

#HerStory2021

Celebrating Optical Women Who Make a Difference



BY VM STAFF

As the pandemic continued to upend life in 2021, women, it seems, were bearing the brunt of extended responsibilities, both at home and in their work life. According to a recent Deloitte Global report, “Women @ Work: A Global Outlook,” heightened workloads and household responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic are driving deep dissatisfaction among many women in the workforce.

The report found that these increased responsibilities are having devastating effects on working women as 51 percent of those surveyed are less optimistic about their career prospects today. And on top of that, women surveyed reported a 35-point drop in mental health.

Apparently, the women we profiled in our 2021 Most Influential Women in Optical Report did not get the memo. While COVID-19 presented complex challenges for many women, our honorees persevered and in many cases thrived—their stories of achievement, innovation and sheer determination, as they faced personal and busi-

ness hurdles due to the pandemic, are nothing short of inspiring.

This edition will mark the 19th year of our Special Report. The VM editors had more than 220 nominees to choose from and we selected 49 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.

For this year’s Annual Report, VM considered women who are making a difference in the following five categories: **Executive Suite, Mentors, Rising Stars, Innovators and Above & Beyond**

We hope you enjoy their stories of success and fortitude as they navigated through the rough seas that were the hallmark of 2021.

To get a handle on what it was like to survive the challenges of the pandemic, as businesswomen, doctors, wives, mothers and co-workers, we asked our honorees how they had to change their business or professional tactics and if there were any positive developments because of these changes. Here’s what some of them had to say. →



“The pandemic forced us to embrace technology differently which allowed us to connect differently. Prior to the pandemic, our teammates across the country didn’t have the opportunity to interact or connect with each other. When we reopened following the early pandemic shutdown, we provided video conferencing equipment to all stores. It’s a much more personal way to connect for individual or regional meetings. For me personally, the pandemic offered an opportunity to really get to understand and connect with our workforce in a way I never would have had otherwise.”

— **Cindy Moen, Chief People Officer, Shopko Optical**



“So much of what I do now involves touching people’s hearts so it’s been challenging to do that all virtually. We’ve worked hard to create these special experiences via Zoom and Webex. For example, we’re striving to provide learning sessions that are extremely real and authentic, and in many areas, especially in the DEI space, we talk about really difficult topics and share a lot of ourselves ... and that’s just hard to do virtually.”

— **Jacqueline Grove, Senior Vice President, Talent Development; Culture; Philanthropy; Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, National Vision, Inc.**



“During the pandemic, we were all forced to find new ways of working. I spent a lot of time nurturing my network remotely to continue learning and sharing. This provided the opportunity to connect more deeply with people and learn more about them. I hope to continue building these connections even as we return to the new normal.”

— **Sandra Mohr, Dean of Academic Resources and Administration, New England College of Optometry**



“I think IOT was more prepared than many businesses coming into COVID. Most of our team is highly technical. We were already used to working virtually with coworkers on the other side of the Atlantic. Like many other companies, we moved to more virtual meetings and webinars. That felt very natural, like an extension of what we were already doing. There was one change that took me by surprise. It was a new ability and willingness, both by people and organizations, to really set priorities and filter out the noise.”

— **Tina Lahti, VP of Sales and Marketing, IOT**



“COVID cemented the fact that vision care is essential health care. By securing critical PPE early in the pandemic with help from our parent company and employing [safety protocols], Visionworks was able to stay open and provide services that kept patients from visiting emergency rooms and clinics overwhelmed with COVID patients. This focus on essential care and safety created a true sense of pride.”

— **Jacqueline DeChamps, Chief Retail Officer, Visionworks of America, Inc.** ■

Access to VM’s Most Influential Women in Optical Reports

To access an Alphabetical List of prior years’ honorees, read previous *Most Influential Women in Optical Reports* or to download a complete PDF of this year’s #HerStory2021 feature, go to the VM Reports category on [VisionMonday.com](https://www.visionmonday.com). ■



Above and Beyond

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

Kelly Asbra

VP OF PROGRAMS

Oregon Lions Sight & Hearing Foundation
Portland, Oregon

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Kelly has affected the lives of hundreds of women struggling for direction after serving lengthy prison terms and through her program, has provided thousands of pairs of new and recycled glasses for use in eye missions around the world.”



When Kelly Asbra started in the optical field in 2002, she developed a work-based education program at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility (CCCF), a women’s prison in Oregon. After reading about a similar program focused on the optical field, she reached out to one of their educators, Mike Garza. He helped her learn about the operations of their program, as well as the foundations of opticianry. From there, Asbra studied textbooks and took the ABO exam to become a certified optician.

In her program, the women prisoners spend a portion of their day recycling glasses from the Oregon Lions

Sight & Hearing Foundation, and part of the day studying the curriculum Asbra built to prepare them for taking the ABO and CPO or CPOA exams. “I feel that with the skills these women leave the program with they are able to restart their lives and make a better future for themselves and their families,” she said.

In 2014, Asbra became the VP of Programs for the Oregon Lions Sight & Hearing Foundation, overseeing all their optical, hearing and surgery programs. She helped start the Lions Eyeglass Assistance Program lab, which provides over 2,500 pairs of eyeglasses annually for people in Oregon. Her team also opened a retail shop, which has a staff made up of former students from the CCCF program. All its proceeds go back into their other charitable programs. Most recently, Asbra set up an internship program for women after completing the CCCF curriculum, which she hopes will continue to grow.

SHE SAYS... “My advice to women in optical would be to ask for help. Seek out people who can be your mentor. I find this field has so many people who want to help lift people up.”

Sherry J. Bass, OD

DISTINGUISHED TEACHING PROFESSOR

SUNY College of Optometry
New York, New York

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Dr. Bass has dedicated a lifetime to advancing the optometric profes-

sion in many areas, including research, teaching, and care of patients with complex issues. Her investigations have informed understanding and approaches to vision health and eyecare, particularly for people with retinal disorders.”



Dr. Sherry Bass has been a member of the SUNY College of Optometry faculty for 41 years, where she earned the rank of Distinguished Teaching Professor. Dr. Bass also works in the University Eye Center’s retina clinic and electrodiagnostic clinic and serves as the residency supervisor for the residency in ocular disease. One of her specialties is inherited eye diseases. “I have helped to train close to 100 residents. And I have examined thousands of patients throughout the years, helping them to see better and get the treatment they deserve,” she said.

In addition to her work at SUNY, and maintaining her own private practice, Dr. Bass has written over 150 articles and book chapters. She has presented lectures across the country and around the world. Dr. Bass is a Fellow of the American Academy of Optometry, a Fellow of the College of Optometrists in Vision

Development and a Diplomate of the American Board of Optometry. She has also been a member of the American Optometric Association for 43 years. In her career, Dr. Bass has helped to educate and train over 3,000 optometrists, and many more who have attended her lectures and read her publications.

SHE SAYS... “My primary focus is helping patients get the correct diagnosis. I have been taught that 95 percent of treatment is making the correct diagnosis. Doing so helps patients obtain the most appropriate treatment that will help them to maintain their vision.”

Michelle J. Hoff, OD, FAAO, ABOM, FNAO

CEO AND CO-FOUNDER

SightLine Ophthalmic Consulting LLC
Moraga, California

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She has mentored the future of optometry as an associate clinical professor and now helps established ECPs enhance patient care through training and continuing education.”

Dr. Michelle Hoff’s life was profoundly affected when she got her first pair of glasses at age four. In the late ’70s, when she expressed her career interest during an eye exam, the doctor gave her some great advice. He said, “Start in the front office and work your way back to see if you like the whole profession.”

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Above and Beyond

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



That's exactly what she did. When she was admitted to UC Berkeley School of Optometry, she was hired to instruct optometry students in the clinic. When she graduated, she accepted a faculty position to teach pre-clinic laboratory courses—and ended up instructing and inspiring optometry students for the past three decades.

"I hope that each one of my former students learned something

about ophthalmics that they use every day to help their patients have clear comfortable vision," she said.

As of June 2021, Dr. Hoff retired from teaching. But she said, "In many ways, I'm just getting started pursuing my passion for ophthalmic education."

In the Fall of 2020, she brought together two other like-minded industry professionals and formed SightLine Ophthalmic Consulting—a collaborative optical partnership focused on educating and inspiring optical and vision care professionals at all levels through articles, ABO seminars, national speaking engagements and training.

During Dr. Hoff's career, she also founded Mindful Eyes Foundation, a

not-for-profit organization that helps homeless and low-income adults in Alameda County.

SHE SAYS... "Seek out your passion. Practice with compassion and you will find your success at the end of the rainbow. I've done this my whole career and I have never felt like I've worked a day in my life."

Demetria Roberts, ABOC

SALES PLANNING SPECIALIST

Carl Zeiss Vision Inc.
Hebron, Kentucky

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Demetria provides services for our key customers enabling them to more easily sell our products, particularly through Rx Lab network. She also develops product roll-out plans, including training programs and sales tools."



Demetria Roberts got her start in the optical industry while still in college, working part-time as an optician at a Walmart Vision Center. She said she had no idea this part-time job would turn into her passion. Within two years, she had begun fabricating and

assembling eyeglasses as a lab technician before quickly taking on management positions.

In her role at Carl Zeiss Vision Inc., she is responsible for leading key sales planning projects by tracking deliverables and managing stakeholder concerns. This includes ensuring effective communication between customers and the rest of the sales team.

After more than 25 years in the industry, Roberts still finds inspiration in the ability to help people see better. She said the most rewarding aspect of her job is connecting with people in the field and hearing their ideas on how to make the industry better.

"The most valuable insight comes from the opticians who deal with patients daily. Helping people see clearly is the foundation of my love for optical and it's what encourages me to actively seek improvement in the industry."

She believes it is important to surround herself with women who she describes as "innovators and leaders in the optical industry. She said she still loves sharing new innovative technology with patients and discovering new ways to help people see better.

SHE SAYS... "Find other women in the field to connect with and stay connected with those women. A strong network will take you far and encourage you on those days when it gets hard. Please remember that you can accomplish anything you set your mind to." ■

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JULY-AUGUST 2021



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

Jacqueline DeChamps

CHIEF RETAIL OFFICER

Visionworks of America, Inc.
San Antonio, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Jackie is responsible for all retail operations for our +715 plus locations and over 4,000 employees. She is an amazing leader that has unlimited potential and conviction. She helps to pave the way for many other female leaders, both within and outside of the optical industry."



Jackie DeChamps joined Visionworks in October of 2018 as a member of the executive leadership team heading up HR and operations support groups, promoting organization-wide people focus until July 2020, when she took on the role of chief retail officer. Before Visionworks, she spent nearly 15 years with IKEA North America, eventually working her way up to COO, responsible for U.S. operations.

"I have spent my career working between human resources and operations roles. I genuinely believe that we accomplish our brand objectives when our people are engaged, nurtured, and empowered," she said.

In July 2020, she moved from a split

focus on operations and people to oversee the retail field, stores, and support center store operations team as her core responsibilities. "Today, I lead our retail business's overall planning and effectiveness to ensure we deliver sustainable results through the flawless execution of a simplified Visionworks in-store experience."

DeChamps said, "The Visionworks mission is to empower everyone to see the world they love in a surprisingly simple way. We are wildly focused on simplifying our operations to focus on patient care and a frictionless experience. This intersection between patient and associate satisfaction drives me every day. I strive to empower our talented associates to provide an excellent standard of care and truly be brand ambassadors."

SHE SAYS... "The optical industry is complex and takes years to gain proficiency, let alone to master. As someone that joined only a few years ago, I am still on that journey. It has been helpful to me to be curious, vulnerable, and open to ask lots of questions. Be open to share and bring your experiences, and it will create a rich tapestry of knowledge that will move the optical industry forward."

Johnna Dukes

OPTICIAN AND OWNER

Optique

Spirit Lake, Iowa

VICE PRESIDENT

Opticians Association of America

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "She is an invaluable member of the Optician's

Association of America's executive committee, helping to steer the organization through complex decision making."



Johnna Dukes discovered the optical industry at age 18. "I began working in a local clinic where I had the good fortune to work with a master optician who inspired me to consider opticianry, and I'm so glad he did," she recalled. "Opticianry has taken me on quite a journey. I've worked in private practice, and in retail settings, and for the last 11 years, I've owned and operated my own optical boutique."

Dukes is dedicated to advancing the profession of opticianry at both the state and national level. She is a former president of the Opticians Association of Iowa. As a current board member, she works to bring high-level education to the organization's members.

Currently, she serves as vice president of the Opticians Association of America, and is preparing for her term as president in 2022. She is active on many OAA committees and has helped revitalize the Opticians Guild of America, a sub-committee of the OAA. She was honored as the OAA's State Leader of The Year for 2020.

Dukes credits Shirley Earley, a past OAA president, with encouraging her

to get involved in the organization. She is inspired by current OAA president, Dibby Bartlett, whom she said has led with "grace and grit through all of the uncertainty of this last year due to the pandemic."

Dukes also writes on dispensing topics, and her articles have been featured in *20/20 Magazine*.

SHE SAYS... "Opticianry is a wonderful alchemy that beautifully blends math, optical physics, the ability to work with your hands, and fashion. I truly believe that I have the coolest job in the world."

Tina Farrell

VICE PRESIDENT OF OPTICAL OPERATIONS

Clear Sight Partners MSO
Oldsmar, Florida

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Tina has over 33 years in the industry and started as an optician, working her way up to the VP level. She has built valuable relationships across all areas, from front-office staff and the executive suite to manufacturers, suppliers and other partners. She is kind, knowledgeable, diligent and a great role model for other women in the industry."

Tina Farrell began her career in optical at age 20 while working as a tech for an optometrist in her hometown of Rockford, Ill. After college, she moved to a Pearle Vision Center and had her first exposure to the optical and lab side of the business. She subsequently had a leadership role at

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Jacqueline Grove

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT

Talent Development; Culture; Philanthropy; Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
National Vision Inc.
Duluth, Georgia

Sears Optical and began to learn the business side.

At Sears, she also was awarded Number One Club three times, earned the ABO and NCLE certifications, and moved into an area sales manager position. Her next move was into a role at Opti-Mart, which marked “the beginning of a 14-year journey with the Payne family to grow the Opti-Mart business.”

Currently, as VP of operations at Clear Sight Partners (CSP), she led the effort to integrate four recently acquired businesses into one cohesive group within the CSP portfolio. “I manage a total of 13 optical locations, where we have implemented operating strategies focused on sustaining profitable growth without losing the family-owned values that were central to their success to date,” she said.

Farrell has had several mentors during her career, including Kathy Hays and Rhonda Kratz from Sears Optical, and Ron Pierce, OD, of Pearle Vision.

SHE SAYS... “The largest impact on my career came from the entire Payne family, starting with Skip and Scott Payne who taught me that if you treat employees like family, they will treat patients like family which creates loyalty and trust, ultimately improving the business.”

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Jacqueline has helped bring our company together in many ways. She started as the SVP for our Eyeglass World brand and began programs to give back to not only our community, but the entire world. She saw the need for us to grow within and took the new role of talent development and most importantly the DEI/Culture sector. She has a unique way of bringing the best out of everyone she interacts with.”



Since August 2020, she has overseen the new NVI department bringing together training, culture, philanthropy, and diversity, equity and inclusion. “By having all these areas in one department, we’re able to build truly cohesive efforts to activate our mission throughout our internal culture,” she said.

Grove noted that “a pivotal mentorship came” when she made the decision to “come out” to her leadership coach Angie Wagner, and tell her that she was a lesbian. “Up to that point, I had never discussed my sexuality with anyone at work, but I decided it was time and I wanted to do it with someone I really trusted. This was a very scary and nervous moment, but I knew it had to be done because I wanted to bring my ‘whole self’ to work.”

SHE SAYS... “We’re trying to shape a more diverse and inclusive future for the optical industry by sponsoring scholarships and educational opportunities focused on supporting BIPOC students and students from under-represented communities.”

Wendy Hauteman

CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER

VSP Global
Rancho Cordova, California

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Thanks to Wendy’s incredible leadership and months of sustained work across all levels of the organization, including research and insights from VSP employees, network doctors, clients, and members, we arrived at our new purpose statement: ‘To empower human potential through sight.’”



Wendy Hauteman leads a marketing and communications team of more than 250 employees at VSP Global. She has used her knowledge and expertise to drive business growth for more than 20 years including marketing strategy and execution, corporate communications, media, branding, creative development, and public relations initiatives.

She believes mentors have played a significant role in her career development. “I have never been shy about seeking out mentors throughout my career, but also was fortunate to have more experienced professionals see potential in me and offer their advice along the way.”

Hauteman noted the pandemic has helped employees in her company develop strong bonds and work toward common company goals. “A greater level of empathy among employees was born out of this difficult time. Whether it was supervisor to employee, employee to employee, or anything in between, it was clear we were all in this together. Despite the challenges we all faced, we came together in order to serve our stakeholders in new and meaningful ways.”

Hauteman serves on the Dr. Pearle (Pearle Vision) Scholarship Board, the National Association of Vision Care Plans, and currently serves as a board member for the Accessories Council and the Sacramento chapter of the Salvation Army.

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

SHE SAYS... “Always look for ways to broaden your skills, and be mindful that the path to moving up in your career is not always linear and will likely include lateral moves. I said yes to many opportunities that at first glance did not appear to be advancing my career. But looking back, those roles helped me gain leadership skills, business acumen, and industry knowledge that made me a stronger marketer and leader.”

Cindy Metrose

SENIOR DIRECTOR, STRATEGIC ACCOUNTS AND DIGITAL BUSINESS

Carl Zeiss Meditec
Dublin, California

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “During all of her leadership roles, she has been a stable and driving force in the growth of our business throughout optometry.”



Cindy Metrose's success in the eyecare industry began 37 years ago, when she started as an intraocular lens salesperson for Precision Cosmet (J&J), before joining Humphrey Instruments (now Carl Zeiss Meditec) as a sales representative in 1987.

Since then, she's moved up the ranks in a series of leadership positions to arrive at her current role: leader of strategic accounts and digital business for

Carl Zeiss Meditec. Her team impacts eyecare by evaluating new business opportunities and finding creative solutions for customers. In fact, her team is so talented, they continue to break records year after year.

“Our team pushes each other to perpetually improve,” she said. “I'm driven to find the best in the individuals on my team, to nurture those strengths, and to create a high-performance team culture based on integrity, growth, problem-solving, trust and success. It thrills me when people I care about succeed.”

Metrose is a teacher and motivator with a calm spirit and goal-oriented focus. She has a special gift of helping others that's rarely found in today's business environment. Throughout her career, she has returned many of her own learnings to help others. This dedication to helping others learn and grow, apply wisdom from experience, build a cohesive team, and learn from mistakes is all part of what makes her a magnificent leader.

SHE SAYS... “I'm inspired by the innovation and devotion to customers that's the basis for Zeiss's culture. We work every day to make a difference in our customers' and their patients' lives.”

K-T Overbey

PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

OneSight
Mason, Ohio

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She is the definition of a servant leader and her influential passion for improv-

ing the lives of others is widely felt and admired in the optical field.”



With a degree in international politics from Princeton and an MBA from Northwestern University, K-T Overbey spent the majority of her professional career in the corporate world, with stints at Bain & Company and 15 years in marketing at Proctor & Gamble. But she made a deliberate choice to change her path to have a purpose-driven focus and took a new role to oversee learning networks for Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center.

She was familiar with OneSight and its activities but when she learned of a leadership opportunity there as the organization was being spun out to be its own separate entity with the support of founding sponsor, Luxottica, she became intrigued by the group's global reach, realizing that all of her skills and past experience would help her to make an impact.

Since her arrival at OneSight in 2018, the group has seen continued growth, developing 97 new permanent vision centers in nine countries that provide vision care access to 28 million people and providing vision care to 260,000 patients globally through charitable short-term vision clinics. Overbey drove the organization to hit two key milestones in her tenure—the transition of ownership to create truly sustainable

care in The Gambia and to achieve complete access to vision care for 100 percent of the country of Rwanda. Currently, OneSight is on track to provide 100 percent access to vision care in Zambia in 2022.

As the COVID-19 pandemic rocked the world, Overbey updated OneSight's training model, enabling the organization to still open 24 new permanent community-based vision centers in 2020 that provide local, affordable vision care access to 7.3 million people. In 2020, OneSight launched an Online Vision Check tool that has helped more than 23,000 people check their vision and receive recommended next steps for quality vision care.

SHE SAYS... “One of the key elements of optical is the element of service. Focus on the difference you're making for those you serve and on what's different among those with whom you serve. Pick out leaders, ask for introductions, guidance and support.”

Valerie Sheety-Pilon, OD

VICE PRESIDENT EYE CARE SOLUTIONS

VSP Global

Rancho Cordova, California

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She drives strategic initiatives to raise awareness about vision, eye health and its connection to overall wellness, while providing insight into medical advancements to benefit patient care.”

Offering 17+ years of experience as a

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



Doctor of Optometry, Dr. Valerie Sheety-Pilon has dedicated much of her career to addressing patients' visual and health-related needs. Today, as VP of Eye Care Solutions for VSP Global, "Dr. Val" (as she prefers to be called) advances strategic initiatives and represents eyecare providers' interests across the entire organization. She fosters collaboration between supply chain, Eyefinity, vision care, other parts of the organization, and the profession at large—ensuring that VSP's strategic focus aligns with the needs of practicing optometrists and members alike.

"The difference I have made and hope to continue, is being a champion of our profession," she said. "By providing a real-life perspective of the opportunities and challenges facing optometrists, I believe VSP is better prepared to address the needs of tomorrow."

Her participation in numerous committees across VSP ensures that the voice of the OD resonates throughout the organization. Her "voice of optometry" also extends beyond VSP's walls, as she serves as VSP's representative on the National Association of Vision Care Plans (NACVP) council.

As a female minority practitioner, Dr. Val is also instrumental in supporting VSP's diversity, inclusion, equality and belonging efforts. Additionally, she is a vital member of VSP's Global Innovation Center (GIC) that seeks to engage, fos-

ter and invest in novel innovations designed to transform the vision care space of the future.

SHE SAYS... "Seek out opportunities wherever they may arise and aim to learn something from every situation. It may not be what you envisioned, but there's no such thing as failure—only success and an opportunity to learn."

Sarah Throne

CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER
Keplr Vision
Bloomington, Illinois

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Sarah has been an integral part of Keplr Vision's rapid growth. Her leadership, process improvement skills, and general 'can do' attitude serve as the foundation of Keplr's business services division. On the journey from 31 clinics (2018) to over 240 clinics (H1 2021), Sarah has internally developed several key leadership teammates. Keplr Vision would not be where we are today without Sarah Throne."



Sarah Throne has used her more than 15 years of marketing and data analytics experience to drive business growth at Keplr Vision. Her diverse roles include overseeing operational support services

including marketing, planning and procurement, revenue cycle management, business intelligence and analytics, and digital services. Her drive and hard work helped propel her from marketing manager to chief information officer in less than 5 years.

She has used this knowledge to bring together the company and drive down costs for the organization. She noted one of her first projects was building an intranet hub, a project that now supports more than 200 clinics.

Thorne believes in using the knowledge she has gained in the industry to pass on to others, to help grow her team professionally and personally. She thinks leading by example, paired with being both a rebel and a rule follower is the best way to improve how a company does business. She says she has found success by being true to her word, being open and honest, and being consistently the first in and the last out of the office.

SHE SAYS... "Do not limit yourself—look for opportunities to improve even if it's outside your lane."

Gianna Venturi

CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER
Eyemart Express
Dallas, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Gianna ensures that Eyemart Express has relevant people-related programs, initiatives and policies in place that make it a great place to work."

As chief people leader for Eyemart Express, Gianna Venturi is all about watching people grow in their careers—and making sure they love the company



they work for. Before joining Eyemart, she spent 16 years in the consumer goods industry with Kimberly-Clark, followed by work in the retail/fashion industry for Coach. But today, she's happy to have landed in the optical field with Eyemart Express.

"The company and the culture appealed to me first; but the industry has such a strong sense of purpose that it was easy for me to be swept into the optical field and want to stay here for the rest of my career," she said.

Venturi is responsible for everything related to human resources and employee culture—including recruiting, employee relations, compensation and benefits, talent and internal communications. She firmly believes that if Eyemart associates are happy and engaged, then customers will benefit by receiving a friendly experience, as well.

In the past few years, Venturi has transformed Eyemart Express in numerous ways. She revolutionized the way Eyemart trains associates by introducing cutting-edge technology to enable micro-learning and personalized training—an effort that earned her the 2019 Retail Innovators Award from Retail Touchpoints. She also developed and launched a Leadership Academy to build a pipeline of leaders for stores; modernized Eyemart's recruiting processes; and introduced People Analytics and a leadership dashboard to help leaders man-

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age their teams with the support of facts, benchmarks and trends.

SHE SAYS... “I love being part of people reaching their full potential, getting stretched beyond what they thought they could do, and taking on their professional dreams.”

Stephanie Waugh

VICE PRESIDENT AND GLOBAL HEAD, OCULAR HEALTH

Alcon Vision Care
Fort Worth, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She’s passionate about creating a more holistic and equitable eyecare ecosystem for aging and emerging populations worldwide through innovative solutions, outreach programs and consumer education.”



Stephanie Waugh ensures that Alcon continually drives patients toward the right eyecare solutions and is constantly raising the bar on product efficacy.

As vice president and global head of the Alcon Ocular Health business, she manages a portfolio of leading consumer eyecare brands, including Systane, Pataday, Opti-Free and ClearCare. Her strategic leadership covers Alcon products in dry eye, allergy and contact lens care, including innovation strategy, portfolio optimization, new product devel-

opment and launch excellence to deliver above category growth.

One of her biggest career highlights at Alcon was the 2020 over-the-counter (OTC) switch of the Pataday brand right before the COVID-19 pandemic. She shepherded the launch from start to finish—navigating numerous obstacles to bring these Rx products to the OTC market, ensuring consumers can obtain Rx-strength relief without a prescription. The launch team grew to over 150 people and delivered a historic debut, beating the prior OTC switch record with just 17 days from FDA approval to store shelves.

“I try to ensure we focus on patients and their ability to access the best eyecare solutions for their condition,” she said. “Let’s keep raising the bar on product efficacy and clearly communicate the importance of great eyecare.”

Waugh’s next adventure began on Aug. 1. She’s moving to Singapore to lead the Alcon Vision Care business across Asia Pacific where she will oversee dynamic markets with a mix of businesses including contact lenses, consumer eyecare and pharmaceuticals.

SHE SAYS... “The power of new products helps change the dynamic for consumers and professionals as they seek new solutions for ocular health. I love creating momentum through innovation.”

Meg Weathers

VP OF STRATEGIC MARKETING, NORTH AMERICA

Hoya Vision Care
Dallas, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “After 10+ years of rapidly advancing roles

at Essilor of America, including a multi-year international assignment in Singapore, Meg took over the marketing department for Hoya Vision Care North America and is tasked with completely changing the go-to-market for Hoya Vision Care. Her influence and strategic decision making have completely shifted the way in which the marketing team works on promotions and product launches and has dramatically increased the perception of Hoya marketing both internal and external in the industry.”



Meg Weathers understands the impact the optical industry has on the lives of eyeglasses wearers. With each new career opportunity, she has learned the integral role eyesight plays in the human experience. She said she is proud to work for an industry that works so hard to educate around health issues that are having a significant impact on the quality of life for many patients. “I believe that the innovations and the products we bring to market can significantly benefit and enhance people’s everyday lives.”

Prior to joining the Hoya Vision Care team in October 2020, she worked for Essilor of America serving in various marketing and product branding roles. Her work took her around the world

including Southeast Asia where she worked to create a more cohesive marketing approach across seven markets that leveraged the strength of the company, but was also customized to the unique individualities of each market. She has also been involved in charitable projects that have allowed her to help those in need of eyecare.

“I’ve always been somewhat awed by how much people are willing to help and support others if they just ask and treat them with the kindness and respect they deserve.”

She has an undergraduate degree from Harvard University and an MBA in marketing from Southern Methodist University. Her current responsibility is to lead marketing strategy and development in the North American market for Hoya Vision Care. Her experiences have taught her to have faith in her capabilities and to not lose sight of her strengths. She believes these are what you can lean on while you grow your career and utilize help to manage your weaknesses.

SHE SAYS... “I’ve been very lucky in my career to work at some great organizations with passionate and intelligent peers that I’ve learned a lot from over the years. I’ve also been blessed with several direct managers who trusted me with new opportunities to grow into roles and learn new skill sets. I’ll always be thankful for their faith in my capabilities even when I questioned them myself.” ■

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Rose Britton

**SENIOR MANAGER,
INDUSTRY RELATIONS**
CooperVision
Victor, New York

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "During her time in professional, clinical and academic affairs, Rose Britton has helped build the company's reputation and relationships with eyecare professionals and industry partners in every way imaginable. She also helps drive market-share growth and expansion of the contact lens category ... through education, advocacy and commercial partnership."



Rose Britton will celebrate 19 years in the optical business in December, all of which have been with CooperVision in the professional affairs department. Originally hired as a clinical research associate to manage post-marketing clinical studies, Britton said she "stumbled on the position and started working out of the Lake Forest, Calif., office where Tom Bender, CEO at the time, was based. I say stumbled because I graduated with a bachelor's degree in biology thinking I would want to go to medical school."

She moved from clinical research associate to manager of clinical and professional affairs (2008), when she

was recognized as Business Professional of the Year. "I gave up the clinical work when Dr. Michele Andrews came on board, because she was truly on a mission to make the professional and academic areas grow and I wanted to help make it happen," she said. Britton is a member of the Optical Women's Association, and also part of the African-American Descent Employee Resource Group at CooperCompanies, where she co-chairs the planning and strategy committee.

SHE SAYS... "I love, love, love our professional affairs team and this industry. We have the most caring, supportive and humble group of individuals in this industry whose absolute ultimate goal is to help patients see every day. When I was pursuing my dream to be a doctor, never did I think about pursuing optometry. And now that I'm in the industry, specifically contact lenses, I am in awe of all the things we do to help patients and this industry."

Wallatta Delvaille

**EXPORT AND KEY ACCOUNTS
MANAGER**
WestGroupe
Toronto, Ontario

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Wally's vast knowledge of how our business works, from the inside and outside, makes her unique in our company and an asset for all departments. In a nutshell, Wally knows how to get things done. She is well respected and admired by the sales teams and all internal departments, and is constantly being called upon to participate in inter-department proj-

ects and problem solving discussions. In addition to the hard work she has put into advancing her own career, Wally has also been a mentor to numerous women within the WestGroupe customer service department."



Wallatta Delvaille fell into the optical industry while in college, when she took a customer service role at WestGroupe while completing her undergraduate degree. For her final project, Delvaille planned to assess WestGroupe from the lens of a consultant, unbeknownst to them. She found herself enamored—admiring the company's family values and recognition of each individual employee. So, Delvaille stayed, moving up within the company and becoming an integral part of WestGroupe's team and family.

Now responsible for WestGroupe's North American key accounts and international export division, Delvaille works across departments to find solutions that make workflow functional for all, both internally and externally. Delvaille leads with positivity and empathy in her work, supporting and motivating her team, whether they are together in person, or connecting now via Zoom and FaceTime.

SHE SAYS... "Growth can only come if you are open to change. The fear of the unknown can be intimidating,

however, your growth and strength can only be revealed if you challenge yourself. The results are immeasurable and inspiring for you and other women that may be watching. We are all influential—live your life with courage and compassion, you can't go wrong."

Victoria Dzurinko, OD, MBA, FAAO

**DIRECTOR OF PROFESSIONAL
RELATIONS**
MacuLogix
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Victoria is helping to develop and promote an improved standard of care for the detection and management of age-related macular degeneration."



At MacuLogix, Dr. Dzurinko nurtures professional relationships with optometric opinion leaders and manages MacuLogix's AMD Ambassadors, a group of 20 to 30 doctors who use the company's dark adaptation device and speak about it. She is their in-house expert on the science behind dark adaptation, reimbursement, practice workflow and all things optometric. She trains new team members and sales staff on the inner workings of an optometric practice.

She works with industry KOLs, publi-

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cations, reimbursement experts and workflow champions to figure out how to best incorporate dark adaptation testing as part of the standard AMD workup.

Dr. Dzurinko has worked in nearly every type of optometric practice. She became one of Alcon's top speakers on contact lenses before she joined MacuLogix in 2019 to become a leading expert in dark adaptation and age-related macular degeneration. "I am the liaison between our company and my colleagues," explained Dr. Dzurinko. "I help educate my colleagues on our science and its clinical applications.

"I have the privilege of meeting the most cutting-edge doctors in eyecare. I collaborate with our internal teams (sales, marketing, customer success) to continue our mission of preventing the blindness caused by AMD. I have been part of many projects here at MacuLogix which has allowed us to understand our customers' needs and create programs that will help them implement dark adaptation testing into their AMD standard of care and help patients maintain their eye health for years to come."

SHE SAYS... "Vision is our most important sense, and the eyes are not only the windows to our soul, but also the window to our overall health."

Lauren Fereday, OD

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

EssilorLuxottica
San Diego, California

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Lauren serves as professional development director, acting as the face of EssilorLuxottica and is responsible

for building strong relationships and partnerships to reinforce EssilorLuxottica's brand among critical customer and stakeholder groups. She executes the strategy behind the company's relationships and presence within specific U.S. regions, and partners with regional sales and strategic account regional counterparts to contribute to its overall growth."



Dr. Lauren Fereday began her career as an ophthalmic technician while pursuing her undergraduate degree at Loyola University New Orleans in 2010. She began her career with Essilor as an intern in Dallas, before taking on a part-time role with the company and working part-time for a private practice. She joined the company full time in 2018, and now takes a leading role in communication with optometry schools and state associations. She still enjoys seeing patients whenever she can, noting her chair-side role happened by accident.

"Honestly, I walked into an office with an eye infection and walked out with a job. Dr. Notaroberto asked me what I was in school for during undergrad and I said biology and that I wanted to go into some sort of medical field. He told me that he had a position open for a technician and it would be a great opportunity to explore optometry and ophthalmology."

Fereday feels it is important to bring a fresh perspective to the industry and education events are one of her favorite professional opportunities to help people learn new approaches to care. She suggests that industry members use every opportunity to network through events, clubs, and conferences. She says this has allowed her to build a network that makes her job easier and more enjoyable.

SHE SAYS... "I love how we are such a small but mighty community. We get to help people see and appreciate so much that the world has to offer. It is so great that EssilorLuxottica has employed optometrists so we can be a voice for other optometrists and actual patients."

Tine Graziosi

ENTERPRISE RESOURCE PLANNING APPLICATION SPECIALIST

ClearVision Optical
Hauppauge, New York

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Tine is valued for her amazing ability to always find a way to the desired solution for any problem. As a creative technologist, she is often sought out by our owners, David and Peter Friedfeld, for her thought leadership. Whether Tine takes on troubleshooting a system glitch or endeavors to build something new, she puts forth her whole energy to ensure there is a successful outcome."

Tine Graziosi joined ClearVision, and the optical business, in 2011, taking on the responsibility of supporting and



enhancing ClearVision's highly customized Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system, which helps run all aspects of the business. As ClearVision becomes more and more tech-forward, Graziosi expands her role, and her in-depth understanding of all aspects of the business process.

Graziosi is appreciative of ClearVision's smaller size, which allows her to work closely with the company's owners and leaders. Over the past 15 months, she and her colleagues have transitioned the business from being almost completely on-premises to a hybrid system, and helped launch ClearVision's successful PPE business. In particular, she worked to integrate the online PPE shop with the ERP system to seamlessly fulfill orders and provide reporting so leadership could make timely, informed decisions regarding PPE.

Over the past few months, Graziosi said she's seen herself and her team learn to make more deliberate decisions. Having previously worked in software consulting, office supply management and pet consumer goods, her varied background allows her to bring a unique perspective to the optical industry, and has allowed ClearVision to take advantage of the unique technological opportunities that have arisen due to the pandemic.

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SHE SAYS... “Things are changing faster than ever, so keep learning, and embrace any opportunity you are presented with the eager eye of a beginner.”

Essence Johnson, OD, FAAO, Dipl ABO

Southeast Dallas Health Center
Parkland Health and Hospital
System
Heartland, Texas
CHIEF VISIONARY OFFICER
Black EyeCare Perspective

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Inside and outside of the office, Dr. Johnson serves as a mentor, advocate and diversity champion, inspiring people in every phase of education to visualize their goals and reach their potential.”



Dr. Essence Johnson’s path to and through optometry has been distinguished by her own curiosity about science and vision care, her willingness to learn about new environments and a commitment to provide and advocate for service for patients of communities in need.

Since 2014, Dr. Johnson has been practicing at Parkland’s Southeast Dallas Health Center Community Outpa-

tient Clinic and Lew Sterrett Justice Center and is also a Faculty Associate at UT Southwestern. In 2020, she was Parkland Hospital’s DFWHC Physician of the Year nominee. A Regional IV Trustee for the National Optometric Association (NOA), she is passionate about diversity, equity and inclusion, receiving certificates from Cornell University and the University of South Florida Muma College of Business.

Dr. Johnson is also the Chief Visionary Officer of Black EyeCare Perspective and co-advisor to the Black EyeCare Perspective Pre-Optometry Club (BEP-POC) which is redefining the color of the eyecare industry one percent at a time by creating a pipeline for Black students into optometry. BEPOC now has a total of 80 members and 30 of these students will be entering optometry school in the fall (class of 2025). One of Dr. Johnson’s latest accolades was to be awarded by the NOA with its Dr. Edwin C. Marshall Emerging Leader Award.

She earned her B.S. in Biology from Prairie View A&M, followed by her B.S. in Vision Science and optometry degree from the Pennsylvania College of Optometry at Salus University and a residency in ocular disease at the University of Alabama, Birmingham. She credits her family, many friends and professional mentors for inspiring her to be a professional career woman, wife and mother.

SHE SAYS... “I’m happy to have found the platforms in optometry which enabled me to amplify my voice. You have to be the change you want to see.”

Leah Johnson, OD, FAAO, FSLs

DIRECTOR OF PROFESSIONAL AFFAIRS
CooperVision Specialty EyeCare,
Americas
Phoenix, Arizona

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Leah Johnson is quickly and seamlessly building a reputation as an exceptionally knowledgeable, trusted and well-respected voice in the specialty lens community. She is both relentless in her study and pursuit of knowledge around myopia management and other specialized conditions, and passionate about sharing information and clinical expertise for the benefit of ECPs and their patients around the world.”



Leah Johnson, who has been in the optical business for 15 years, is responsible for the development and implementation of clinical and educational programs supporting current and future eyecare practitioners across the U.S. and China for CooperVision Specialty EyeCare. This includes specialty contact lenses within the ortho-k portfolio and lenses for the irregular cornea. She leads a professional affairs team of 16 people.

Beginning as an optometry assistant

and optometry technician, she attended optometry school at the University of Houston and completed a year of training with a Fellowship in Cornea & Contact Lens. She has been published in peer-reviewed journals on orthokeratology, was part of the team gaining CE Mark approval (EU countries) for myopia control in Paragon CRT lenses, and is on the team driving development of customization options for Paragon CRT and Paragon CRT Dual Axis contact lenses.

Johnson also has spent extensive time in China (pre-COVID), which has the highest numbers of myopic children. “There I work collectively with eyecare professionals to bring a better understanding of myopia and selecting the best treatment options that enhance patient outcomes and care,” she said.

SHE SAYS... “I love patient care and my goal is to share with practitioners the wonders of specialty contact lenses—especially with ortho-k and scleral lenses—and how they can make a difference in their own patient’s lives.”

Allison Lancaster

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING
AEG Vision
Dallas, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Allison (Allie) is AEG’s director of marketing and manages both the day-to-day marketing programs (digital, web, TV, radio, print, website development) and the integration of marketing programs for each of the 50+ new practices that AEG acquires. AEG’s

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model is to keep the brand/business model intact—but to use better tools to get their message out.”



Allison Lancaster oversees the integration of new practices acquired by AEG Vision. In her role, she maintains core businesses by executing integrated marketing and promotional strategies. She began her optical career 10 years ago as a marketing intern for Crown Vision, quickly rising through the ranks. She was named marketing manager and then director of marketing when the company was acquired by AEG in 2017.

Having gone through the acquisition process herself, she understands the importance of brand legacy. “In partnership with our development teams, we have built proprietary systems to allow us to market to patients with targeted messaging while maintaining a practice’s legacy branding.” She said when AEG Vision acquires a practice, the goal is to maintain the legacy brand name and ultimately the DNA they have built-in to their communities.

She believes the fast pace of the optical industry should be a catalyst for learning. Lancaster thinks it is important to set clear goals for yourself and the organization and don’t be afraid to lean on your mentors for

help when needed.

During her time as an intern, she was exposed to many different areas of the business. Her favorite moments were her time spent with Kids Vision For Life in St. Louis, a charitable division bringing vision to children in need through local schools.

SHE SAYS... “That is where I learned that vision is so much more than sight; it can change lives. I will never forget how kids’ faces lit up when they could see the chalkboard and their classmates for the first time.”

Melissa Nichole Long

COATINGS LAB MANAGER

Eye-Kraft Optical
St. Cloud, Minnesota

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Melissa is Eye-Kraft’s coatings master and is instrumental in the lab’s budding but robust AR business.”



Melissa Long manages the entire coatings and treatments process at Eye-Kraft, including the scratch coating cell, AR process, tints, and outsourcing. She runs a six-person lens treatments team responsible for all coatings and treatments production.

Long first came to work for Eye-Kraft as a temporary staffer and quickly established herself not only as a hard worker, but as someone who truly cared about the lab and the success of her product. Eye-Kraft didn’t have AR vacuum deposition until 2017, and the lab tagged Long to operate the new equipment.

Since then, she has created all of the lab’s AR processes, engineered new coatings and established quality control processes. She is quickly becoming a thin films expert, managing complex equipment and processes with no formal education or training in the field.

Before starting in optical seven years ago, Long worked in the culinary industry. She sees a parallel with the two industries. “There’s a lot of multi-tasking and mathematics in both,” she observed, adding that both industries require precision and a high level of cleanliness.

“I have a passion for AR technology,” she said. Her quest for knowledge has motivated her to start a master’s degree in material science and instrumentation this fall at St. Cloud State University. Long is a member of National Academy of Opticianry and The Vision Council. Outside of optical she volunteers for the City of St. Cloud Parks and Recreation Department and coaches soccer for the middle school girls.

SHE SAYS... “I am inspired every day for success. There is always more to learn, goals to accomplish, more knowledge to apply. Teamwork divides the task and multiplies the success.”

Sathi Maiti, OD

OCULAR SURFACE DISEASE CLINICAL RESEARCH FELLOW, OPTOMETRIST

Periman Eye Institute,
Eye Eye, SEE Eyewear
Seattle, Washington

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She is always teaching and elevating others, and loves to share knowledge and humor. She writes and speaks on many topics related to optometry and is a rising star in the key opinion leader world.”



With seven years in the optical field, Dr. Sathi Maiti serves in three roles. She’s an ocular surface disease clinical research fellow at Periman Eye Institute (a dry eye specialty clinic); an associate optometrist at private practice Eye Eye; and a subleasing optometrist at Dr. Maiti’s Eyeballs and Stuff, located within SEE Eyewear.

She’s also a rising star in the optical field—bringing a fresh voice to optometry through modern channels. Her social media accounts have a large following and she writes many fun and relevant posts on optical-related content.

“When I first started practicing as a

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solo OD, I felt cut off from other ODs and I didn't really engage with the profession outside of my daily work," she said. "I wanted to share the eyeball stuff I loved with other like-minded people, so I started an Instagram account (@drmaidseyeballsandstuff) to connect with others in the eyecare world. I've made many connections with ECPs from around the world, and I hope my posts bring some joy, humor, interest and education to those who follow the account."

Dr. Maiti also serves on several associations and is a member of the Optometric Physicians of Washington's (OPW) diversity/inclusion/access task force, launched in 2020 to focus on anti-racism in optometry, promote diversity among ODs, and improve access to eyecare by underserved populations in Washington State.

SHE SAYS... "Many people in our industry are willing to share their advice and experience. Look for mentors and let people know what you want to do. You'll be surprised at what opportunities come your way."

Hayley Rakus

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

The Vision Council
Alexandria, Virginia

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Hayley shapes the reputation of The Vision Council among the industry members and also promotes the importance of the industry through press and PR outreach.

In a challenging year, Hayley has kept members updated and

engaged, and when appropriate, positioned our industry members as an essential part of comprehensive eyecare."



In her current role, Hayley Rakus is responsible for the strategic development and implementation of The Vision Council's consumer and trade media relations campaigns, including Vision Expo.

Rakus said, "It has certainly been a challenging year, but I'm proud of how we've been able to bring the community together through virtual events, from our virtual Executive Summit to two virtual All-Member Meetings. Coming off the heels of Vision Expo East 2021 in Orlando, we are so looking forward to a vibrant, impactful Vision Expo West 2021 in Las Vegas this September."

At the start of her career, Rakus honed her PR skills in the hospitality and travel world when she was based in New York City and handled public relations strategies for high-profile luxury lifestyle brands, from Rosewood Hotels & Resorts' portfolio of luxury properties to private jet company Sentient Jet.

She said, "I had two very demanding managers at my last PR agency job before joining The Vision Council who inspired me through their passion for and dedication to our clients. They

taught me the power of perseverance, smart communication and polished presentation."

Coming from such a completely different world in travel and hospitality, Rakus has been able to bring a fresh perspective to optical. "Also, having worked on the PR agency side, I think I bring useful insight to an 'in-house' marketing role," she said.

SHE SAYS... "Communication has never been more important than during the past year and a half. From communicating with our members to media, we have had to be creative, transforming typically in-person events to virtual and offering all-member virtual meetings to keep members informed."

Amy Russell

REGIONAL DIRECTOR EyeCare Partners Columbus, Ohio

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Amy leads a region of optometry offices in the states of Ohio, Michigan, Minnesota, and Texas. She is in charge of leading a team of eight district managers who each manage about 8-10 offices. Amy also is very involved in our acquisition and integration process—when we acquire a practice in her area, she helps to lead the practice through a smooth transition into ECP."

For 12 years, Amy Russell has been supporting the optical industry, currently serving more than 65 EyeCare Partners offices across five states as regional director, a role she is proud



to fill. "I have played a vital role in successfully integrating 28 optometry offices into EyeCare Partners operations over the last five years. Our rapid growth has enabled us to provide many career opportunities for our staff and I am most proud of the tenure, experience, and development of those I support."

She believes assembling a team that supports each other is the key to creating a workplace that is enjoyable and allows for personal growth and development. "I've taken a bit of an unconventional path which had me finishing my degree just a few months after my oldest son was born, working many years from home, raising five kids, and juggling too many schedules.

"When I shifted to a full-time job outside of the home, then to a corporate role, and most recently to a regional role that includes frequent travel, my husband has supported and encouraged me to continue doing what I enjoy, often reminding me of my own strengths when I doubt myself.

SHE SAYS... "Be honest with yourself about what you love to do and your skillset—if you aren't sure about your strengths/weaknesses, don't be afraid to ask a trusted colleague or supervisor. Don't back down from a challenge and don't compare yourself to those around you." ■

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Linda Blain

DIVISIONAL VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES, CANADA

Marchon Canada
Dorval, Quebec

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Linda has built up an incredible following of customers and sales executives who trust in her advice and support and are energized by her contagious passion for business. Through many years of experience, she is recognized as a team builder, but even more important, she treats her team members as part of her family.”



Linda Blain entered the optical industry 33 years ago, and joined Marchon Canada in 2001. Now, as vice president of sales for Canada, Blain doesn't see her job as selling frames—for her, it's about building relationships and offering a unique selling experience, with a laser focus on customer service. She takes true joy in helping her sales team grow as individuals, and in building connections that grow beyond business, blossoming into friendships too. Blain knows that the people she works alongside have put their trust in her—and that's something she says she deeply values and respects.

For Blain, COVID-19 has confirmed

just how important it is to be a strategic and unique business partner to Marchon Canada's customers. Her main priority throughout the pandemic has been to listen to customers' needs and support them however possible, all from a distance. She and her team developed new and improved working methods over the past year, growing closer together despite the physical distance.

SHE SAYS... “Build a solid network, engage with your contacts, ask questions and be open to learning new ideas throughout every stage of your career. You'd be surprised how much you can learn from a simple conversation. The eyewear industry is simply fascinating—indulge yourself in it and you will not regret making a career out of it.”

Robin Brush, ABO

TRAINING AND EDUCATION MANAGER

Safilo North America
Omaha, Nebraska and
Secaucus, New Jersey

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Robin has worked in optical for the last 26 years with a focus and purpose to educate and lead others to see their true potential... She was a beacon of shining light for Safilo customers, as well as the Safilo sales force, during the early months of the COVID shutdown by educating customers and reps alike how to put their best foot forward during their pandemic and make the most of the downtime... Robin is an incredible presenter and a true rock star at Safilo. To know her is to love her and to be inspired by her.”



In 1995, Robin Brush, ABO, joined the optical industry as a Walmart Vision Center manager. She eventually transitioned into private practice and then, after a guest speaker appearance at Safilo's national sales meeting in 2018, took on a full-time position at Safilo. In her current role, assumed in 2020, Brush trains Safilo employees internally, and travels to provide CE to Safilo customers across the U.S. and Canada.

Travel and connection with customers are integral to Brush's role, but COVID restrictions threw a wrench into everything. At the start of the pandemic, Safilo launched a series of educational webinars with Brush as the sole trainer—within two months, Brush created 62 webinars, reaching over 3,100 customers in 19 countries, and translated into three languages. Far reaching and impactful, Brush's impact has shaped optical for the better.

SHE SAYS... “This industry is full of possibilities for women. Become the best at what you're doing right now. Develop those leadership skills and take them with you to the next level and the next. Don't give up. I've dreamed of being where I am at this very minute for 15 years. I never gave up until I saw that dream come to fruition.”

Anna Dixon

DIRECTOR, MANAGED VISION CARE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

MyEyeDr.
Fairfax, Virginia

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “As director of business development and support, Anna leads a team of four and a department of 70 that supports the patient experience with the insurance claim process, a critical piece of the MyEyeDr. value proposition/promise to patients...

She has the ability to see the claims experience from the staff and the patient's point of view, and her focus is always on the patient experience.”



Anna Dixon has been in the optical industry for 14 years. She graduated with a Bachelor of Business Administration in Healthcare Management from Harding University and began working in the optical industry in 2007 for The Hour Glass and South East Eye Specialists where she eventually worked her way up to chief operating officer.

When The Hour Glass and South East Eye Specialists partnered with MyEyeDr. she joined the MyEyeDr. family in a regional operations role and served once again as the lead on the company's con-

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WOMEN WHO ARE TEAM BUILDERS AND DEVELOPERS OF TALENT

version to a new electronic medical records platform. “During that time, I had the privilege to share my experience by working with new offices and optometrists as they were going through the acquisition process. For the last five years, I have worked in the managed vision care space for MyEyeDr. focusing on building office support teams, training and development, and growth and expansion protocols.

“As the director of managed vision care business development and support, I help oversee many of the areas where we are growing and adopting new business to include helping facilitate onboarding our integrations with our managed care processes as well as helping lead our revenue integrity and patient access functions.

“I strive to uncover the real root cause

of the problems we are trying to solve. Understanding this helps create more holistic process driven solutions that provide efficient and structured processes to help make the chaos feel manageable.”

SHE SAYS... “Be extremely self-aware and know the value that you bring to the table. Discover what your strengths and weaknesses are and always align yourself with people who complement and fill gaps in your skill sets. Stay humble and grateful.”

Juanita Fisher

REGIONAL SALES MANAGER
Tura Eyewear
Portsmouth, Virginia

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Juanita has a stellar reputation for her profes-

sionalism and knowledge of our industry. Her experience has allowed her to mentor not only the sales professionals she directly manages but also help guide and assist her colleagues in management.”



Juanita Fisher has always been interested in the optical industry. “As a young child at age 3 I was diagnosed with Retina Blastoma secondary to glaucoma which resulted in me having to have my

right eye enucleated,” Fisher said. One thing she feels this industry gave her was the chance to share her experiences with others who might be going through similar struggles.

Her first job in the field came 27 years ago when she began working with Tura Eyewear. She later left Tura and worked at Marchon then Essilor Laboratories of America, before returning to Tura as a sales manager 11 years ago. Now, Fisher works as their regional sales manager for the Mid-Atlantic region and part of the Northeast, and she oversees a team of 15 sales representatives.

Fisher believes in the importance of working together and using each person’s strengths to benefit the group as a whole. She finds inspiration in the way that her team grows and in seeing

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RISING STAR



THE VISION COUNCIL and **VISION EXPO** congratulate **HAYLEY RAKUS** for being named one of VisionMonday’s Most Influential Women in Optical!



CONGRATS



WOMEN WHO ARE TEAM BUILDERS AND DEVELOPERS OF TALENT

the way their relationships with their customers grow. She noted that even during the COVID-19 pandemic, working together remained integral. They continued talking on the phone more and using Zoom calls to continue to train and solve problems together.

SHE SAYS... “One of my biggest strengths is building relationships and training. I think it is important to always keep current with training and find ways to partner with your customers. Training the customer takes you from just selling frames to being a consultant and taking ownership in seeing their practice grow.”

Lauren Harmon

**SENIOR DIRECTOR
PROFESSIONAL MARKETING,
EYE CARE, LUXOTTICA**
EssilorLuxottica
New York, New York

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She is a leader who shows great compassion for others. Lauren is passionate about the work she and her team does and pushes them to see their own potential and provides the path to obtain it. She sets professional goals for herself and her team to better themselves and the end result for the businesses taking care of our doctors, patients, and customers.”

Lauren Harmon found her place in the health care industry early in her career. One of her early roles including consumer marketing and advertising for Fortune 500 CPG and health care start-up companies.

Today, she is responsible for leading



a team that’s focused on talent acquisition and engagement of doctors of optometry across 2,000 retail optical locations including LensCrafters, LensCrafters at Macy’s, Target Optical, and Pearle Vision.

Harmon said the optical industry is exciting because there are so many big opportunities to solve problems like driving consumer awareness of the importance of an annual eye exam with an eye doctor as well as driving patient access to care for the underserved. She believes there is nothing like seeing the face of someone who can see well for the first time.

Harmon believes working for Luxottica has offered her many opportunities including having a part in making an impact against these efforts. She feels she has been blessed to work for and with so many incredibly talented, generous, and dynamic people who have believed in her and been instrumental in her personal and professional growth. As her time with the company has grown, so has her passion for eyecare. “I try to bring a little piece of each of them to my work every day. At the end of the day, it’s all about people. I’m grateful for my relationships.”

She says she is proud of the team she works with and hopes that both she and they have made a difference in people’s lives.

SHE SAYS... “Lead with what brings you passion and be open to how that passion can manifest itself in your work. Say yes to opportunities that challenge you outside of your core function—on the other side of it is where true growth lies. Be yourself and be good to those around you.”

Deidre T. Huff

**CLINICAL APPLICATIONS
SPECIALIST**
Luneau Technology
Bensenville, Illinois

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She inspires ECPs and practice owners to re-think what’s possible and maximize emerging technologies to elevate the patients’ eyecare experience.”



Deidre Huff began in optometry at age 15—working for an optometrist in Texas—and since then, she’s touched nearly every aspect of eyecare there is. Aside from becoming a Certified Ophthalmic Technician in 1993, she’s also worked in academia, private practice, genetic research and eye banking. She taught in the Duke Ophthalmic Technician program, serving as both a technician and clinic supervisor.

Since 2011, Huff has served the industry side, in both capital equipment and surgery. She left surgery to work with Luneau Technology, whose tech-

nology platform uses wavefront to analyze the eye and lenses in new ways.

“It challenges me in ways that are unique and very complementary to my previous experience,” she said. “Supporting wavefront technology has been a career highlight thus far.”

Huff works closely with ECPs to ensure their practices, technicians and staff have the most success when implementing advanced and integrated refraction and screening technologies. She’s dedicated to using her clinical understanding in anterior segment, cataract, retina, glaucoma and neuro-ophthalmology to ensure ECPs understand the clinical benefits of innovative technologies, and how to best implement them for excellent patient outcomes and practice growth.

“I’m inspired by helping practices succeed, and knowing that I’m having an impact on the quality of care patients receive. It has always been about the patients for me.”

SHE SAYS... “By being willing to work hard, think outside the box, face brutal travel schedules and always challenge the limitations of my fears, I’ve helped bring to market devices that affect patient outcomes and helped practices adopt technology that can really make a difference in patients’ lives.”

Jill Johnson

**VICE PRESIDENT,
HUMAN RESOURCES**
IDOC LLC
Norwalk, Connecticut

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Jill’s influence on IDOC, our culture, and our

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WOMEN WHO ARE TEAM BUILDERS AND DEVELOPERS OF TALENT

membership have been astounding during her tenure. Her signature achievement to date was leading the IDOC efforts through the darkest moments of the COVID-19 pandemic. During that time, the service provided to members, and all independent optometry, was exemplary and noted industry wide.”

Jill Johnson takes her role as a leader to heart. During the recent pandemic, she was called upon on numerous occasions to guide her team through uncertain and difficult times. She helped her team adapt to remote working while maintaining the highest level of service. She implemented key areas of focus for her team that not only reflected their professional lives but their personal ones too, ensuring



wellness initiatives for physical and mental well-being were implemented.

As a result, her team now continues to integrate these practices as life returns to normal.

“The experience forced us to think differently in how we allocate resources, how to harness the power of collective knowledge to innovate, and how to create and implement solutions for connecting and collaborating

in a virtual environment.”

Though she is new to the industry, joining in 2019, she quickly leveraged her more than 20 years of experience in HR roles within various industries to help enhance productivity and business growth at IDOC. Though she did not take a direct path to the optical industry, she believes her past experiences serve to help her find new ways to make the industry better.

SHE SAYS... “Throw away the idea that a career path is only linear. Career paths are dynamic and can move in many different directions. Regardless of the career path, build and adhere to a set of leadership principles. My own set of leadership principles keeps me grounded in how I show up as a leader.”

Tina Lahti

VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES AND MARKETING
IOT
Torrance, California

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Tina is recognized around the world as an authority on optics and provides non-biased and detailed information that the entire industry benefits from every day.”

Now in the third decade of her optical career, Tina Lahti has become known throughout the industry for her deep knowledge of optics and her considerable skill as a trainer and educator. She began working in her mid-teens at Vision World in Minnesota, where she

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Congratulations Dr. Dzurinko

for helping change the future of
AMD care and for being named one of
Vision Monday's Most Influential Women!

Dr. Dzurinko is leading the AMD revolution by urging her colleagues to embrace AdaptDx Pro® dark adaptation technology for the early detection and management of age-related macular degeneration, helping us end blindness caused by AMD.

maculogix
the AMD experts



VICTORIA DZURINKO, OD, MBA, FFAO
Director of Professional Relations, MacuLogix

**CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL
OF THIS YEAR'S HONOREES**



Melanie Mills

**SENIOR DIRECTOR,
DECISION SCIENCES**
Essilor of America
Dallas, Texas

received in-depth classroom training.

She moved into management with LensCrafters, and, after graduating with a degree in industrial and organizational psychology, went to work for Vision Ease as a training and education consultant, sales rep, and eventually national account manager. Lahti came to IOT in 2016 as director of national accounts. Since 2018 she has led the commercial team, developing technical articles, training programs and webinars for eyecare professionals.

“I work on everything from the big picture of helping to develop corporate strategy to the tiny detail of writing captions for social media posts,” she explained. “The most rewarding part of my job, however, is working with people. I get to share in the success of so many people working to achieve their goals. I love to see individuals and teams grow, develop, and get better.”

Lahti is a past president of the Minnesota Opticians Association, a contributing editor to *20/20 Magazine's* Pro to Pro section, an active member of The Vision Council and an ABO-approved general and technical speaker.

SHE SAYS... “I’ve always been amazed by how much of a community the U.S. optical industry is. To many of us who have been in optical for a long time, industry functions feel almost like family reunions. The way people in our business value, support, and take care of one another is inspiring.”

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She acts as a compass for our organization by fueling decision-making with data. The insights that come from Melanie’s team profoundly influence Essilor’s decisions, and as a market leader, these insights have a direct impact on shaping the industry as a whole.”



With more than 25 years of experience in research and analytics, Melanie Mills understands the power of actionable insights and data-driven decisions. For the past 13 years, she has applied those skills to the optical industry, where she currently heads up Essilor of America’s decision sciences department.

Her job entails designing and executing strategic market analyses and research projects, including segmentation, path to purchase, advertising and launching new products. This work results in actionable insights to help guide major business decisions and overall company growth.

“I’m inspired by my profession because we can truly make an impact by being the voice of customers and helping companies understand their

key wants and needs,” she said. “I’m inspired by the work that my team does at Essilor because of the company’s mission and how the insights we provide help Essilor improve lives by improving sight.”

Her team analyzes sales data by channel, product type, materials, correction, and demographics to inform Essilor’s strategies and validate its tactics. Her primary research includes awareness of the company’s brands, attitudes of customers, and the company’s reputation to develop critical insights to ensure that Essilor is meeting and exceeding the needs of customers.

SHE SAYS... “In the optical industry, I believe that you need to listen—to the ECPs, to consumers/patients and to people who have been in the industry; because I believe to truly succeed in this industry you have to understand it.”

Cindy Moen

CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER
Shopko Optical
Green Bay, Wisconsin

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “As chief people officer, Cindy Moen is focused on empowering our employees to achieve our mission, and together with them, creating a culture that attracts and inspires the most passionate, hard-working talent. Cindy has worked across the organization to transform our culture into a more diverse, inclusive environment where everyone can learn and thrive.”

Cindy Moen has worked with the Shopko Optical team for almost 15 years,



while exclusively serving optical for the last two years. “At Shopko, I have had the opportunity to grow my career within the human resources team, while also leading executive development programs in merchandising and field leadership,” she said.

Prior to HR, Moen worked in medical and retail, supporting patient accounts, training and system rollouts. She’s a member of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), and previously held leadership roles with youth sports organizations.

“It is interesting for me to reflect on how all these unique experiences have influenced me and have guided the way I seek to influence those who I am fortunate to serve today,” she said

Shopko Optical was founded in 2019 after operating for 40 years within Shopko Stores. Over the past two years, it has worked to build on that 40-year foundation of optical care, while establishing itself as a new company. “Talk about a fun job,” she said. Moen said she believes that “women tend to be their own worst critics, especially when they find themselves thinking they need to be something they’re not in order to achieve success. “My advice would be to be your awesome self,” she added.

SHE SAYS... “For me, the pandemic offered an opportunity to really get to understand and connect with our

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WOMEN WHO ARE TEAM BUILDERS AND DEVELOPERS OF TALENT

workforce in a way I never would have had otherwise. Everyone had a different twist and was affected by circumstances at and outside of their work at Shopko Optical. [We] worked tirelessly to handle each situation with kindness and to provide the most helpful information.”

Sandra Mohr, MA, MS, EdD

DEAN OF ACADEMIC RESOURCES AND ADMINISTRATION

New England
College of Optometry
Boston, Massachusetts

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “In her role as Dean of Academic Resources and Administration, Sandra sets up one-on-one exit interviews with

graduating optometry students to guide them on their next journey.

It is important that these students have a great mentor that is involved and is well connected in the optical community. She is also very involved with The Optical Women’s association as cohost of the OWA Talks podcast, one-minute inspiration writer, and as a committee member of Connection and Enrichment.”

Sandra Mohr has worked in higher education for 20+ years and has called the New England College of Optometry (NECO) home for the last five years. While at NECO, she created the Center for Academic and Professional Achievement that supports students from acceptance at the College through retirement.

She also developed the Center for



Educational Effectiveness, which is designed to support effective teaching and learning at NECO through continuous, rigorous assessment of the effectiveness of instructional programs. The Center places student learning at the center of its teaching, evaluation, and improvement efforts. As such, it promotes educational practices that value diversity and intentionally foster inclusive learning environments.

She said, “I am inspired at how the work we all do in the profession

changes the way that people see the world. Each of us, no matter what role we play within the industry, impacts the vision and sight of others across the world. It makes the work impactful and helps keep us moving forward during challenging times.

“I have the privilege of working with students during their career preparation. Watching students transform into Doctors of Optometry is very inspirational.”

SHE SAYS... “My advice to women in optical is to get involved with others in the profession. There are many organizations to build your support network and to learn. I encourage women to find ways to give back to the profession—not only will it help you expand your reach, it will positively impact you in new ways.” ■

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Congratulations

MELISSA LONG

VM 2021 Most Influential Women in Optical
RISING STAR CATEGORY

EYEKRAFT CELEBRATES ALL OF THE INSPIRING WOMEN RECOGNIZED THIS YEAR

We are especially proud of our teammate and friend, Melissa Long. Her journey and passion for this industry has been amazing to watch, and we can't wait to see what her future holds.

Eye-Kraft, an
independent
lab full of
rising stars





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

Beverly Bianes, OD

OPTOMETRIST, PARTNER OWNER

Pack & Bianes
Vision Care Optometry
Chula Vista, California

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She has been a practicing optometrist for 30 years and is currently director of Charitable Outreach for Total Vision where she was able to develop the Neighbors Helping Neighbors program that provides a free eye exam and glasses to a neighbor that has been significantly impacted by COVID-19...She uses all of her skills and resources to lift others.”



After being fitted for contact lenses in 8th grade, Dr. Beverly Bianes knew she wanted to become an optometrist. “This experience changed my life. I was a quiet Asian girl who sat in the front of the class because I was embarrassed to wear my glasses for fear of being teased. After being fitted for CLs, my confidence grew. Ever since then, I knew I wanted to work in a profession that allowed me the opportunity to have a positive impact on the lives of others.”

Upon graduating optometry school and moving back to San Diego, Dr. Bianes joined and became a board

member of the San Diego Optometric Society and served as director of professional affairs for five years. As a private practice practitioner in her home community for 30 years, Dr. Bianes has always felt an obligation to give back to the people that helped build her practice.

As the current director of Charitable Outreach for Total Vision, Dr. Bianes focused on the mission of reaching out to the community in need by creating the Neighbors Helping Neighbors program. “The program was designed to target those hurting in our local community. We asked our patients to nominate friends, family members, colleagues, or local businesses that were significantly impacted by COVID-19, to receive free exams and glasses.”

SHE SAYS... “No one succeeds alone. Find ‘advocates’ who do not judge, but assess where you are and where you want to be. They will help you understand that the challenges you face will stretch you and eventually make you grow. When you do succeed, remember to reach down and bring other women up with you.”

Karen Carrasquillo, OD, PhD, FAAO, FSLs, FBCLA

VICE PRESIDENT OF CLINICAL AND PROFESSIONAL AFFAIRS

BostonSight
Needham, Massachusetts

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She oversees innovation for Scleral, BostonSight’s first commercially available scleral lens.”



Raised in a family of educators, education has always been central to Karen Carrasquillo’s life. Her initial interest was in chemistry, and she earned a PhD in that field. But while doing post-doctoral studies at Mass Eye and Ear, Dr. Carrasquillo, who has been passionate about the eye and ocular physiology from a very early age, discovered the world of clinical ophthalmic research. That led to studies at the New England College of Optometry and a residency at BostonSight, a nonprofit eye health care organization and research center dedicated to saving sight and improving quality of life for patients.

“At the time, I didn’t know anything about scleral lenses, but I saw what these pieces of plastic could do to change people’s lives,” she recalled. Following her residency, she took a job at BostonSight, where she has immersed herself in scleral lens design, research and treatment for the past 15 years.

Today, she leads the BostonSight PROSE (Prosthetic Replacement of The Ocular Surface Ecosystem) Fellowship Program, training optometrists in the treatment, management, and prosthetic device design for patients with challenging ocular surface disease. She is the program chair and founder of Fit-Academy, an educational retreat for

cornea and contact lens residents.

Dr. Carrasquillo also oversees innovation for BostonSight Scleral, BostonSight’s first commercially available scleral lens. She has expanded education nationally and abroad, particularly in Latin America, Europe, and India. Dr. Carrasquillo holds two patents, has presented 58 seminars and posters, and has published two book chapters in ophthalmology.

SHE SAYS... “Support other women and connect with other like-minded women. Find ways to differentiate yourself. Find a niche, identify a passion and develop it. Don’t give up on your dreams. Go for it!”

Marissa Cundiff

VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING

Kenmark Eyewear
Los Angeles, California

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Marissa has brought us to another level as far as marketing, digital content and outreach, overall integration of new ideas and opportunities are concerned.”



It has been 18 years since Marissa Cundiff joined the optical industry as a product intern at Kenmark while in her final year of college. Her road has

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had many stops, taking her from an internship at Disney World post-graduation to Kenmark's vice president of marketing, working in the company's social media and communications departments along the way. Cundiff said taking on these varied roles helps her see the big picture, and understand her current work from the perspective of every department at Kenmark.

Over the years at Kenmark, Cundiff has spearheaded the company's growth in a few areas—most notably in suitability and charity work, as well as the launch of Paradigm and Kenmark's collaborations with Gemma Styles. These are the accomplishments she is most proud of, alongside the growth of Kenmark's digital presence and its 2017 rebranding, which rocketed the company to where it is today. Cundiff strives to constantly push herself, remain curious, and take inspiration from the world around her, helping her see where Kenmark can go, thrive and be different from the rest.

SHE SAYS... “Dig deep, do the work, stand out, and live in the grey area. Stay inspired and motivated and always be open to change so that you continue evolving. Continue to push yourself, take every opportunity to learn, and try new things in your role—this will make you stand out as an employee and as you grow will help your company stand out as well. It definitely pays to be different and go down new paths you may have not seen taken yet; luckily there is lots of opportunity and room for growth in the industry. Always go with your gut, it's always right.”

Trish Farley Olson

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING
ADO Practice Solutions
& DONE4YOU Marketing,
a Walman Company
Minneapolis, Minnesota

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “More than 20 years of marketing and team leadership experience led Trish Farley Olson to the role of director of marketing at ADO Practice Solutions, a Walman Company. She is responsible for the planning, development, and initiation of marketing strategies across the division including the development of the DONE4YOU marketing service within ADO.”



Trish Farley Olson's passion and innovation have led to an “optical return on investment” on marketing spends. She believes it is important to build a strong relationship with independent businesses, supporting their day-to-day needs and growth goals.

“As an optical professional, you want to focus on the end consumer's needs, and marketing is an area where we can be a partner. That partnership has worked well over the years and it's what keeps me motivated and excited about each day.”

Olson believes it is important for women to find opportunities to learn and collaborate to help grow their careers within the optical industry. She feels it is vital for women to be open to new ideas and test the waters. She has used this approach in both her professional career and her personal interests. She is currently a member of the Optical Woman's Association and served on the board of directors for Meals on Wheels.

SHE SAYS... “I believe that creating development opportunities and having open communication with team members has created a wonderful team dynamic and staff tenure. My favorite saying is ‘Do What You Do Better!’ Plus, loving what you do, helps.”

Melanie Frogozo, OD, FAOO, FSLs, Diplomate CLCS

**CHIEF OPTOMETRIST AND
DIRECTOR OF CLINICAL OPERATIONS**
Alamo Eye Care and Contact
Lens Institute of San Antonio
San Antonio, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She's made it her life mission to deliver superlative contact lens care...her commitment is evidenced by her many titles and accomplishments.”

It was during Dr. Melanie Frogozo's first years in practice that she became interested in advancing her knowledge in eye disease and specialty contact lenses. Since then, she has been mentored by some of the top leaders in the field of cornea and contact lenses;



and she's acquired an impressive list of accomplishments that make her truly innovative.

Aside from being the chief optometrist and director of clinical operations at Alamo Eye Care and Contact Lens Institute of San Antonio, she's a Diplomate in the Cornea, Contact Lens, and Refractive Technologies section of the American Academy of Optometry. This is among the profession's highest honors, which places her in a highly elite group of internationally recognized doctors who make contact lenses their practice.

Not surprisingly, her contact lens expertise is unmatched in the Texas Hill Country. Most of her patients have either damaged or diseased corneas that limit their visual potential, so her care is often life-altering.

“I'm inspired by the challenges of specialty and medically necessary contact lenses,” she said. “I love to restore comfort and vision to those with demanding visual needs, and I'm committed to serving the profession and educating the next generation of optometrists.”

To further elevate the role of optometrists and ensure doctors of optometry are at the forefront of eyecare, Dr. Frogozo serves in a variety of roles—advisory board member, council member, adjunct faculty member, contribut-

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

ing columnist, international lecturer, and key opinion leader.

SHE SAYS... “Women are the future of optometry. Follow your passion and carve out your unique niche with a focus on superlative patient care and customer satisfaction.”

Teresa Mason

VICE PRESIDENT, PRODUCT MERCHANDISING

Eyemart Express
Farmers Branch, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Teresa started working at Eyemart in our Sherman store over 25 years ago. She managed that store

for several years before she was personally asked by Eyemart Express founder Dr. Barnes to work in the home office and take over the merchandise function. For more than 20 years, Teresa has been evolving Eyemart Express’ frame offering based on customer demand, trends, optical advancements, and competition. She has been able to keep a 29-year-old retailer relevant and efficient when it comes to its main offering of frames and accessories.”

For nearly 30 years, Teresa Mason has helped transform the products at Eyemart, ensuring they are always fashionable and quality pieces. In fact, the optical industry has been a family pursuit for many years. “My



mother worked in the wholesale side of the optical business, and I helped out part-time while in school. I never moved away from the industry. I continued to work hard and grow through the years and that part-time job turned into a career.”

As VP of product marketing, Mason is responsible for the design and development of all frames and accessory selections for more than 230

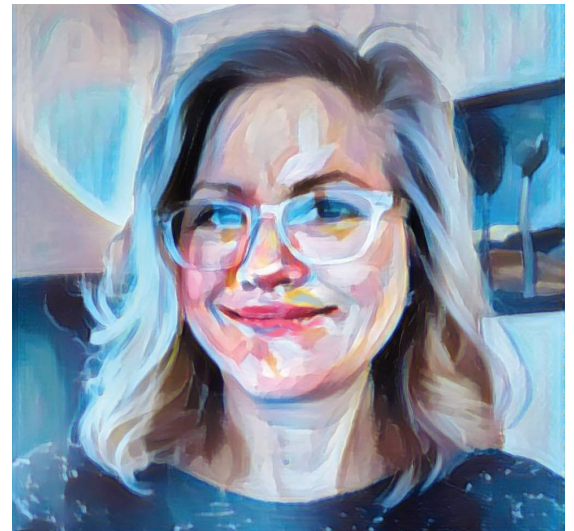
retail locations. “My leadership and participation in product design and development have produced many private label brands and the management of trending national brands has contributed to the company’s success and profitability.”

She believes her role is more than just assembling frame collections, but having a greater impact on both customer’s lives and her colleagues, which her mentor, Dr. Doug Barnes, founder of Eyemart shared with his staff. “He taught me to stay true to who we are but always be open and look for new innovations and ways to improve our selection and service. I have had many other mentors and advisors throughout my career including associates, colleagues, leaders,

More →

Our people make good things happen.

Congratulations to IDOC Human Resources VP Jill Johnson, winner of the 2021 Vision Monday Mentor Award. Her strength, commitment and professional leadership has helped IDOC develop a diverse and inclusive culture that celebrates the unique qualities of every employee, partner and member. And to all those honored this year as the Most Influential Women in Optical, our warmest congratulations.



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and our suppliers. All of whom were, and still are an essential part of my vast experience and success.”

SHE SAYS... “I am part of an organization that truly cares for customer needs and brings to market the best quality and fashionable eyewear at an affordable price along with exceptional service. Also, I contribute through mentoring, helping and encouraging others to grow in many facets of the optical business.”

Anila J. Nadkarni

**SENIOR DIRECTOR,
NORTH AMERICA WHOLESALE
STRATEGY**
Luxottica
New York, New York

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Her strategic initiatives support the growth of the organization and the industry by bringing to life innovation and solutions that build the long-term success of our customers and partners.”



When Anila Nadkarni was young, she needed glasses but was too embarrassed to wear them. Over the past eight years, her work at Luxottica has helped counter that challenge. When she first joined Luxottica, she was

impressed with their reputation of building strong brands and relationships in the fashion industry.

“I loved that we offer such a great variety of frames that people love to wear and that allow them to have the best vision,” she said.

After many years of experience in senior roles—including finance and brand marketing (serving as former director of Luxury brands)—she developed strong industry knowledge and brings an extraordinary analytical and strategic mindset to the table.

In her current role, Nadkarni is responsible for leading some of the most critical strategic projects for Luxottica Wholesale North America. In partnership with Luxottica’s sales leaders, she supports crafting Luxottica’s go-to-market approach and commercial strategy, driving initiatives such as EssilorLuxottica 360 and Luxottica Rewards, and shaping the company’s service approach in the field.

She also plays a critical role in implementing cutting-edge digital tools, driving their adoption, and evolving their features to continually adapt to market needs.

“I’m proud that our company not only offers frames that build confidence in patients who wear them, but also supports organizations like One-Sight, which provides access to vision care to those in need all over the world, making an impact in how people see and experience their potential,” she said.

SHE SAYS... “Success is not measured by accomplishments, it’s measured by how you get up when you fall.”

Charlene Nichols

CEO & FOUNDER
SellSMART Not Hard, Optical
Near ME & My Vision Show
Centereach, New York

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Charlene has designed and hosted My Vision Show, a virtual platform bringing optical people together virtually. Her forum, speakers, vendors and overall feel of the event offers up a warm and inviting experience.”



Charlene Nichols started in the optical field in 1996 at Nu-Chems Labs, which would later become known as Opti-Source. When OptiSource was acquired by Essilor, Nichols became one of their select territory consultants. In 2017, she began working at Stereo Optical as a global sales manager. From there, she decided to leave her corporate role and begin working in entrepreneurship.

Nichols said, “I felt independent awareness was key so I focused on building a digital marketing company, SellSMART Not Hard, which was designed to help eye doctors and opticians build websites with a purpose to educate their customers.” Through this, she saw the need for eyecare providers to take their eyewear stores online, so she created an online marketplace,

Optical Near ME. “We partnered with several couture frame designers, digital lens labs, virtual technology developers and several other independent consumables providers,” Nichols said.

These collaborations resulted in the idea of a virtual trade show where their network could be used by independent eyecare professionals. My Vision Show went live in early 2019 as a beta, with the full launch scheduled for March 2020. Of course, that is also when the COVID-19 pandemic was beginning. Nichols said, “Our solutions were already positioned to empower those that needed technology to bridge the gaps in accessibility and deliverability so it gave us an opportunity to truly put our technology to the test.”

Nichols and her team continue to develop Optical Near ME and My Vision Show, and she is working on new collaborations that will continue to support the independent eyecare community.

SHE SAYS... “Going to my first trade show was the final deal breaker. I would never look back—I was an optical professional and I was proud to associate myself with such great people.”

Karen Samuelson

**VP CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE,
NORTH AMERICA**
Hoya Vision Care
Lewisville, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Karen is an influential innovator because she understands the nature of customer service and the trends that will give Hoya a competitive advantage in the future.”

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



Karen Samuelson's career journey to the optical industry has been anything but linear. An industrial engineer by training, she spent her early career supporting missile production. She then spent two decades as a leader in the online travel industry—where she discovered her passion for customer service. And six years ago, she found her niche in the optical industry as

Hoya Vision Care's VP of customer experience for North America.

"This role and this industry are everything I love all in one place—manufacturing, technology, health care and customer service," she said. "It really is my unicorn job!"

In her role, Samuelson is responsible for the 125-person customer care organization across the U.S and Canada, and for all major channels (e.g., ECP, wholesale). Her major accomplishments fall into two categories.

The first is technology, which she expanded both internally and customer-facing. Internally, Samuelson's efforts increased visibility into service delivery and performance metrics. And externally, the new Hoya Hub self-service ecosystem gives custom-

ers real-time access to account and patient information without having to rely on customer service.

Her second transformation was in people development. Over six years, she has helped geographically dispersed teams become part of a united customer service organization with clear direction, expectations, oversight, and most importantly, a sense of belonging.

SHE SAYS... "The optical industry is vast, with wide-ranging opportunities. Pursue what moves your heart and inspires your spirit, and be willing to listen and learn. Bring your collaborative spirit and your individual perspective to all you do. And most of all, be unwilling to fade into the background."

Laura Walker

VICE PRESIDENT & BUSINESS UNIT HEAD, DIGITAL INNOVATION
Alcon
Fort Worth, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Laura focuses on the digitization of the patient journey and offers critical patient/practice connectivity, which was especially important during the pandemic-related shutdown. She is the driving force behind MARLO, a digital solution focused on keeping optometrists connected to their patients throughout the contact lens journey, while helping ECPs retain critical contact lens revenue within their practice."

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CONGRATULATIONS Juanita Fisher

on being recognized as one of
Vision Monday's 2021 MOST
INFLUENTIAL WOMEN in Optical
in the category of MENTORS!

We're glad you are part of our team!
Thank you for making a difference every
day in Tura's mission through your
dedication, attentiveness, and mentorship!

Tura applauds the achievements of all
of this year's Most Influential Women.





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



How does Laura Walker describe her role at Alcon? As an action-oriented digital leader driven to delight customers and exceed business expectations. Her journey into the optical world began as a child when her grandmother had cataract surgery. She says this event changed her perspective on the

world around her and of herself.

“The opportunity to make a difference in someone’s daily life and to positively impact their perception, as it did for my grandmother, led me to pursue a career in eyecare.”

After graduating with an MBA from Southern Methodist University and a Bachelor of Science from Indiana State University, she quickly parlayed her skills into a successful career with Alcon, helping launch and develop key programs including MARLO, a simple and convenient contact lens ordering experience that patients have come to expect from online retailers, offered within their eye doc-

tor’s practice.

Walker said her success has come from her ability to tap into the diverse experience, skills, and ideas from across her entire team, giving every associate, regardless of their position or level, a voice and allowing them to advocate for the needs of our customers and the team in their own way. She said her team’s passion, ideas, and commitment inspire her every day.

In her role, she tries to create opportunities for ECPs to stay connected and relevant throughout their patient’s eyecare journey, noting a customer-centric approach allows her

team to balance the needs of the optometrist and their practice against the desires of their patients to provide a unique digital solution that keeps them connected and relevant throughout the eyecare journey.

SHE SAYS... “Listen closely to your customers and those closest to the customer, as they will tell you what matters most. Those insights will unlock new opportunities. Then, ruthlessly prioritize the work, experiment to learn, and embrace failure. By doing so, you and your team will grow both personally and professionally while delivering delight to your customers.” ■

Congratulations Dr. Sandra Mohr

Dean of Academic Resources and Administration

For being honored as one of
VisionMonday 2021’s
Most Influential Women in Optical.

