as a class offered at one of the wonderful trade shows, take it, no matter how close it directly relates to your current position. There is always something more to learn and more great people to meet.”

## Alexis Nyiro

### MANAGER OF PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

WestGroupe  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Over the last 11 years, Alexis has continued to grow, not only as an eyewear developer, but as a core member of the WestGroupe management team. She began her career at WestGroupe when our product development department was a one-woman operation and we did not have an internal marketing department. Alexis has been involved in, and was instrumental to, the evolution of our product and marketing departments. Her keen eye, love for fashion and eyewear, and her natural leadership ability make her one of the most influential WestGroupe managers.”



For Alexis Nyiro, success in the optical industry boils down to three things: being creative, working hard and choosing your attitude. Nyiro fell into the industry while looking for a marketing career that would allow her to be creative—it was working with Beverly Suliteanu, WestGroupe's VP of product development, that helped her grow.

Having experienced how impactful mentorship is firsthand, Nyiro works hard to go above and beyond as a leader herself. She explains, “creating a successful and respectful team atmosphere is critical in the success of any organization. Team members must be able to adapt and collaborate in order for everyone to thrive together.”

To do this, Nyiro leads with passion, kindness and gratitude for her work. She said, “I believe you should lead a team with the intent to support and educate, while listening to their ideas. I also choose to start each day with optimism and positivity as I believe it breeds success.”

“Seeing people in everyday life, wearing a frame that I helped design and saying how happy they are is flattering to say the least. Coupled with the success I was having within my own career and the recognition being shown to me, I just got hooked and have enjoyed every minute.”

**SHE SAYS...** “There is no limit to how much you can learn and how much you can teach others.”

## Dawna Owens

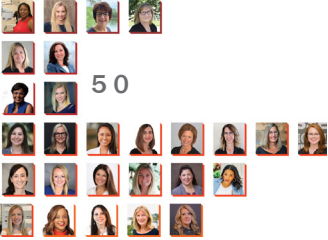
### DIRECTOR, NATIONAL ACCOUNTS AND GOVERNMENT SALES

Topcon Healthcare  
Oakland, New Jersey

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Dawna's hard work and perseverance has landed her with much responsibility and she continues to be successful and strive for more.”

More →





# Rising Stars

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



Over the past 22 years, Dawna Owens has worked her way up from studying optical engineering at Rochester Institute of Technology, to becoming a clinical trainer at Zeiss, then on to getting her own sales territories at both Zeiss and Topcon Healthcare, and now she holds the title of director, national accounts and government sales. In this role, she manages a team of six national account managers.

Owens is also actively involved in each account from the ground up. She educates them on best-in-class equipment to provide doctors and patients with the best eye exams and specialty testing. She's involved with everything from day-to-day repairs, to major equipment contracts, and serves on committees for new and innovative products.

"I love being able to provide best-in-class capital equipment for early detection and prevention, enabling doctors to provide proactive treatments and solutions for patients. It's an honor to help doctors provide comprehensive eye exams, changing the lives of thousands with a quick scan and refraction to help them see clearly."

Owens is a very effective leader, and has a wealth of knowledge from her years of experience in the industry. She has excellent communication and organizational skills and has built rela-

tionships and gained the trust of key customers throughout the industry.

In fact, working closely with Topcon's VP of sales, Owens helped to secure the largest Maestro OCT contract in the company's history in the U.S.

**SHE SAYS...** "Communication is the key to success. Share your visions and don't be afraid to make your voice heard."

## Danielle Richardson, OD

### OPTOMETRIST

Zak  
Los Angeles, California

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Danielle's patient treatment arsenal includes the latest optometric technologies like digital device lenses, computer progressive options, specialty contact lenses, and blue light protection to ensure comfortable and clear vision even after staring at screens all day."



Living in the digital age presents unique challenges for our eyes and Dr. Danielle Richardson understands an evolving world requires evolving eyecare. As a glaucoma-certified therapeutic optometrist at Zak, she spends time understanding each

patient's unique visual demands and provides a personalized eyecare experience.

Dr. Richardson is licensed in New York, Texas, and California and has a wealth of experience in several optometric settings. She's certified by the National Board of Examiners in Optometry to treat and manage ocular disease and she specializes in LASIK surgery co-management and modern eyecare issues like contact lenses, dry eye and digital eye strain.

In addition to practicing at Zak, Dr. Richardson is a consultant for Johnson & Johnson Vision and is also an active speaker and advocate in the industry, most recently moderating the EYE2EYE Series, Taking Steps to be an Ally of Diversity & Inclusion.

In her free time, Dr. Richardson runs a holistic wellness company, Fierce Clarity, where she hosts wellness retreats, yoga classes, and pop-up events to help professional women manage stress and avoid burnout. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she has conducted yoga sessions through Instagram Live to stay engaged with her followers. She's also a Transitions Change Agent, and has been featured in industry publications on subjects of work-life balance, holistic patient care, and stress reduction techniques.

"I've taken a non-traditional path professionally, but it has allowed me to refine and be intentional about my optometric career," she said.

**SHE SAYS...** "I always want to inspire and empower others to forge a path that feels most in alignment with their truest self."

## Jenna Slater

### HEAD OF STRATEGIC GROWTH

Anagram Inc.  
Santa Monica, California

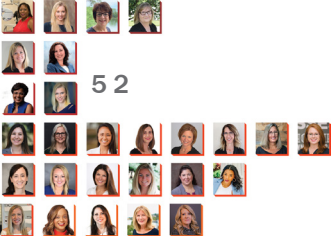
**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Jenna outworks everyone and still finds time to make everyone around her better. She cares deeply about the success of her clients, the industry, and the entire sales team. She goes out of her way to mentor and support other female sales reps, both at Anagram, and in the software industry at large. She is truly the definition of a rising star."



Jenna Slater was the fourth employee at Anagram Inc. (previously known as Patch), which has grown to over 50 people in 3 1/2 years. "I was the company's first salesperson, although I had no real sales experience or vision industry knowledge," she said. "I simply loved the problem Anagram was solving and I convinced my executives that sales and vision care could be learned, but that passion cannot be taught."

In college, she studied social justice and worked with women in prison, which inspired her senior thesis (published in 2013), and she received scholarships to present the research at conferences around the world. This led to her initial work in health care.

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# Rising Stars

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

"I took part in fundraising, political activism and research before leaping into tech. I realized that helping doctors get ahead of the many issues facing health care, specifically insurance, gave me a better opportunity to instigate change than debating policy in think tanks. I'd never have guessed my journey would lead me to optometry but I'm so grateful that it did!"

**SHE SAYS...** "I believe in brutal honesty and that, as a woman, you can go so far by simply asking hard questions and giving hard answers. I don't tell people what they want to hear because that is not how progress is made. I may be an altruistic millennial at times but if we are going to build a better future—in optical, in health care, in the workplace—we have to do it together and pleasantries slow things down. I also think my relentless sense of humor has served me well in this industry. ECPs love to laugh and I love to make people laugh."

## Leigh Ann Vanausdoll

### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Illinois Optometric Association  
Springfield, Illinois

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "She is not only a known lobbyist in our State Capitol, but she's taken our organization from being in the red to one that has enough money to pay for a complete remodel of the office to bring it up to code—all in a matter of three years."



As executive director, Leigh Ann Vanausdoll oversees the optometric association for the entire state of Illinois, representing over 1,200 doctors of optometry. In her role, she serves as the visionary change agent for the organization, implementing the strategic plan, promoting public policy to advance and protect the profession. According to her peers, the Illinois Optometric Association is more respected since she came on board in 2017.

"During my tenure with the association, I have worked hard to update the entire organization from top to bottom—doing a complete reorganization of positions, internal policies, marketing, creating new programs and structuring the Board for success by implementing a new strategic plan and mission," she said.

Vanausdoll's previous experience working, for the Illinois Department of Transportation and several other state agencies, has prepped her well.

"I take great pride in being able to build bipartisan relationships in the political arena," she said. "Being able to build relationships with lawmakers is essential when taking on optometric battles and fighting to protect the profession of optometry."

To achieve her goals, she leads by example and strives to leave the pro-

fession better than she found it. For her, that means making sure that the organization's opportunities are open and inclusive to every member.

**SHE SAYS...** "I'm continuously inspired by members' passion to move their profession forward and to make it better for generations to come. It's their energy that fuels my fire and inspires me to fight for their profession and their patients."

## Victoria Whitman, OD

### DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS

Art of Optiks  
East Wayzata, Minnesota

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "In addition to being an outstanding optometrist, Dr. Whitman has also learned all facets of the eyewear side. She lives the adage 'I don't expect you to do anything that I couldn't or wouldn't do,' and employees respect her enormously."



Like many other ODs, Dr. Victoria Whitman studied pre-med as an undergraduate, where a "science of vision" class opened her eyes to the eyecare field. After working in corporate offices and Chicago Public

Schools, she now enjoys wearing many hats at Art of Optiks. Success in meeting her main goal—to make patients into their customers, and customers into their patients—has resulted in organic growth and earned recognition for the practice at the city, state and national levels.

Dr. Whitman noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic, women have been ever more resilient and adaptable. Citing "doing it all" and rarely saying "no" as top challenges, she focuses on setting priorities, tightly scheduling her time, and investing in team curation. She names COO and owner Stephanie Haenes as a mentor, and credits Art of Optiks' ownership team as a whole with entrusting and empowering her to successfully take on a leadership role in addition to patient care. Given this opportunity, her interest in the business side of the practice has quickly grown to match her passion for optometry.

For women developing careers in the optical industry, she asserts: "Step up! Find and observe those who align with your mission; take ownership and do the job you want before you have the title, and that will then manifest itself."

**SHE SAYS...** "Human connection inspires me. I connect with patients on both their systemic health and lifestyle, and I also learn something from everyone I meet, which keeps me growing and excited for each day."

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# Rising Stars

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

## Maria Beard

### DIRECTOR, STRATEGIC PLANNING & ANALYSIS

Vision Source  
Houston, Texas



CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Maria has provided great leadership to her team and helps each person grow within and beyond their areas of responsibility.”

With 11 years of experience, and more than four in the optical industry, Maria Beard knows that for many companies, strategy and financial goals are often disconnected from operations—which can lead to unrealized strategic objectives.

At Vision Source, she helps to ensure the opposite. She oversees the daily management of business partnering, so that she can help doctors create and execute strategic planning into their daily operations. She manages a team of three analysts who

support the day-to-day sales and vendor operations, executive leadership planning and forecasting P&L revenue and expenses. These responsibilities have put her in a position to not only influence goals, but company outcomes, too.

“I help find opportunities to assist our members in delivering the best results for their business, and thereby care for their patients,” she said.

She also helped Vision Source’s external sales team realize their potential by running analysis on potential opportunities and used this to gauge quotas that are aligned to realistic business outcomes. Ultimately, Beard’s contributions have helped Vision

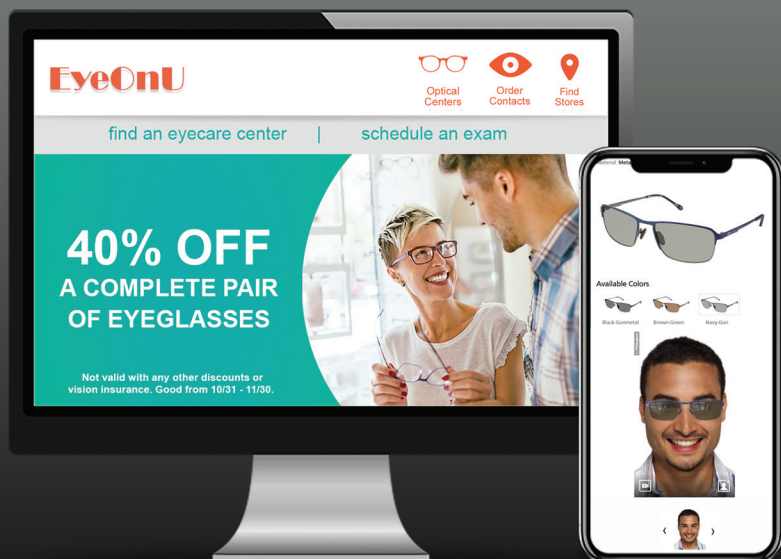
Source achieve not only sales goals, but many other strategies, as well. Among them are increased influence, plus financial gains for the company and the IECP industry.

Among Beard’s many accomplishments, she helped create the concept and launch the new program “Vision Source Next” to help independent optometric practices maintain fiscal strength, competitive profitability and independent status. She also provided opportunity analysis for more 1:1 network support, which helped Vision Source members engage in solutions to help drive business success.

**SHE SAYS...** “Strive to provide assistance that matches your key strengths and talents. Be willing to listen, and constantly look to get advice and seek mentors along the way.”

**\*At presstime, Beard is on a leave of absence and has moved into a consulting role for Vision Source. ■**

## Are Your Profits Walking?

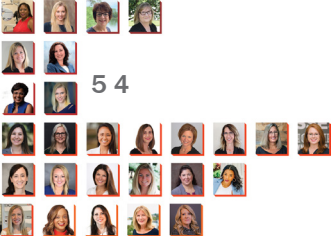


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# Mentors

WOMEN WHO ARE TEAM BUILDERS AND DEVELOPERS OF TALENT

## Camille Cohen, OD

**OPTOMETRIST**  
Pearle Vision  
Brooklyn, New York

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She isn’t interested in having thousands of followers on social media; she’s simply interested in helping other minority students succeed. She is always available to the students who need her and provides great advice and motivation.”



Dr. Camille Cohen is a private practice owner in Brooklyn, New York, juggling the roles of doctor and office manager, and working tirelessly to provide the best care for her patients. Yet, she’s also heavily involved in the National Optometric Association (NOA), where she spearheads the initiative to help fourth-year and post-graduate students who are having difficulty passing boards.

As the NOA Tutoring Committee Chair, she has brought mental health to the forefront and enabled students to have access to clinical psychologists, as they tackle test anxiety and common study tips. She’s highly motivated to help minority optometry students pass their boards.

Many doctors, once they have graduated, forget what it was like as a student, but Dr. Cohen hasn’t. She’s always available to students who need her,

and consistently provides great advice and motivation.

“Right now, my involvement with the NOA Tutoring Committee has been the most fulfilling project for me. I know how these students feel because I was in their position. It’s difficult feeling alone and dejected. Speaking to these young doctors one on one reaffirms my purpose. I can use my past experience with boards to hopefully guide them to their upcoming success.”

Dr. Cohen’s greatest strength is her genuine care for the needs of others. She excels because that compassion shines through.

SHE SAYS... “Make a plan outlining what you want for your life. Write it down. Take the steps toward the dreams that frighten you. Then watch them unfold.”

## Deborah Kotob

**DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING DEVELOPMENT**  
Jobson Health Information  
Hopkinton, Massachusetts

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Her insights into optics, especially new technologies, make the information easy to understand and embrace. Deb is dedicated to educating all opticians, from novices to those with years of experience. She shares her passion and excitement for the field in a way that ignites those feelings in others.”

Deborah Kotob creates continuing education courses, editorial content and oversees *20/20 Magazine’s* educational content for Pro to Pro. She considers her



major accomplishment at Jobson to be enhancing the *20/20 Pro to Pro* education learner experience while adding value for the CE sponsors.

She said, “Learners, especially younger generations, are seeking digital interactive online options, accessible from their devices, whether tablets, phones, or laptops. *20/20 Pro to Pro* CE sponsors receive the added value option of presenting education on their new technology via an interactive and responsive online delivery platform.”

Kotob got her start in optical as a Giorgio Armani frame representative for Luxottica, in San Diego. She went on to owning and operating two high-end optical boutiques, which she sold. She said, “My experience in frame sales and retail/business ownership paved the way for over 10 years with Vision Ease, which ignited two things in me: My love of optics and my love of training and content development.”

When it comes to management style Kotob takes her cue from the book titled “Multipliers - How the best leaders make everyone smarter” by Liz Wiseman. “The author describes the difference between leaders that are diminishers versus those that are multipliers. Multipliers ‘amplify the smarts and capabilities of others.’ Suppose all managers thought like mentors, helping others fulfill their potential—imagine the untapped talent that would bloom.”

SHE SAYS... “My favorite signature quotes include, ‘Worry is a debt paid before it’s due’ (Confucius). ‘The answer is always NO if you never ask.’ (Author unknown) and ‘Strive not to be a success, but rather to be of value.’ (Albert Einstein)”

## Toni McElroy

**DIVISIONAL VP – WEST**  
Marchon Eyewear  
Seattle, Washington

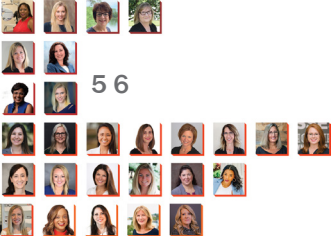
CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Toni has been with Marchon for 25 years in various roles from sales rep to her current position as divisional vice president for the West region. She is a strong team builder and motivator for her teams leading them to consistent growth each year.”



Toni McElroy leads the West region for Marchon which consists of 80 sales reps and five regional vice presidents. One of her biggest assets is her ability to build strong relationships with each person and get them to realize their potential. Her interpersonal skills have propelled her to help develop these teams to produce amazing results each year.

McElroy began her career at Nordstrom where she quickly moved up to department manager and buyer. She always was aware of the value of offering excellent customer service and she went on

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# Mentors

WOMEN WHO ARE TEAM BUILDERS AND DEVELOPERS OF TALENT

to work for Ray Ban and then B+L as a trainer. She then moved to Marchon and began a 25-year career starting as a rep and moving up to district manager, key accounts manager and now she is a divisional vice president.

When it comes to managing people, McElroy believes you need to, “Get to know them and understand how they think. Listen, support, coach. Empower them to do their job and try new things. Then plan for change and be ready.

McElroy has a strong passion for fashion in eyewear and has been very influential in working with Marchon’s brand teams to develop new products and styling along with helping to create a new brand rating system in the US. She said, “I love the blend of fashion and health care. It just doesn’t get any better and there is so much opportunity for women. You need to know all aspects of this business and be looking for new ways of doing business. Get ahead of it!”

**SHE SAYS...** “It takes courage to let go of the familiar and embrace the new. Put on your seat belt because here we go!”

## Heidi Orlando

### NORTHEAST REGIONAL SALES MANAGER

WestGroupe USA  
Plattsburgh, New York

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “The ongoing growth and success of [early-stage career women within WestGroupe] is partly due to Heidi’s caring actions and mentoring abilities.”

As the Northeast regional sales manager for WestGroupe USA, Heidi Orlando is



responsible for guiding, training and motivating a team of 14 sales representatives to achieve and surpass their sales objectives. She is known as a true champion of the WestGroupe culture and instills in her team the importance of superior customer service and going the extra mile for customers.

This passion has led to several awards over her 20-year sales career, including President’s Circle Award (during her time with Luxottica). With WestGroupe, she was named Sales Representative of the Year in 2016 before being promoted to her current position in 2017.

But Orlando’s personal mission goes far beyond sales awards.

As she moved from sales representative into a leadership role, Orlando took it upon herself to begin mentoring a group of young women within WestGroupe who were in the early stages of their career. Although they were based across the country, Orlando made it a point to bring them together at national sales events so they could begin to build a support network within the company.

During the COVID-19 shutdown, she has hosted numerous Zoom meetings with these women to ensure they could maintain their supportive network, enjoy a forum to discuss business ideas.

“My entire sales team is poised and ready each day with the enthusiasm and desire to make themselves, their

customers and WestGroupe the best they can be.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Mentors come in all shapes and sizes. Find your people and challenge yourself to learn from them each day.”

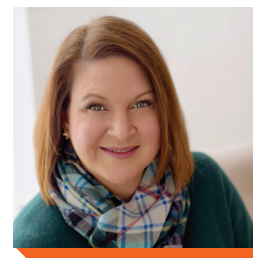
## Jennifer Palombi, OD, FAAO

### SENIOR MANAGER, PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT

CooperVision  
Victor, New York

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “The word ‘mentor’ typically conjures up the image of a one-to-one relationship between two people, in which one bestows her wisdom on another using experience to drive the other’s personal and professional growth. Dr. Jennifer Palombi certainly held that role for many optometry students during her years in practice, as she influenced future practitioners—one at a time. Now at CooperVision, she is still very much a mentor, yet in an entirely new way.”

Jennifer Palombi, OD, FAAO, said she has been “fortunate at every stage of my career to be surrounded by people who have willingly given of their time to teach me anything I want or need to know.” She noted, in particular, two medical professionals who have had an oversized influence: Walter Hartel, MD, a neuro-ophthalmologist who, in the midst of crushingly busy days, never thought twice about pausing to talk through a case or share his insights,



and Michele Andrews, OD, at CooperVision, whose feedback and thought-provoking questions have led to better understanding and insights.

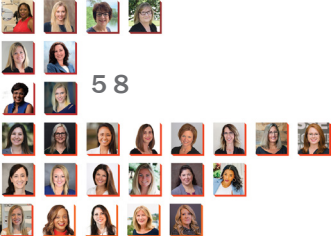
“So, any time I see an opportunity to provide that same kind of peer-to-peer support for others, I seize it, because I know from my own experience how meaningful that mentorship can be,” she noted.

Dr. Palombi graduated from The Ohio State University College of Optometry and spent her earlier years in clinical practice, the last 10 of which were with an OD/MD group where she concentrated on neuro-ophthalmic disease and specialty contact lenses.

In 2017, she transitioned from clinical practice to CooperVision, where she now leads communication and education initiatives related to the CooperVision portfolio of products and services. She is a member of the American Optometric Association, the Ohio Optometric Association, the American Medical Writers Association and the Society for Health Communication.

**SHE SAYS...** “In this industry, no matter what we do or how we do it, we must remain focused on WHY we do it—and that is to improve patient outcomes. That’s true no matter what area of the industry we work in.” from direct patient care to the manufacturing of optical and medical devices to research and education.” ■

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# Innovators

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

## Leigh Berberian

### DIRECTOR OF MARKETING

Todd Rogers Eyewear  
Andover, Massachusetts

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “The eyewear industry often forgets that we as humans have not two, but three eyes. Leigh has been an innovator in using that ‘3rd eye’ human connection in marketing the Todd Rogers brand through storytelling.”



When her sons Jackson (age 9) and Wade (age 5) ask their mom about work, Leigh Berberian tells them, “mom is a storyteller.” As director of marketing for Todd Rogers, Berberian creates the story, look, feel and “general good vibes” of all things Todd Rogers, from its physical space to its company presentation. Alongside Todd Rogers—her husband—Berberian has helped grow the name-sake brand from the ground up.

She explains, “I believe I have the talent of questioning ‘why ...?’ Why would I or anyone else care to listen to a story being told? Why would I remember it? That’s the real challenge of marketing—to create something people want to hear, or look at, or experience in the first place, and then finding that part of the story that travels with them.”

To do that, Berberian makes a point of listening to customers in the store and watching how they interact. Plus, by

injecting a dose of personal authenticity, humor, optimism, gratitude and style into her work, Berberian has helped build a business that she loves deeply. She said, “I’m in awe of the brand we continue to build together and that Todd Rogers has a heartbeat so much louder than its size would suggest.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Tune out the noise. Don’t compare yourself. The only measuring stick to what others are doing professionally is in your head. There is plenty of room out there for success stories, so go be one of them in your own authentic way. Be the president of your own fan club. If you aren’t—why ask someone else to be?”

## Colleen Galanti

### CREATOR OF OPTICIANS ON FACEBOOK

Optical Manager and Optician  
Pascaralla Eye Care  
& Contact Lenses  
Yardley and Newtown,  
Pennsylvania

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “[Colleen] started Opticians on Facebook with just a few dozen members and the group has grown to 23,500+ members over the last several years due to her leadership and guidance.”

Opticians on Facebook was born because Colleen Galanti couldn’t find what she needed—an active Facebook group for opticians to share. “Covering every aspect of the job... the good, the bad and the ugly without the opinions of ODs,” she said. Now, OOF has nearly 25,000 members, and is far and away the largest and most popu-

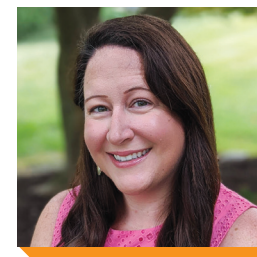


## Jessica Klein

### SENIOR DIRECTOR, MARKETING

EyeCare Partners, LLC  
St. Louis, Missouri

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Jessica has instituted innovative digital and print marketing projects and processes that resulted in the significant growth of new patients. Her #1 priority is the patient, and it shows in everyone she comes into contact with and everything she creates.”



lar Facebook group for opticians—all under Galanti’s leadership.

“I wish I had something like this when I started out in 1986. People enjoy having a place to go to. There have been many friendships made that will last a lifetime, including some romantic relationships that have started from meeting in the group. I am so happy to have made a difference in so many lives.”

To run a popular Facebook group, Galanti has to do it all. She keeps up with all the posts, accepts new members, diffuses arguments when they happen, encourages new members to get involved, and keeps the rules in place. It’s a full-time second job, she said.

In addition, she works her day job at Pascaralla Eye Care, where she’s the optician and optical manager—that involves frame buying, training and lab work. Balancing it all is tough—but Galanti considers patience key. She said, “I work hard to exceed my goals. When it comes to Opticians on Facebook, I excel at engaging conversation. I know how to keep people interested. I post what people want to talk about. I diffuse arguments diplomatically.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Find a mentor, listen and let her guide you. A woman should never allow a door to close in her face. Be confident, feel confident and that will make you soar.”

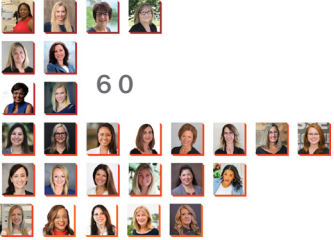
Jessica Klein heads up the marketing department in a very fast paced, PE backed, optometry/ophthalmology group. Klein has been with EyeCare Partners for 10 years. She began with the company as an optician at a newly opened office in downtown St. Louis, and believes, “that experience of working in an office still influences how I view promotional planning, creative development, patient journey optimizations and company communications. When I began at the corporate office I had no experience specific to marketing.”

Today, her specific responsibilities include media buying, CRM, branding, reputation management, digital media strategy and buying, internal and external company communications and direct mail programs.

Klein built the marketing department from a team of one into a consistently

More →





# Innovators

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

praised group of professionals that support the marketing and brand strategy of 500+ offices and 20+ brands in 31 markets. She also led a multi-departmental collaboration to develop and communicate, to both employees and patients, an ECP's new pre-appoint program for optometry practices, resulting in an 8 percent year over year same store increase in returning patients in 2019.

Through her efforts, EyeCare Partners has successfully integrated more than 300 independent practices into the ECP support system, using their data-driven strategy to increase retention and attract new patients.

**SHE SAYS...** "I believe effectively leading a team requires a high level of empathy and consistent, open communication. I encourage everyone

on my team to come to me so we can identify solutions together. There is always a way forward."

## Melanie J. Poon

### MANAGER OF STRATEGIC PROJECTS

Vision Essentials  
By Kaiser Permanente  
Los Angeles, California

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "She is one of the key change agents in Kaiser Permanente's Vision Essentials department."

Poon began her optical career 10 years ago when she went to work for Kaiser Permanente, following 15 years in pharmaceutical sales with Abbott Laboratories. But long before that she had come to understand and appreciate the

essential role optometrists play in eye health and the importance of regular eye exams, having worn eyeglasses since age 12, and later, contact lenses.

"When I entered the industry, I knew very little about vision's dual role in preventative health and retail sales," she recalled. "I was so fortunate to be able to work for Dr. Susy Yu at Vision Essentials, who created this ideal, collaborative platform that allowed me to learn and explore the world of vision yet infuse my experience and perspective into my work projects. This gave me the opportunity to create tools that our members can use to access vision care or learn more about their vision."

Poon's current responsibilities include project management for key strategic projects for Vision Essentials, Southern California region and collaborating with



Kaiser Permanente sales and account managers to sell the vision hardware rider to employer groups. She has collaborated on a vision module of the Kaiser Permanente online Personal Action Plan which includes patient recall, eyewear order status, and vision education that is open to all Southern California members.

**SHE SAYS...** "I hope our work encourages people to have an eye exam every two years and acknowledge that the small 20- to 30-minute commitment required can help detect problems early that may save their vision." ■

# CONGRATULATIONS To Our Favorite Pro!

From your team members and friends at *Jobson*

## Deborah Kotob

*Vision Monday's  
Most Influential Woman  
Mentor*

