

# Making a Mark

**MOST DARING  
OPTICAL RETAILERS  
IN THE U.S. AND CANADA**

VM  
2013 **D.A.R.E.**  
DISPENSING AND RETAIL EXCELLENCE AWARDS

**V**ision Monday is excited to announce the winners of our Third Annual Dispensing and Retail Excellence (D.A.R.E.) Awards, sponsored by Europa International.

“As the frame company that prides itself on being ‘independent for the independent,’ we are always looking for ways to support the independent ECP,” said Cynthia Shapiro, creative director of Europa International and a 2013 D.A.R.E. Awards judge. “When we learned that *Vision Monday* was going to be honoring the best and most daring retailers, we jumped at the opportunity to participate. We hope this program does more than honor the best of the best; we also hope it inspires other retailers and gives them new perspectives on how to compete in this ever-changing and consistently challenging marketplace.”

The D.A.R.E. Awards were conceived in 2010 to

award daring optical retailers and dispensers from the U.S. and Canada in five different categories, with an additional winner, chosen by readers, for a sixth award. In 2013, an additional award was added bringing the total number of possible winners up to seven.

This year, eyewear retailers and ECPs were asked to submit entries, free of charge, from May 6 through June 14. Those submissions were reviewed by a panel of judges (see details on page 56) and the winner in each category was identified.

The judges also selected six entries they deemed worthy of special recognition for their daring approaches across different aspects of optical retailing to be put up for the “We the People” Readers’ Vote Award. From July 1 through Aug. 9, readers were then able to vote on those six nominees at [www.VisionMonday.com/DARE](http://www.VisionMonday.com/DARE) to deter-

mine a winner.

Over the next several pages you will be able to see a sampling of the submission essays and supporting materials that earned each of this year’s daring retailers their honor. Of particular note this year is the fact that half of our winners are from the Midwest, one is from Canada and none are from the usual suspects like New York or California, proving that daring optical retailing is happening all over the country.

So please join us in congratulating the daring winners that made their mark in 2013. And if you missed entering this year’s D.A.R.E. Awards, we hope the caliber of winners inspires you to participate next year.

Look for the complete story on [VisionMonday.com](http://VisionMonday.com), where you will also be able to revisit the retailers who claimed the prize in 2012. ■

*Deirdre Carroll and Catherine Wolinski*

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# The PDA (Public Display of Affection) Award

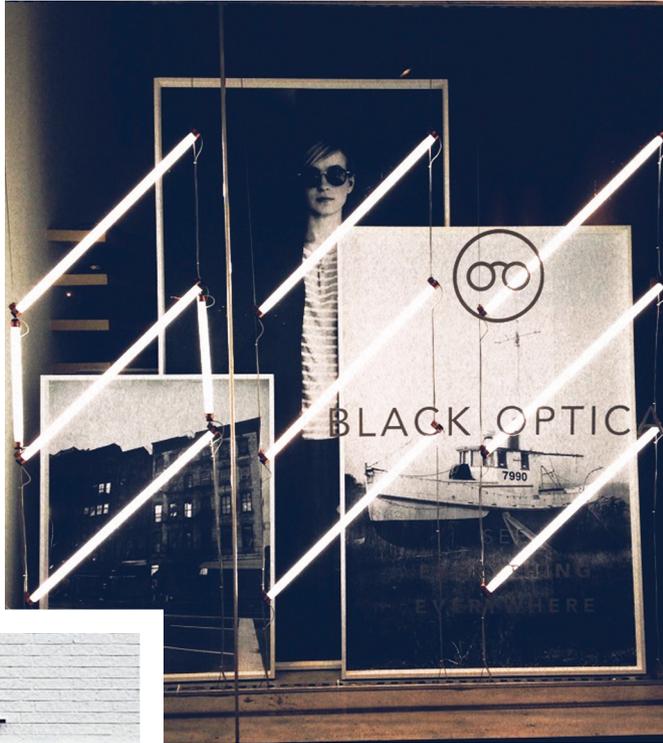
FOR MOST DARING IN-STORE MERCHANDISING AND/OR WINDOW DISPLAY (NEW FOR 2013)

## BLACK OPTICAL

TULSA, OKLA.

WWW.BLACKOPTICAL.COM

OWNER: GARY BLACK



### SUBMISSION ESSAY...

“Black Optical takes brands out of the equation and focuses on the product design and quality. Name brands and logos are a thing of the past. Each window display seeks to tell a story unique to the Black Optical brand. Whether it is a black American flag, burned Christmas tree or obnoxiously bright florescent lights, Black Optical always seeks to try something new.

Alongside each season’s window display, a bi-annual look book is created to further the story. This spring/summer, a photo shoot was done in-store. Each photo was blown up for the window display and additional photos were printed in the look books.

The addition of the look book enhances the client experience by tying the window displays back in with the art they see in the look books. Each window creates dialogue and excitement for what might be next. Black Optical will never stop pushing the limits on what an optical shop can be.”



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# The Least, Follow, or Get Out of the Web Award

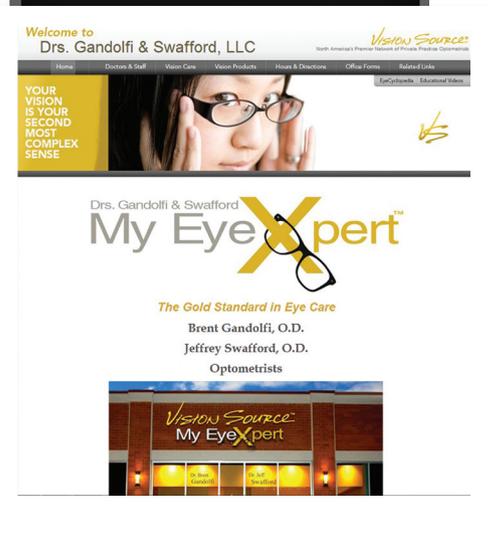
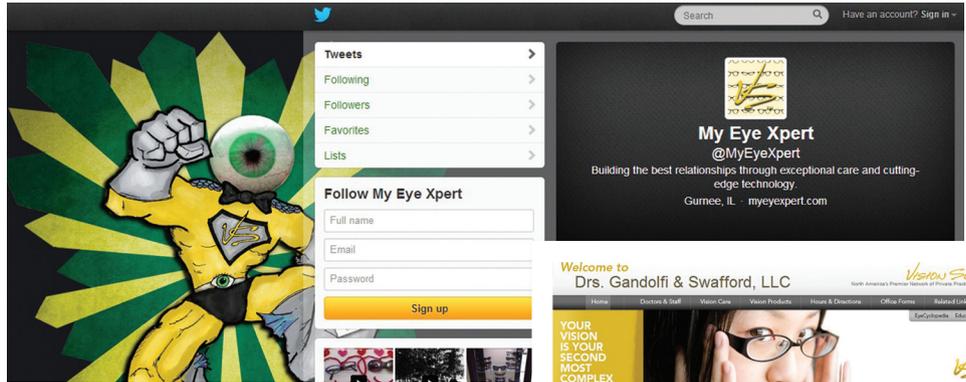
FOR MOST DARING SOCIAL MEDIA OR WEB PRESENCE (INCLUDING WEBSITES, SOCIAL NETWORKING AND VIRAL MARKETING)

## MY EYE XPERT

GURNEE, ILL.

WWW.MYEYEXPERT.COM

OWNERS: BRENT GANDOLFI, OD  
JEFFREY SWAFFORD, OD



### SUBMISSION ESSAY...

“Our office is unlike any other optometrist’s office—unlike any other doctor’s office, to be exact. We strive to be outstanding in every aspect of our office, and one of the biggest things that sets us apart is the fact that we utilize every form of web presence we can—from social sites like Facebook and Twitter to our webpage to listings all over the web.

What sets us apart is how much we engage our fans/followers. We make it known that social media is our drive. It allows us to connect with our patients on a personal level and it shows them that we care.

We go in and maintain every page we can on a weekly basis. [In addition to] Facebook and Twitter, our list includes: YouTube, LinkedIn, Google+, Bing, Yahoo, our website, Yelp and listings on a variety of different directory sites.”

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# THE SEEING GREEN AWARDS

VM  
2013  
D.A.R.E.  
DISPENSING AND RETAIL EXCELLENCE AWARDS

FOR MOST DARING ECO-CHIEVEMENT

## EYE IMPACT

HOUSTON, TEXAS

WWW.EYEIMPACTHOUSTON.COM

OWNER: GARY NGUYEN, OD



### SUBMISSION ESSAY...

“Eye Impact is completely unique in that the building is a live-work space for owner Dr. Nguyen. It’s no shopping center or standard office building. There is no commute, so his car sits in the garage most of the day, reducing his carbon footprint.

Every aspect of the practice strives to be eco-conscious. The building features zero VOC paint, primarily LED lighting (the compact fluorescent lights are being phased out), repurposed display shelving and furniture and a tankless water heater. The electricity provider also utilizes solar and wind resources. There are plans to eventually add solar panels or wind turbines to the roof to get the building off the grid.

Eye Impact partnered with New Living, a local green builder/lifestyle store to create sustainable bamboo cabinetry and countertops from recycled glass and mirror. Business practices like electronic health records and an electronic signature pad, which means no paper credit card receipts to sign, as well as the e-mailing of itemized receipts also contribute to the location’s eco-friendly stance.

Additionally, the optical features two lines, eco by Modo and Linkskin, which utilize only recycled metals and plastics in their production.”

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# THE RESISTANCE IS FUTILE AWARD

FOR MOST DARING ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN (PRINT, TV OR RADIO ADVERTISING)

## SVS VISION OPTICAL CENTERS

MOUNT CLEMENS, MICH.

WWW.SVSVISION.COM

OWNERS: KENNETH STANN

ROBERT G. FARRELL, JR., OD

### SUBMISSION ESSAY...

“In 2012, SVS Vision launched its initial marketing campaign ‘Got bad glasses? Get good glasses.’ Our advertising strategy took us in a different creative direction from other optical retailers.

Our goal was to:

- 1) Create consumer awareness.
- 2) Promote SVS Vision as the place where customers can pick from a great selection of designer frames.
- 3) Establish SVS Vision as the place customers *want* to go to get their new glasses.
- 4) Create a strategic approach that the SVS Vision staff believes in.

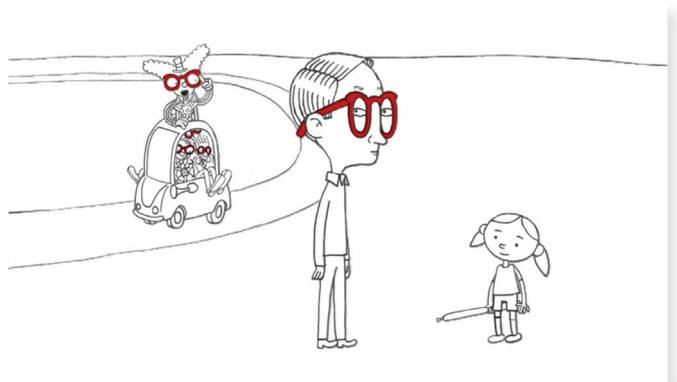
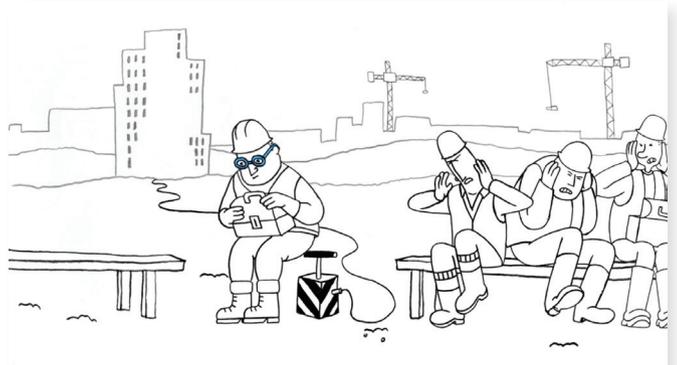
In our TV spots, we placed cartoon characters wearing bad glasses in funny, problematic situations. We had the characters wearing ugly glasses or glasses that didn't work well. In either case, they were wearing ‘bad glasses.’ The solution to getting both fashionable glasses and ones that help you see better is ‘good glasses’ from SVS Vision.

Our radio spots expanded on the creative concepts and provided our audience with numerous ‘positive side effects of wearing good glasses’ from SVS Vision. The spots take an edgy and humorous approach to how others might view the customer wearing ‘good glasses.’

SVS Vision began as an eyecare insurance provider in 1974. At the time, Ford Motor UAW members had to go to SVS Vision to get their glasses. Our campaign has changed the consumer impression of SVS Vision from a blue collar, industrial company to a fashionable retail company known for carrying the latest designer frames at affordable prices.

Our company, once known as being a place where customers *had* to go to get their glasses, has now transformed into a place where customers *want* to go to get their glasses. We accomplished all of this while growing our retail operations and without alienating our core customer base.”

Got bad glasses?®



FOR MOST DARING COMMUNITY OUTREACH, PHILANTHROPIC OR PATIENT EDUCATION PROGRAM

## STANTON OPTICAL

PALM SPRINGS, FLA.  
WWW.STANTONOPTICAL.COM  
OWNER: DANIEL STANTON



### SUBMISSION ESSAY...

“Although they are a relatively new company, Marcus and Daniel [Stanton], operating under the Stanton Optical retail brand, made the *Vision Monday* Top 50 U.S. Optical Retailers list in 2010 at no. 30 and in 2012 at no. 28.

Headquartered in Palm Springs, Fla., the eyeglass chain has over 30 stores throughout the nation with plans to open 10 to 15 new stores per year.

Stanton’s employees have taken part in many volunteer and race opportunities to benefit a variety of organizations and non-profit charities, including:

- Epilepsy Society of Kern County, Calif.
- Friends of Jonathan Dickinson State Park
- Lisa Boccard Breast Cancer Fund
- The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society
- Bright Horizons

Corporate giving [has included] sponsoring the company mud volleyball team at the 21st Annual Tournament for Epilepsy, corporate donation to the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society through the Team in Training program and one of the employees participating in the Dopey Challenge at the Disney Marathon.

The company’s core values have remained unchanged since the formation of the company in 2006 by CEO Daniel Stanton. Community involvement helps foster a stronger work environment by having employees take part in common goals. Stanton Optical supports the building of safer, stronger and better educated neighborhoods through enrichment of the communities where they live, work and play.”

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# The Shop It Like It's Hot Award

FOR MOST DARING STORE DESIGN OR RETAIL ENVIRONMENT

## THE SPECTRUM

REGINA, SASK., CANADA

WWW.THESPECTRUMEYECENTRE.COM

PARTNERS: BRYAN ROBERTSON, OD

RYAN HORNE



### SUBMISSION ESSAY...

“Our new 13,000 square foot world-class eye clinic and eyewear showroom features a unique blend of modern and industrial decor, along with the latest diagnostic equipment and independent eyewear selection. [Its] 30 foot ceilings, glass elevator, wet bar, brick fireplace, Pandomo wall, DIRT T custom wall system, polished concrete floors, European furniture, granite countertops, electric privacy glass and LED-lit pillars all contribute to an extraordinary patient experience from start to finish.

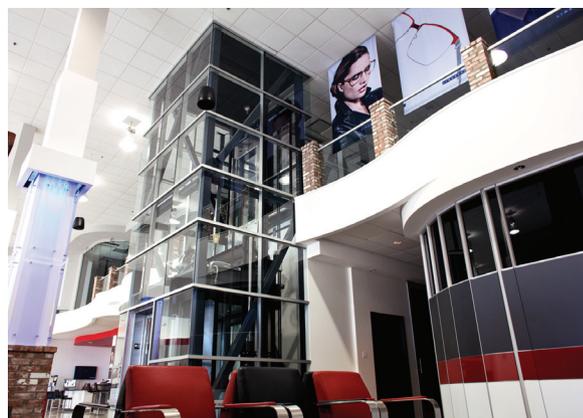
The eyewear showroom boasts a relaxing yet luxurious feel. Warm sounds from the JBL speakers above provide a calming sensation while patients are consulted in person at a curved granite table, an ultra-modern white sofa, or our luxury bar, where the gloves are donned and the precious pieces are presented with a nice beverage.

The minimalistic atmosphere keeps the look clean and modern. Re-claimed bricks from a mid-century brewery accent the bright colors for a warm feel. Large windows allow for natural light to showcase styles and colors more effectively.

A portion of eyewear is displayed on LED-lit white shelves, giving a taste of what is in store, while the rest is under glass-inlayed granite countertops with custom drawers, reducing any selection anxieties. We prefer to consult with each patient, offering frame suggestions, limiting the self-serve/browsing to a minimum—a much more personalized approach.

Featuring the latest in lens technologies has been a tremendous part of our DNA. Our 500 square foot on-site finishing laboratory is complete with dual islands, the Mr. Blue edging system and even a small kitchen.

Our goal is to provide the absolute best experience from entering the building, to the reception area, into the pre-test area, the exam rooms, and finally the eyewear showroom. We feel we have accomplished that very nicely.”



# THE "WE THE PEOPLE" READERS' VOTE AWARD

FOR MOST DARING RETAILER - WINNER

## SPECS AROUND TOWN

BLOOMINGTON, ILL.

WWW.SPECSAROUNDTOWN.COM

OWNER: JULIE KUBSCH



### SUBMISSION ESSAY...

“Our newest TV commercials are four- to 15-second spots that are rotated on local stations and cable. We have used clients in each of the spots and played off of Elton John, John Lennon, Buddy Holly, Audrey Hepburn, Barry White and a French/German theme. Our clients loved being ‘stars’ and we consistently hear people saying how much they enjoy the commercials.

We frequently get shoppers who ask if we have glasses like [a certain celebrity] wears, or if we know what [another celebrity] was wearing in their last movie. We have paired up eyewear that is representative of the highlighted celebrities.

In the Barry White segment, it is almost as if the frame is talking to the shopper. The John Lennon/Elton John/Buddy Holly segment features eyewear shapes that [those icons] wore and some vintage vinyl. We used a female voice with the Audrey Hepburn concept, and the French/German theme features French and German eyewear collections.

Another star of our commercials is the interior of our 1901 historic building. When people shop here, they feel as if they are shopping in a big city, enjoying our comfortable, modern, funky atmosphere and our eclectic eyewear collections.”

*More* →



# THE "WE THE PEOPLE" READERS' VOTE AWARD



FOR MOST DARING RETAILER - HONORABLE MENTION



## SELIMA OPTIQUE SOHO

NEW YORK, N.Y.  
SELIMAOPTIQUE.COM  
OWNER: SELIMA SALAUN



## THE EYE GALLERY

YPSILANTI, MICH.  
THEYEGALLERY.COM  
OWNER: ARNOLD BULOS, OD

## D.A.R.E. JUDGES

### KAREN GIBERSON, THE ACCESSORIES COUNCIL



Giberson has over 20 years of experience in marketing, merchandising and public/media relations, including stints at QVC and Macy's. She is the president of The Accessories Council where she is responsible for over 16 events annually, including the ACE Awards. Giberson is also a partner in Fred Siegel Partners. She executive produced a television show/product line "Avec Eric," featuring chef Eric Ripert on PBS, as well as a partner in Hunter & Moss, a line of environmentally friendly handbags. Additionally, she has consulted for Always In(Style), Crown Consumer Brands, Elyse Ryan Jewelry, HCI Direct/Sculptz, Miramax and Tracy Reese, among others.

### CLODAGH NORTON, EYESTYLIST



Norton is a British journalist who has worked in the optical sector for over 14 years. She is editorial director of *20/20 Europe* and co-founder of the *Eyestylist*, *The Fine Eyewear Design Review*, a new site dedicated to the most beautiful, high-quality sunglass and spectacle designs. Since 2008, she has also worked as a communications consultant specializing in consumer PR for eyewear companies.

### CYNTHIA SHAPIRO, EUROPA INTERNATIONAL



Shapiro is co-founder, CEO and creative director for Europa International and Cinzia Designs. She brings with her over 37 years of experience in the optical industry, and from the beginning has been directly responsible for overseeing all of Europa's marketing and advertising. Also chief among her many duties is overseeing product design and manufacturing. She carries with her a unique perspective of the eyewear industry shaped by her tireless research of style trends and her experience running a successful business within the fashion industry.

### DEIRDRE CARROLL, SENIOR EDITOR, VISION MONDAY



Carroll is senior editor of *Vision Monday* magazine, where she's covered frames, sunwear and fashion accessories (including products, marketing initiatives, companies and brand licenses) as well as retail buying and merchandising trends for the past seven years. She is also the creator and editor of *Style.Pages* in print and *Bold Face* and *High Visibility* on VisionMonday.com. Carroll is also the chief community officer for SightNation, a social network community site for eyecare industry professionals.

### CATHERINE WOLINSKI, ASSISTANT EDITOR, VISION MONDAY



Wolinski is *Vision Monday's* assistant editor and social media editor. For the past year, she has covered independent retail and professional associations for *Vision Monday* in print features such as *Local Diary*, *Trending* and *In/Store* and in web features on VisionMonday.com, along with managing *Vision Monday's* Twitter and Facebook social media properties. Additionally, Wolinski assists in web production of VMail e-newsletters and posts content for the eyecare industry social networking community, SightNation.

### MARGE AXELRAD, SR. VP/EDITORIAL DIRECTOR, JOBSON OPTICAL GROUP



A 25-year veteran in the optical industry, Axelrad is currently responsible for the overall editorial direction of *Vision Monday* including its print publication, VMail, its e-newsletters including CLICK, VisionMonday.com and special events including the *VM Global Leadership Summit*. Her focus is on general corporate and company news, industry developments and business trends for eyewear, lens and contact lens, retail and managed vision care companies. She is also the editorial liaison to Jobson Optical Research. Prior to her role at the Jobson Optical Group, Axelrad covered retail developments in the apparel, department store and home furnishings industries. ■