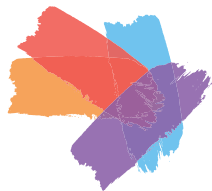


# Femmes Accompli

## 35 Stories of Achievement



VM 2011  
**Most Influential  
 Women**  
 in optical

NEW YORK—Conscientious. Dedicated. Passionate. Innovative. These words describe women who have made professional strides in many fields, including those that compose the vision care and optical arenas.

At *Vision Monday*, through the initiation of our “Most Influential Women in Optical” reports nine years ago, we’ve long been committed to recognizing the very diverse and distinct contributions made by women working in businesses which range from suppliers to retailers, from laboratories and the eyecare professions, from management to operations, from entrepreneurs to mentors.

Once again, we’re also gratified at the huge response we received from *VM*’s readers to our annual call for nominations. It’s always enlightening to learn about those women in the vision care community who have been singled out for recognition by their peers, colleagues and staffs.

In this the 9th year of *VM*’s signature Annual “Most Influential Women” report we once again segmented our nominees into four distinct categories that highlight the individual strengths of each of the women selected.

- **Executive Suite:** Candidates are women who hold positions such as president, VP, CEO, CFO, CMO, CIO or COO that guide their companies forward, inspire leadership among their teams and peers and achieve high performance.
- **Mentors:** Candidates are women who are team builders, developers of talent, who via example or education and training successfully influence others to learn and to grow in their business or professional acumen.
- **Rising Stars:** Candidates are women who are “up-and-comers” in their careers and

within their companies or arenas within the industry; sharp talents who are on their way toward higher levels of responsibility and influence.

- **Innovators:** Candidates are women who have initiated new product developments or special programs in the arena of marketing, technology or retail, who have spearheaded innovative business ideas or enterprises.

We hope you enjoy reading their profiles of accomplishment as *VM* shines the spotlight on women who make a difference in the dynamic realm of optical.

Please visit [www.visionmonday.com](http://www.visionmonday.com) to review an alphabetical listing of past years’ honorees and to read prior years’ Special Reports. ■

—The Editors

## Dori Carlson, OD

### President

American Optometric Association  
Heartland Eye Care  
Park River, N.D.

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“She was elected this year as the AOA’s first female president. She works hard to promote optometry both inside and outside the profession and puts special focus on encouraging optometry students.”



In the spotlight for her election at this year’s Optometry’s Meeting as the first woman president of the American Optometric Association, Dori Carlson, OD, hopes to make an impact for more than just her gender.

A graduate of Pacific University College of Optometry, Carlson practices in North Dakota with her husband, Mark Helgeson, OD, when she’s not traveling for the AOA. A special interest is working with optometry students: Carlson is nearly halfway through a “20/20 Tour” she initiated, visiting 20 optometry schools in the U.S. in 20 months to answer questions and cheer the students on for their choice of profession.

When talking with students and with established practitioners, Carlson urges them to “do something outside your comfort zone,” believing an eyecare professional will grow more as a person and as a clinician by taking some chances. She also encourages women in particular to become more active in optometry, declaring, “With the rise in numbers [of women ODs], there is also a call to action.”

**SHE SAYS...**“My personal philosophy is to leave optometry a little better than the way I found it. If all of us left life, and specifically optometry, a little better than we found it, we would continue to do great things for our profession and our patients.”

## Maureen Cavanagh

### President

Nassau Vision Group  
Northvale, N.J.

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“As head of Nassau Vision Group, Maureen has led her team to improved performance, top and bottom line, over the last 18 months. She has also been instrumental in growing talent within the organization and building a strong team around her.”



A lifelong athlete who once ran the New York and Boston Marathons the same year, Maureen Cavanagh now channels her competitive drive for Nassau Vision Group, one of Essilor of America’s most important business units. She oversees all business activities for lab services, stock lenses, contact lenses, the Shore Lens division and Oregon Optometric Group practice.

A 19-year industry veteran, Cavanagh worked for Johnson & Johnson’s Vistakon and Spectacle Lens divisions before joining Essilor in 2005. Since then, she has held various executive leadership positions before becoming president of Nassau Vision Group in December 2009. Cavanagh is a member of the Essilor of America Executive Committee which includes the senior officers of the Essilor of America organization. Being part of this team, Cavanagh is able to effectively influence the strategy and direction of the overall organization. She is also an active participant in the Essilor Global Women’s Network which focuses on developing women’s leadership within Essilor.

Cavanagh’s advice to the women she mentors: “Don’t try to act like a man! Be proud of being a woman and strive for individual authenticity.”

**SHE SAYS...**“Gaining confidence, creating momen-

tum, and having contagious enthusiasm is critical to being successful.”

## Yvonne Cooney

### Vice President/CFO

Midwest Vision Centers  
Sauk Rapids, Minn.

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“For over 20 years, Yvonne has helped guide Midwest Vision Centers. Many female staff members went on to higher positions because of her mentoring and she continues her work with the female businesswomen’s group in the area.”



Yvonne Cooney works for the same company that hired her 30 years ago. Though there was a 10-year break in between, Cooney said she was happy to come back to MVC because, upon returning to work with Myrel Neumann and Larry Pearson, she was able to transition “into a position that had not previously existed and gain the trust of the employees who were there from the beginning,” one where she influences everything from cash management and forecasting to assisting the CEO in decision-making.

But for Cooney, seniority is not the final word. “I meet people who have been around for a very long time and they’re reluctant to accept how the business has changed. We have to, if not change, at least be aware of and address new issues.”

She added, “We need to have all our employees behind us, understanding why we make decisions in order for us to be successful.”

**SHE SAYS...**“Whatever level, you have to have goals. Where do you want to be five years from now? People get caught up in day-to-day tasks, but if you don’t keep your eye on those long-term goals, time goes by very quickly and you’re no closer to accomplishing anything.”

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## Paula Dank

### Vice President, Underwriting

Davis Vision  
Plainview, N.Y.

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“Paula is a true inspiration. She is respected for her ability to mentor, motivate, foster teamwork and act as a strategic agent of change. Her team members appreciate her strong work ethic, commitment to quality and visionary approach.”



Paula Dank left a job in Manhattan because she wanted to work closer to home. But that hasn't stopped her from finding success. While the change allowed her to watch her children grow up, she also credits the move for her “new and challenging career.”

Since joining Davis Vision in 1998, Dank has worked on a wide variety of projects that allowed her to not only grow HVHC/DV's customer base but also its internal talent. “My goal as a manager is to provide people with the tools to problem-solve and find solutions to the questions at hand so we achieve the best results for our customers and ourselves,” Dank explained.

Describing herself as an enthusiastic person, Dank said she is constantly challenged by coworkers to constantly look for ways to change the processes or do something better. “I see us continuing to improve and getting even better at delivering benefits. We are definitely working toward excellence all the time.”

**SHE SAYS...**“There's no question that there are women in top executive positions in managed vision care organizations. The glass ceilings of the past are being broken on holding high level positions. I hope that is true for salaries as well.”

## Sue Ann Healey

### President

MyEyeDr.  
Vienna, Va.

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“Watching her success makes one think dreams can come true. She wanted to start her own retail chain, and in the last 10 years MyEyeDr. has grown to nearly 40 locations.”



As president and co-founder of MyEyeDr., Healey runs the day-to-day operations, overseeing every facet of the company's 37 retail offices and managing a staff of 350. Healey describes the operation as “a group of eyecare offices brought together by a business management company.”

Before joining MyEyeDr. in 2001, she was director of managed vision care for Hour Eyes and Eye Care Centers of America. Her career in optical spans some 25 years and she considers herself “fortunate to have learned a lot with ECCA— it gave me the insight to do things the right way at MyEyeDr.”

Healey, along with CEO and long-time co-worker Dr. Robert Samit, never loses sight of the fact that “our most valuable resource is our great employees.” To that end, she spends one day a week visiting the company's various locations throughout the Virginia, D.C. and Maryland area “keeping a finger on the pulse of the company along with an eye on the horizon to figure out where we need to be. Continuing to thrive in this unpredictable economy means focusing on the details and managing our growth.”

**SHE SAYS...**“A company's character is known by the people it keeps.”— John Ruskin “This very succinctly conveys my total commitment to customer service as well as my leadership goals to

treat all our employees with respect and dignity, giving them the tools they need to succeed.”

## Janet L. Johnson

### Director of Acuitas Product (U.S., Canada)

Ocuco  
El Paso, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“She has trained, taught and guided thousands of people in the use of computer software in the optical field. She has helped develop systems to ease the transition from paper offices to computerized optical outlets, and is a real visionary in the field.”



Although she is known as an optical software specialist, Johnson started out as an optician in the mid-'80s, working at Vogue Optical, a retail chain in her native Canada. When the

company decided to purchase point-of-sale software from C.C. Systems, Johnson managed the implementation.

Her knowledge of retail operations and her insights into the needs of customers led to a succession of jobs in the software business, including retail software manager at C.C. Systems, product manager at Eyefinity/OfficeMate and product manager at EMRlogic Systems.

Last year, she was recruited by Ocuco to manage the functional specifications for U.S. and Canadian users of Acuitas, a POS/EMR software product for retail, front office and refracting. “When a client takes on your software, there's a big learning curve for them, so I become a very close partner with clients. I like to troubleshoot and resolve problems, and I have good intuition and determination. It's fun.”

Johnson's husband, Gordon Bishop, is also in the optical business, and she credits him as being her “sounding board.”

# EXECUTIVE SUITE

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**SHE SAYS...**“I want the software to be working for the client, not the client working for the software.”

## Caroline MacIsaac

### Former Registrar and CEO

College of Opticians

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...**“Caroline MacIsaac is one of those rare leaders that can inspire individuals to believe in themselves and achieve what they once thought was impossible. She has had greater impact on educational and professional standards for opticians in North America than any one person in recent history.”



Caroline MacIsaac’s mom was a sales rep in the Canadian optical industry for 30 years. “I grew up at optical conventions,” MacIsaac said. Her mother encouraged her to go to school and become an optician. “My mother was completely supportive then and now of the work I do,” said MacIsaac.

Until last month, MacIsaac was the Registrar and CEO of the College of Opticians of Ontario, the regulatory body for opticians in Ontario, Canada. Her responsibilities included strategic planning, regulation, collaborative and cross-jurisdictional project management.

MacIsaac is the current past president of the Council on Licensure, Enforcement and Regulation (CLEAR), after serving in the executive

office for two previous years as president-elect and president. An active participant in national opticianry issues, MacIsaac works closely with the Opticians Council of Canada (OCC) in the development of national best practices, the building and fostering of partnerships with key stakeholder groups, a national branding and public awareness campaign and the identification of emerging trends in vision care globally.

**SHE SAYS...**“I believe that finding the right people—those who have the skills, knowledge, judgment and integrity to get the job done, and done well—is critical. When people are encouraged, motivated, passionate, and having fun, the product of that positive energy is incredible.”

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## Nanette Michaels

### Vice President

Henry Ford OptimEyes  
 Madison Heights, Mich.

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“Nanette has been the driving force in the remarkable success of OptimEyes that has grown substantially in the face of difficult economic times in metro Detroit. She refuses to participate in the recession.”



It's not every day one meets an employer like Nanette Michaels, a woman entirely focused on making sure her employees are satisfied, engaged and fulfilled. “I can identify strengths in other people and provide them with the opportunity to be the best that they can be,” Michaels said, adding that she doesn't need credit. “I just want to get it done.”

Entering the optical field in 1981 after a career with Gap, Michaels credits her success to surrounding herself with people who excel where she doesn't. She explained, “It's very important to me that the individuals who join Henry Ford OptimEyes have a real career. I look for people who can fit into our culture and who can help build our culture.”

That culture today includes a staff that, according to last year's Gallup survey, has a 25 to 1 rate of engagement—Michaels' proudest achievement. “I'm so wildly proud that we've been able to build a team of highly engaged employees who really do drive this organization,” she said.

**SHE SAYS...**“We're the ones they talk about at dinner. Our teammates absolutely depend on us to guide them, make them feel influential, empowered, valued. We want our staff to feel that they make a difference and help guide the direction of this company.”

## Audrey Reed

### Executive Director

Essilor Vision Foundation  
 Dallas, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“We in the optical community are fortunate to have benefited from the dedication Audrey Reed has given to her business and charitable efforts. As the first Executive Director of the Essilor Vision Foundation (EVF) the world is a better place due to her tireless efforts to provide vision care for those most in need.”



Audrey Reed has never been afraid to try something new. Starting out as an ER nurse in the Air Force in the '60s, she began her optical career in 1970 during her last two years of active duty. She worked for the next 28 years in retail operations for four different major optical companies and then joined Essilor 14 years ago.

Throughout her 42-year career she has worn many hats, but it was her business, operations and marketing acumen that prepared Reed to take on one of her most valuable roles four years ago as director of the EVF where she handles the day-to-day operations and financial affairs of the nonprofit. “As we continue to expand, I will be moving more into a field operations role to help grow our Adopt-A-School program. To date, our team has screened over 50,000 children and provided eyeglasses to over 10,000 who otherwise would have not been able to afford them.”

Reed, a founding board member and secretary/treasurer for the OWA for five years, was a regional finalist for the Ernest & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award last year.

**SHE SAYS...**“I hope I serve as a mentor to help other women understand the importance of vol-

unteering. Have a passion for life, stay true to yourself, trust your instinct and don't let anyone tell you that it can't be done.”

## Tina M. Schott

### President

Schott Management Group, LLC  
 Herndon, Va.

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“Tina Schott has 20 plus years experience in the optical industry and she currently owns her own consulting business facilitating COPE approvals for opticians. She's always willing to help individuals and organizations and with her knowledge of the ophthalmic industry, she is our answer-girl!”



Tina Schott was always interested in a career in health care because she liked the idea of helping people achieve better health. She answered an ad for the Opticians Association of America (OAA) and the rest, as they say, is history. She spent 14 years with the Association, working her way up to assistant executive director. She left the OAA to open her own management company to serve the optical industry and prides herself on being “keenly aware of the difference between opticians, optometrists and ophthalmologists and respect each discipline's scope of practice.”

Schott Management Group was launched with the Contact Lens Society of America (CLSA) and its educational foundation on board as clients and today Schott continues to strengthen that tie as executive director for CLSA. Some of her other corporate clients in the optical industry include Alcon Laboratories, CIBA Vision and Wal-Mart Stores.

In addition to being a member of the Optical

# EXECUTIVE SUITE

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Women's Association, she has served on numerous committees throughout her career including the Contact Lens Institute's Marketing Committee and is currently part of the Development Committee for the Foundation for Eye Health Awareness.

Schott's major career milestones include the creation of the CLSA University, an online learning center for contact lens education and continuing education certificates; being on the ground floor of the creation of the Contact Lens and EyeCare Symposium and the recent launch of an optical website for online learning known as optce.com.

**SHE SAYS...**"My advice for other women who are trying to have a career in the optical industry? Be tough, stay unemotional, and be comfortable in your own skin."

## Diane Souza

### CEO

United Healthcare Specialty Benefits  
Minnetonka, Minn.

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...**"Diane has championed many vision products that have increased productivity, improved efficiencies, and increased sales. Diane is valued in the organization in that she inspires us with her leadership and her positive can-do attitude."



Diane Souza has been in the insurance industry for the past 17 years, spending the last four years as the CEO and COO of Specialty Benefits for UnitedHealthcare. Souza oversees and directs the

ancillary group and voluntary insurance business that serves over 75,000 employers and 23 million members. She previously held senior leadership positions in health care and financial services.

Her background includes operations, systems, finance, customer service, and mergers & acquisitions. "I believe to be successful as a leader you must create a united culture, characterized by a clear vision, understood by the organization, which engages a team, to deliver on those values, beliefs and behaviors," said Souza. Her leadership style would be described as approachable and engaging. She spends over 40 weeks a year traveling across the country to meet with her team, brokers and key partners to build relationships. "I am inspired by the talented and innovative people that I have the privilege of working with each day."

**SHE SAYS...**"I love my job because of the people I work with, the ability to make a difference in the lives of the people we serve, and the opportunities

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and challenges of growing a \$2 billion business during a time of significant change in our industry.”

## Vicky Sheppard

### Contact Lens Manager

Kaiser Permanente of Southern California  
Los Angeles, Calif.

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“Her winning way with people and vast knowledge of the industry makes her influential in the optical community.”



An acknowledged contact lens expert, Sheppard manages contact lens programs at Kaiser Permanente’s 28 clinics in southern California. She is also the current president of the Contact Lens Society of America and recently concluded a term as a member of the National Contact Lens Examiners (NCLE) board of directors.

Sheppard started her career 30 years ago, working as an optician at the Minneapolis-based retail chain Benson Optical where she became certified as a contact lens fitter. She then moved to Park Nicollete Medical Center where she became involved with pediatric ophthalmology, an area of practice she particularly enjoys. After relocating to California she worked for a pediatric ophthalmologist specializing in contact lenses before joining Kaiser Permanente eight years ago.

Although her role is administrative, she still does hands-on work, often troubleshooting hard to fit patients. “A lot has changed in the field,” she observed. “The average age of wearers was 18 when I started; now it’s eight to ten years old. My goal is to make it healthier and less costly for patients to wear contacts so they can be compliant.”

**SHE SAYS...**“I get excited about people wearing contact lenses. We get to help someone be able to see, or change their eye color or help someone with a scarred eye look normal. You see how their lives are changed. It’s a good feeling.”

## Jackie Zelman

### Executive Vice President

Revolution Eyewear  
Simi Valley, Calif.

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“Jackie is part-owner of the company and oversees all non-sales aspects of the organization. She’s a diplomatic leader, able to handle sensitive situations, in the most professional way.”



Despite not starting her career in optical, Zelman always had a passion for eyewear. “Even before I met my husband Gary [Martin], I owned Laura Biagiotti, Gucci and Dior sun-

glasses. Plus, my husband’s enthusiasm for the optical industry was quite infectious.”

So infectious that in 1995 Zelman joined her husband and father at Revolution Eyewear, which the two of them had founded in Zelman’s father’s garage in 1993. She now controls the overall operations of the company and oversees all customer service departments.

Zelman works closely with all her employees to ensure that the environment at Revolution is one that fosters fun. “I really enjoy making the environment for my employees a very fun place to be. I feel if the environment is fun, employees want to stay.”

It is a philosophy that has paid off for the company. In 1999, they were awarded Small Business of the Year by the Bank of America and The L.A. Times. From 2001 to 2006, Cole National presented them with several awards from Pearle Vision, including Rookie Frame Vendor of the Year and Vendor of the Year, and in 2007, they were named one of the Top 25 Family Owned Businesses in the San Fernando Valley.

**SHE SAYS...**“I am a good leader. I think that being a good leader requires confident action, along with fast and clear decision making. Stay edgy if you do enter our industry and keep moving because everything goes really fast.”

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## Laura Bush

### Operations Manager

Encore Optics

South Windsor, Conn.

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“Laura manages by example and is involved in all facets of operations from customer service to inventory to writing and implementing operational procedures.”



Bush joined the optical industry thanks to a newspaper ad for an office position at QSA Optical 21 years ago. She advanced to inventory manager and from there to a position as office manager at Hoya. She left Hoya in 2003 to join Paul Zito at his newly founded Encore Optics.

As Encore's operations manager, she oversees all aspects of production, hiring and training of employees, managing the lab's processing system, regular management meetings, new production integration and production flow. “I like the challenge, whether it is solving a problem, streamlining production, or teaching our employees. I credit my success to Paul Zito for seeing my potential and my partner Deb for all her support.”

Bush's advice is for women to keep their head up, be proud of who they are and do their best in everything. “What's unique about the optical industry is that there isn't a position that a woman couldn't hold.”

Bush, herself, loves her job. “Being able to resolve a problem, whether it is an upset account, a difficult Rx/frame combination or a machine that is down, gives me a sense of satisfaction. I try to plan ahead and then confront a challenge head on. I like the change and if you can't handle change you will be left behind.”

**SHE SAYS...**“My personal philosophy is pretty straightforward— ‘Teach, not Tell.’ If you take the

time to teach your employees instead of just rushing through your answers, your employees will continue to grow and develop their own skills and you will also earn their respect.”

## Stephanie Campbell

### Managing Director

Foundation for Eye Health Awareness

Alexandria, Va.

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“She has been instrumental in setting up the Foundation as a successful not-for-profit entity with a strong public health message concerning the importance of yearly, comprehensive eye exams for better eye health.”



Armed with a masters degree in public health, Campbell entered the workforce managing a county government wellness program to over 4,000 employees. “That's where I provided education on a variety of health issues and realized I would like to focus on one cause.” She got her wish working as a marketing manager with the Vision Council. Following the 2009 Eye Health Summit, the Board voted to put the Check Yearly program on hold to see if they could start something bigger and better. The Foundation for Eye Health Awareness was formed in October 2009, and Campbell became the organization's managing director in July 2010.

Today, she leads programs and initiatives developed by the board of directors and serves as the primary staff liaison to the development, event planning, finance, marketing and nominating committees. “One of my major accomplishments was my role in drafting part of the agreement that allowed the Foundation to join forces with the Think About Your Eyes campaign.” Since its launch in 2010, the TAYE campaign has seen a 6 percent increase in comprehensive eye exams and

future goals include raising \$25 million over the next two years. “The biggest challenge to promoting eye exams is that vision is an ‘underdog’ in the huge public health field. There are campaigns promoting early detection of breast cancer, heart disease and diabetes that have budgets of over \$60 million per year.”

**SHE SAYS...**“In public health, you're always trying to work yourself out of a job. Once all Americans are getting regular eye exams, the Foundation will no longer need to exist.”

## Jennifer Derryberry

### Vice President Corporate Accounts

Zyloware Eyewear

Port Chester, N.Y.

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“Jennifer is incredibly well regarded and liked among her colleagues and customers alike. Her intelligence, energy, determination, honesty, eye for detail, and efficiency has allowed her to continually increase corporate business even in the toughest economy.”



Derryberry's success is a tribute to the value of finding a mentor early in her more than 18-year optical career. “I've worked with a lot of great people throughout my career,” said Derryberry. “When I was just starting out at Nouveau, I met Kara Meyer; she became my mentor and a trusted friend. She had a way of encouraging everyone that worked with her to step outside of their boundaries to accomplish more. She was a wonderful motivator.”

“I think that is the perfect example of how women support each other. Now I am carrying on the tradition, by helping to build up other strong women in optical, in turn, making us all better.”

When she isn't furthering the cause of women in

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the industry, Derryberry oversees the corporate sales division of Zyloware, working with national retail chains, as well as with marketing teams to create customized launch, merchandising and training programs for the company's frame collections.

"I love the variety my job brings! I get to work with so many different personalities and no two days are ever the same," she concluded.

**SHE SAYS...**"It's important to find a mentor within the optical industry and learn from them. Network whenever possible. When you approach life with a positive attitude and are passionate, you are able to accomplish anything you set your mind to because failure is no longer an option."

## Malini Krishna

**VP, Business Development**  
VisionSpring  
New York, N.Y.

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...**"Malini is a new talent on the not-for-profit side of the business. She's created a lot of innovative partnerships."



Fully aware of the impact she has in the optical field, Malini Krishna said, "Everyday I get to generate excitement and resources to fulfill this industry's core purpose—to get people to see.

Through VisionSpring's work in the field, I help empower people who have historically been marginalized." In her current role, the former sales manager is in charge of fundraising, marketing and global brand management, as well as communications for the non-profit.

"I am most proud of the fact that our team has significantly elevated the need for affordable eyecare in the developing world and brought new players to the table to help solve this problem," she said.

Krishna credits her success first to her grandmother, a widow in southern India who fig-

ured out how to own land and send her adopted nephew to college. She also thanked a former manager as well as VisionSpring's chairman Reade Fahs.

"I am also really blessed with an incredible group of friends. I tend to be a workaholic and go at 90 miles an hour. They help me recognize my own value and ensure that I have balance in my life," Krishna added.

**SHE SAYS...**"Live life by design, not by accident. A lot of people say that success is based on luck, but I have learned that true success comes from hard work and determination."

## Carla Mack, OD, FAAO

**Director, Global Medical Affairs**  
Bausch + Lomb  
Rochester, N.Y.

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...**"Carla is a born leader, passionate, determined and hard-working. Her dedication to elevating the profession is clear from the moment you meet her. Her excitement and energy is inspiring and her work has led to best-in-class product launches, bringing attention to previously low involvement categories."



Carla Mack has a clear vision of success: "To be successful you need to keep the patient and the patient's needs as the number one priority," she said, adding, "This holds true for every role that I've had."

Mack credits her early interest in the field to a family friend who was an OD and a class report on optometry when she was 12. Since then, she has been pushing the limits, challenging the norm and "hoping to leave any situation better than when I started."

In her current role at Bausch + Lomb since 2008, Mack plans and oversees the company's global medical communications and educational programs. "To be a good teacher, a great deal of learning needs to take place. Many times, you learn from those that you are ultimately teaching. I was thrilled to receive this award because it came from the students I worked with each day."

**SHE SAYS...**"Push yourself because you are capable of more. Educate yourself so that you are an expert in what you do."

## Monica Marston

**National Sales Manager, SRx**  
3M Company  
Mobile, Ala.

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...**"She demonstrates exceptional leadership qualities. Her ability to listen to and understand the voice of the customer enables 3M to develop the right solutions for their needs."



Identified as "rising star" by 3M, Marston was promoted in December 2010 to the position of U.S. national sales manager for 3M Occupational Prescription Eyewear. She is responsible for the sales team, sales growth, profits and planning.

Marston started out in the 1980s as contract optician, working for a large ophthalmology practice. She rose to become manager of the optical department, supervising 10 opticians plus support staff and a finishing lab. A call from an optometrist aunt who needed dispensing help resulted in Marston starting her own business, which in turn brought her in contact with AO Safety (now 3M Occupational Prescription Eyewear). There she acquired outside sales experience and honed her already formidable people skills. "I love being in front of a customer and

# RISING STARS

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

coming up with new ways to help them enhance their program," she said.

Marston said her biggest challenge is the shrinking U.S. industrial market. "Everywhere you turn a plant is closing, and the market is very competitive. You have to think outside the box, and keep programs fresh and new."

**SHE SAYS...**"Ten years ago, the safety Rx industry was dominated by men because it was a more industrial-type environment. But women are being recognized and put into sales and executive roles now, and we're making a difference."

## Heather Padgett

**National Marketing Manager**  
Hoya Vision Care  
Lewisville, Texas

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...**"She is outstanding at building rapport, building networks and always striving for win-win. Heather is the kind of person who is always willing to 'roll up her sleeves' and get the job done, pulling in whatever resources she needs."



Padgett has accomplished a lot in the six-and-a-half years since joining Hoya Vision Care. Armed with a marketing degree, she began in the sales support department and then moved into the marketing department. Currently, she is responsible for all Hoya marketing activities in the central region of the U.S. In addition, Padgett supports Hoya's national marketing efforts in single vision and computer lenses.

She is also involved with national buying groups, assists with Hoya's national sales meeting and represents Hoya at trade shows. Padgett's energy and competence have earned her Hoya's Bridge Builder Award in 2009 and 2010 and a nomination for best individual performance in 2010. Padgett sees optical as a "dynamic and unique" industry. She said she is motivated to push forward in her job because "I am making a difference in someone's life, so it is important to give 100 percent, no matter how I am feeling that day." Padgett credits Hoya president Barney Dougher and marketing director Jennifer Ma as mentors who have been particularly supportive.

**SHE SAYS...**"What inspires and drives me every day is knowing my purpose and having goals that I can commit to and reach in every aspect of my life, whether it is career or personal."

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## LaSheta P. David, OD

### Optometrist/Owner

Invision Family Eyecare  
Concord, N.C.

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“Dr. David is the president of the National Optometric Association (NOA), and leads the national organization for minority optometrists. This organization promotes optometry as a profession nationwide.”



It was David's childhood optometrist that first sparked her interest in optometry, asking about her plans for the future and suggesting she consider a career in optometry.

The idea took hold her sophomore year at North Carolina State University.

After graduating from the Pennsylvania College of Optometry, David's first job was with an ophthalmological group with four MDs. She split her time between the group practice and working in a single doctor OD practice, fueling her goal to one day have a practice of her own. That dream came true three years ago.

Today, David is the owner of her own practice, Invision Family Eyecare as well as the president of the National Optometric Association (NOA). She was awarded the NOA Optometrist of the Year twice and as a student won the NOA Student of the Year. “I love my job because it gives me an opportunity to help people of all ages, socioeconomic classes and racial backgrounds,” said David.

**SHE SAYS...**“I am inspired to succeed by the women who have chosen this same path before me. My best advice is to surround yourself with those with experience and wisdom. These will be the people that will help you make some very tough decisions.”

## Jennifer M. Smith, OD, FCOVD

### Vice President/Co-Owner

Draisin Vision Group  
Charleston, S.C.

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“Not only has she hit the ground running in the practice, but she is also state chairman for the Special Olympics and InfantSEE, a member of the Junior League and a Big Sister in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters organization.”



Smith graduated from optometry school in 2006. Since then, she has earned her Fellow in COVD, been president of the Coastal Carolina Optometric Society twice and been awarded the Horizon Award and Distinguished Service Award from the S.C. State Optometric Association. Additionally, she currently serves as a PR committee chairperson for the S.C. Optometric Physicians Association, is the S.C. state leader for the InfantSEE Program and is on the InfantSEE National Board for the AOA.

“I love that I get a chance to give back to my community,” Smith said. “My heart really sings when I get to use my talents and skills to give back to others. I also love to work with children. I am brought to tears when they finish their vision therapy and have straight A's and a complete change in self-esteem.”

“I received my first pair of glasses in 5th grade after having trouble seeing the board at school,” she continued. “I graduated to contact lenses in 8th grade and was amazed that a little piece of plastic in my eye helped me see so clearly. That sparked a curiosity and interest in optometry for me.”

**SHE SAYS...** “The optical industry is a perfect fit for women. Women have an opportunity to dream big

in this field and go out and grab it. There are no glass ceilings and the opportunities are endless.”

## Jeanette Carbone Varanelli, OD, FAAO

### Chief of Optometry

John D. Dingell VA Medical Center  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
Detroit, Mich.

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“As chief of optometry at the VA Medical Center for over five years, Dr. Varanelli has been instrumental in maintaining a tele-retinal imaging program with other VA hospitals, and has been asked to participate in many state and national endeavors within the VA system.”



A 1997 graduate of the Illinois School of Optometry, Jeanette Carbone Varanelli, OD held various committee appointments within the Medical Center, regionally and on a national level

before assuming her current position as chief of optometry. “We have a large scale clinical optometric training program including affiliation agreements with five schools of optometry, encompassing many health care disciplines within the Medical Center,” she said.

“Since I have become chief of optometry, we have created an outstanding accredited optometric residency in primary care and ocular disease, began a low vision blind rehabilitation program, and increased access to care to our patients by streamlining our daily processes and utilizing telehealth technology.” Varanelli admits the pace at the VA is brisk and the eyecare team alone sees upwards of 200 patients per day. But when the chance to work at the VA became available, she was honored to accept the responsibility. “I am proud to serve our nation's veterans,” she said.

# RISING STARS

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

Varanelli is an active member of her state optometric association; especially with regard to continuing education committee assignments. She consistently promotes optometry in her legislative district by highlighting the important role optometrists play in providing eyecare to the community. This past November, she earned the distinguished level of Fellow in the American Academy of Optometry, which she describes as “a goal I held for many years since graduation.”

**SHE SAYS...**“Be passionate about what you do and there will always be a drive inside of you to be your best while continuing to improve yourself through continued learning.”

## Cheryl Vescio

**Director of Regional Retail**  
Carl Zeiss Vision  
Warrenville, Ill.

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...**“She is tenacious, influential, customer-focused and friendly. Cheryl has the ability to bring people together, to understand others points of view and make compromises that work.”



After nearly three decades in the retail optical field, Cheryl Vescio has acquired the insight and experience to manage some of Carl Zeiss Optical’s biggest accounts. As director of regional retail, which is part of Zeiss’s retail/managed care division, Vescio supervises a team of salespeople who develop customized business solutions for their accounts. “Being on the retail side, there’s no one-size-fits-all,” she said. “You’ve got to be creative and determine what each account needs. Then you figure out different ways to use the tools you have available, or else create new tools if necessary.”

Vescio began her career in retail management, working at ToysRUs and Kmart. She learned optical retailing from the inside, working first at Royal Optical and Standard Optical before landing at LensCrafters and then LensLab/Paris Miki. She moved to the vendor side when she joined Sola Optical, working with wholesale customers and then retail accounts, always while based in Chicago.

Vescio’s expertise has earned her a Reach for the Stars President’s award from Zeiss, and she was instrumental in Zeiss receiving Shopko’s Vendor of the Year Award in 2009.

**SHE SAYS...**“Just racking up a sale can be a very short-term thing that can come back to bite you later. Look for that long-term win for both you and your customer.”

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## Belinda Bellows

### Director of Product Development and Marketing

ImageWear/Walman Optical  
Minneapolis, Minn.

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“It is never easy for a lab to introduce their own brands and she has successfully developed and marketed key Walman and ImageWear brands, including the popular Wildflower and Callaway products, as well as the WayCool children’s frame package.”



Bellows started at Walman Optical in 1991 after completing the optical technician course and receiving her ABO certification from Anoka Technical College.

“I must have been destined to work in the optical industry,” said Bellows. “Enrolling in an optical course after moving to Minneapolis was just the right solution for me and I have enjoyed the opportunity and challenges ever since.”

Those opportunities have included various positions within Walman’s frame business where she is now director of product development and marketing for their ImageWear division.

“I currently create and oversee ImageWear’s portfolio of eyewear, sunwear and accessories, which really is a dream job. It’s creative and allows me to continually evolve and grow. The people I work with believe in me. I am respected and I respect my co-workers in return. It’s a great team environment.”

Bellows continued, “I have been fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with many leaders in today’s eyewear industry. I find the optical industry a very tight knit group that loves to share ideas, successes and innovations. In a way, we’re all one big team.”

SHE SAYS...“The optical industry is welcoming and accepting. You’re able to network and share ideas, which I believe is unique in today’s world. There are always new surprises around the corner and there is room to leave your mark if you’re willing and brave enough to do so.”

## Juanita Burke

### Director of Customer Relations

VisionWeb  
Austin, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“Juanita Burke is a guiding and steadying force for our business through her ability to proactively address problems and create solutions. She handles all situations with a professionalism and grace that makes it a privilege to work with her.”



Though she was introduced to the world of optical by chance, Juanita Burke’s long career in the industry has been anything but. Credited as a mentor by each of her four nominators, Burke has been in the optical field since 1971 when she started with Frontier Contact Lenses in Jacksonville, Fla. while still in high school. Since then, she has moved up the ranks in customer service and joined VisionWeb in November 2001.

“I’ve always worked with more start-up companies, which is great because I could create the customer service team the way I wanted and really set the tone for that company.” Burke credits Elizabeth O’ Brien, Fran Mirmina, Dennis McCarthy (all from her time at Johnson & Johnson and Vista-kon) as mentors and added, “Somehow, we are always supporting someone’s vision. We do electronic ordering at VisionWeb but really, we’re helping people get the right information to see better. That’s a pretty cool thing.”

SHE SAYS...“I think the optical industry is fantastic because it’s so diverse. Once you get in this business, you can’t seem to leave. I’m not sure why that is but for me, I never felt the need to go anywhere.”

## Heather Carpenter

### Medical Project Coordinator

Nationwide Vision Center  
Chandler, Ariz.

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“Heather influences the Nationwide Vision Center team of 75 doctors and 75 optical technicians, plus optical staff. She is driven and exudes her wonderful personality across all the levels of office staff.”



In the industry for 11 years, Heather Carpenter started at Standard Optical as a district manager before moving over to Nationwide Vision Center as a medical project coordinator back in 2005. Today, through strong leadership and continuous training, Carpenter teaches medical technicians the skills needed to provide the best possible patient care, while assisting Nationwide Vision Center doctors.

“I have been very fortunate to have many amazing mentors at Nationwide Vision. Al Bernstein, Vince Hayes, and Dr. Mark Peller have all taught me the true meaning of leadership, dedication, and commitment along with putting patient care first,” said Carpenter who is ABO and NCLE certified. As the medical project coordinator, Carpenter opened and currently oversees the two Nationwide Vision Medical Eye Centers, launched the company’s diabetic and glaucoma programs, implemented an EMR system, Exam-Writer in all 61 locations and assisted in launching the company’s general ophthalmological practice.

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SHE SAYS...“It is easy to come to work when you truly love what you do, enjoy the people you work with and believe in the company you work for. I strive to be an example for other young women who wish to elevate their career paths by providing them a solid base of medical optometric knowledge.”

## Cathy Evans

### Director of Ophthalmic Services

Pacific University College of Optometry  
Forest Grove, Ore.

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“She represents Pacific University with positive influence to the communities around Portland and overseas. Cathy Evans is an excellent role model for all who come in contact and work with her.”



Training optometry students in the skills of dispensing glasses has allowed Evans to pass on her personal business philosophy to tomorrow's optometrists. “Always remember the change you can make in every single patient's quality of life with the right eyewear. Great frames along with the right lenses can make a patient walk out of your office feeling like a million bucks!”

As director of ophthalmic services at Pacific University, Evans oversees the operations of the school's five optical dispensaries known as Pacific EyeTrends and teaches optics to second year students. She recently began providing continuing education for para-optometrists and opticians at Pacific's Victoria, B.C. Conference and Island Eyes in Maui.

Starting out as an apprentice to a group of opticians in 1974, Evans went on to own her own practice, Oswego Optique, in Oregon before arriving at Pacific University in 2007. She is certified ABOC by the ABO, is a member of the Optician's

Association of Oregon, and is a Fellow Member of the National Academy of Opticianry.

Evans admits that teaching remains her greatest challenge. “I want so much for the future doctors of optometry attending Pacific University to understand that how the prescription is filled is every bit as important as the refraction.”

SHE SAYS...“My passion for my profession keeps me focused and driven. The success I've enjoyed so far has come from not letting fear get in my way, and by embracing change.”

## Mary Kane

### Executive Editor

Vision Monday  
New York, N.Y.

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“She brings a great sense of responsibility and skill to her demanding role at VM and is recognized both inside and outside the company as a great team builder.”



A New Jersey native, Kane was always intrigued by publishing but cites an influential high school teacher as the one who convinced her to apply to Fordham University's communications program where she earned her B.A. Her career began at Travel Weekly, first on the copy desk, then print production and reporting on the cruise and Caribbean beats. She “got to see the world” at the leading travel trade pub for nearly 23 years.

Kane came to VM in 2005, first on a consulting basis, soon assuming the full-time role of executive editor, overseeing all the expanding operations for VM's group including the print newsmagazine, the Vision Expo Dailies, VMail, e-newsletters and VM.com. She's developed strong working relationships with key organizations across the industry and throughout Jobson's internal departments.

“My sister says, ‘Mary never met anyone she didn't know,’ and I do enjoy interacting with people, pulling together teams on different projects.” Reminiscing about her early days in publishing she said, “We used to write headlines on typewriters, counting characters to make sure they fit at the typesetter! The change in digital media now is fascinating and I'm excited to be part of it. I've had strong mentors: Alan Fredericks, editorial director at TW, looked out for me and taught me so much. Nadine Godwin, my managing editor, taught me aspects of managing a staff. And I love the people I work with at VM and Jobson now.”

SHE SAYS...“Any job may be a stepping stone to another. There's probably never been a better time to be in the workforce—all the doors are open.”

## Sheri Mayes

### Field Training Specialist

Nationwide Vision Center  
Chandler, Ariz.

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“Nationwide Vision Center is proud to train its associates for all certifications. Sheri has taken on that challenge and has had great results. Today, Nationwide Vision Center has state licensed opticians in all offices, thanks to Sheri.”



It was Mayes' mother who encouraged her to look into different types of businesses that would challenge her. When she discovered the world of optical, she immediately fell in love with the unique mix of medical and retail that makes this business so diverse and ever changing.

Some 25 years ago, Mayes started at Lee Optical where she learned her opticianry skills before receiving her Arizona State Dispensing Optician License. As a field training specialist, she now

# MENTORS

WOMEN WHO ARE TEAM BUILDERS AND DEVELOPERS OF TALENT

spends her time helping others to pass the ABO, NCLE or State Board licensure. She is the instructor of ABO/NCLE courses and individual field training.

She's constantly implementing new training programs to ensure all employees have the skills needed to be successful. "The real challenge is when someone doesn't pass," said Mayes. "Then I get the opportunity to motivate them to take the test again. I tell them to never give up. I want to show them that persistence will eventually pay off."

SHE SAYS... "Use your passion to build great relationships with your peers. Be open to new ideas, constantly improve yourself by learning from your mistakes and always be learning through all channels that are available to you such as continuing education courses, optical periodicals, Vision Expo and seminars."

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## Methodology

This year's request for nominations was structured like the 2010 Report in that we continued to expand the scope of women recognized in the report, who make leadership contributions throughout the ECP, retail, supplier, lab, managed care and association landscape.

Readers were asked to make up to three nominations per the following categories: **Executive Suite, Mentors, Rising Stars** and **Innovators**. The nomination form defined these as: **Executive Suite**—Candidates are women who hold the positions of president, CEO, CFO, CMO, CIO or COO that guide their companies forward, inspire leadership among their teams and peers and achieve high performance. **Mentors**—Candidates are women who are team builders, developers of talent, who via example or education successfully influence others to grow in their business or professional acumen. **Rising Stars**—Candidates are women who are "up-and-comers" in their careers and within their companies or arenas; sharp talents who are on their way toward higher levels of responsibility and influence. **Innovators**—Candidates are women who have initiated new product developments or special programs in the arena of marketing, technology or retail, who have spearheaded innovative business ideas or enterprises.

The "Influential Women" process is not designed to be a vote or a ranking. Nearly 200 nominations were reviewed and categorized by *Vision Monday's* editors. The "Chosen Because..." selections are drawn from the nominations submitted for each candidate. Honorees are organized alphabetically by category.

## Sandi Berendes

### Marketing Director

Groetken Family Eye Care  
Le Mars, Iowa

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“Sandi is a beautiful, gentle, kind spirit, always willing to go out of her way to make someone’s day. She is unique in so many ways—beyond just marketing, she is an innovator of how we all should treat people.”



Sandi Berendes has only worked in optical for 10 years but in that time, she has accomplished more than most would in a career three times that long. As marketing director for Groetken Family Eye Care in Le Mars, Iowa, Berendes does everything from planning annual eyewear shows to appearing on local radio stations on behalf of the practice. “I have a passion for eyewear and sunwear in my heart and I share it with everyone around me,” she said.

While there is no secret to her accomplishment (hard work and dedication), Berendes is self-taught where marketing is concerned. By taking online courses and reading optical trades, Berendes worked to soak up all the knowledge she could in order “to pass on the information to everyone around me, to make us a better team for the practice.”

Berendes thanks Elizabeth Groetken, OD, 20/20 editor-in-chief James Spina and her family, of whom she said: “I would not be who I am without them and their constant support by my side.”

**SHE SAYS...**“I set a goal back when I first started in optometry. I remember looking at VM and 20/20 [magazines] and saying to Dr. Groetken, ‘We’re going to get there one day.’ So I can’t tell you how much this honor means to me.”

## Leslie Muller

### Vice President of Design

Marchon Eyewear  
New York, N.Y.

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“Muller is the head of design at Marchon’s N.Y. showroom, where she continuously designs frames that include technological advancements and fashion forward appeal.”



When Muller started in the eyewear industry 18 years ago, there were very few eyewear designers in the U.S., let alone women designers. “It was an exciting and formative time for me. I saw the potential for building a new discipline here. As I gained experience, I gave back to the industrial design community. Over the years, through lectures and Marchon’s Design Internship program, we’ve touched, trained and hired quite a few female designers.”

Muller started her career in the art gallery world and thanks to her own female mentor, Ivy Ross, VP of design at Bausch + Lomb in Denver at the time, was hired as a design manager at B+L. After a stint in design at Luxottica, Muller joined Marchon in 2003, where she established the New York Design Studio and now leads design teams for the Michael Kors, Calvin Klein Collection, Calvin Klein Jeans, Nike and Diane von Furstenberg brands.

“It is a privilege and honor to have the ability to work with the best designers in the world right here in New York,” concluded Muller. “But all designers need trust and support and I’ve been lucky to have that from our president and CEO, Claudio Gottardi, and my boss and mentor, Mark Ginsberg.”

**SHE SAYS...**“The optical industry is such a rich and diverse field that has plenty of room for

women that are interested. It’s also an industry that has a lot of momentum, which allows for interesting career exploration and development.”

## Liz Segre

### Editorial Director

All About Vision  
Access Media Group LLC  
San Diego, Calif.

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“She is a founder of AllAboutVision.com, a pioneer in providing online consumer education about eye care and eye health. Segre sets the tone and is the editorial conscience of the site, demanding that the content meets her uncompromising standards for quality and objectivity.”



Segre has overall responsibility for the editorial content and webmastering for AllAboutVision.com. Her many duties include writing and editing articles, constantly updating the site’s content, and making sure it is optimized for search engines. A self-professed newshound with a technical orientation, Segre likes her job because she enjoys reading newspapers and keeping current on a variety of subjects.

Segre entered the optical industry about 20 years ago when she became managing editor for Eyecare Business magazine. “That was my first exposure to the optical field,” she recalled. “At first, I wasn’t sure I’d like it—previously I had worked at a boating magazine, and I thought the subject might be dry in comparison. I was so wrong! The sometimes complicated combination of retail, fashion, technology, and health makes this a very interesting arena for a journalist.”

**SHE SAYS...**“Be nice to others, and they will be nice to you. For example, when we receive

More →



email comments from people, positive or negative, we always try to respond with respect. After all, they did take time out of their day to write to us. Actually, almost everyone I've met in optical is wonderful, which seems unusual in business."

## Samantha Toth

### President

Innereactive Media  
Ada, Mich.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Samantha is an innovator in the industry with her ideas and the products she has brought to market. Her lectures have helped optometrists and opticians become more effec-

tive in running their own businesses and better serving their patients."



As Samantha Toth puts it, she grew up in "optical diapers."

Her grandfather, father and uncle are/were all optometrists.

Her mother is a sales director for a frame company and her sister

is an optician. It's almost like she didn't have a choice. But of course she did, by becoming a dispensing optician for eight years before pursuing a marketing career.

As the founder and president of Innereactive Media, Toth has built her business by helping optical professionals grow their business through effective communication, strategic marketing and training. "I've had the opportunity to work on innovative marketing projects side-by-side with

some great industry mentors. I am forever grateful, for without them, I would not be who I am today!" said Toth.

As an innovator, Toth created a hands-on photochromic workshop for Transitions Optical, a new marketing campaign launch for Trivex material lenses, Hoya free-form focus groups for ECPs, and the Jump Start eyecare professional training series for Global Optics, to name a few.

**SHE SAYS...** "Success doesn't happen by accident and requires both hard work and calculated risk. Focusing on mistakes of the past won't help you move forward and grow. I'm constantly challenged, but also supported by my mother and two sisters who continue to make me a better person and business professional."

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## Connie Vavricek

### Director, Industry Outreach

VSP Vision Care

Rancho Cordova, Calif.

CHOSEN BECAUSE...“Under Connie’s leadership, since the inception of the VSP Mobile Eyes program, over 800 VSP doctors have volunteered their time and the clinics have participated in 350 events, helping more than 50,000 people to see better.”



Even when disaster strikes, positive outcomes are still possible. Just ask Connie Vavricek, who heads up VSP Vision Care’s charity care and industry outreach programs. “One year

into my time at VSP, hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit the Gulf Coast. The executive leadership quickly pulled together a team to help those affected. I was part of that team and since that moment, I’ve found my calling.”

Vavricek, along with her team of 13 staffers, manages outreach programs, including sponsorships and continuing education for VSP network doctors. “I’m very proud to have played a part in developing the VSP Mobile Eyes program, our mobile clinics program which now includes three 45-foot mobile eyecare clinics that, in partnership with our network doctors, travel the U.S. providing comprehensive eye exams and glasses for the underserved.”

Vavricek believes that while there are many careers within the VSP organization, ultimately everyone is a part of the same mission—helping people see better. “My inspiration comes from watching people grow and witnessing their ideas

turn into programs that in turn help other people grow. It’s cyclical!”

**SHE SAYS...**“No matter the task or project, do the very best you can. If it’s a small task, make sure you do it to the best of your ability. People notice when something is quality, and you will be given bigger and better opportunities if the quality is noticed.” ■

Go to the online version of the Cover Story for an alphabetical listing of past honorees and to read prior years’ Influential Women in Optical Reports. Exclusively on VisionMonday.com.



## CLASS OF 2011: A New Generation of Female Leaders

As we honor this year's "Most Influential Women in Optical," we also continue shining a spotlight on the next generation of optical professionals—recent female graduates from optometry colleges and opticianry programs nationwide.

The students in VM's "Class of 2011" Special Report have been selected by their respective

schools for this feature. They all have excellent academic achievement, are in honor societies, and have received awards and scholarships, but they have also distinguished themselves by doing research projects, going on volunteer missions, and participating in professional organizations.

The new optometrists love optometry because it offers them options and more time with

patients. The new opticians also wanted to be in the health care industry, and found the profession to be the right fit for them.

This marks the 6th edition of our special section, underwritten by a grant from the Luxottica Group. We are proud to present this new group to you. ■

—Seth J. Bookey  
Contributing Editor

## OPTOMETRY STUDENTS

### Sarah Brehm, OD

Nova Southeastern University  
College of Optometry  
Fort Lauderdale, Fla.



Sarah Brehm, OD worked with the Foundation for Fighting Blindness VisionWalk by serving as the school's team captain. She also worked with student optometric associations lobbying the state legislature in Tallahassee to allow ODs to prescribe oral medications.

She is currently in a primary-care resident at SUNY, to round out her clinician skills. Eventually, she would like to work in a primary-care practice, and is interested in working with low-vision patients.

HER SCHOOL SAYS...“Sarah distinguished herself and graduated with her Doctor of Optometry degree with highest honors. She was the president of Gold Key Honor fraternity and the recipient of many clinical awards.”

### Jessica Carson, OD

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



For Jessica Carson, OD, her most rewarding experience during school was her trip to Oaxaca, Mexico, with I Care International. “It reminded us the most important reason we want to be optometrists—to give the gift of sight.”

Carson has a residency at the VA Medical Center Eye Clinic in Fayetteville, Ark., and looks forward to studying treatment and management of glaucoma, cataracts, diabetes, AMD, and other diseases, as well as learning minor surgical and select laser procedures.

HER SCHOOL SAYS...“Dr. Carson graduated first in her class, and was president of the Beta Sigma Kappa Honor Society. She was also an active student ambassador, who mentored incoming students.”

### Kelly Chajka, OD

SUNY College of Optometry  
New York



At SUNY, Kelly Chajka, OD, was involved with a variety of extracurricular activities, including being secretary of the school's VOSH chapter. She also worked with the Urban and Global Mission Alliance to bring eye exams to patients in the Dominican Republic. She was also involved in the AAO student council for four years, and was president in her fourth year.

Chajka hopes to eventually work at a practice in her native Syracuse, N.Y., area and integrate vision therapy and rehabilitation into her career.

HER SCHOOL SAYS...“Kelly combines academic and clinical excellence, a love of research and a genuine desire to help others. She is emblematic of the best qualities of our graduates.”

More →



## Britta Hansen, OD

School of Optometry,  
University of California—Berkeley  
Berkeley, Calif.



Britta Hansen, OD, was involved with student groups, and she represented the school at the AOA and at legislative meetings in Sacramento. “We helped legislators understand our level of education. In California, we have not been able to use therapeutic treatment of glaucoma, but now, there are more aspects that can be treated by ODs who have the right certifications.”

HER SCHOOL SAYS...“Dr. Britta Hansen epitomizes the best of the best in the profession of optometry. As a graduate of the Class of 2011 at Berkeley Optometry, she was recognized for her leadership and dedication by being selected by Berkeley Optometry Faculty and her fellow classmates as the 2011 Gold Retinoscope recipient.”

## Brigitte Keener, OD

Southern College of Optometry  
Memphis, Tenn.



At SCO, Brigitte Keener, OD was involved with ASOA and SVOSH. As president of the student government, “I had a chance to influence our school, and my goal was to emphasize service,” she said. On Martin Luther King Jr. Day, she got the SCO faculty, staff, and students to paint a school in Memphis.

HER SCHOOL SAYS...“Brigitte Keener, OD, ranks among one of the more dedicated student leaders: Her tenure as SGA president coincided with a strategic increased emphasis on college-wide service. She is on track to be a leader in our profession.”

## Melissa Liepens, OD

Illinois College of Optometry  
Chicago



Melissa Liepens, OD was involved in a variety of honor societies and professional organizations, but the most helpful was being president of the Private Practice Club. “Many students get caught up in academics, and don’t learn about networking and post-graduate opportunities.”

HER SCHOOL SAYS...“She graduated summa cum laude and was our salutatorian in 2011. Her notable accomplishments have included membership in the BSK, Gold Key, and Tomb and Key Honorary Societies. She was president of the ICO Private Practice Club, and the VSP, Student Association, and Trustees Scholarships.”

## Jessica Lucas, OD

Northern State University  
Oklahoma’s College of Optometry  
Tahlequah, Okla.



At NSUOCO, Jessica Lucas worked with Women in Optometry, the Private Practice Club, and the AOSA, was on the school’s curriculum committee, and served as a liaison to the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry. She and a classmate also had an article published in the Journal of Optometry and Vision Science. She would like to get into family practice and focus on pediatric vision care.

HER SCHOOL SAYS...“Jessica maintained a 4.0 GPA throughout her optometric education, and she has outstanding clinical skills. She has demonstrated her professionalism and commitment to service and we look forward to watching her impact the lives of many.”

## Kacie Monroe, OD

Indiana University School of Optometry  
Bloomington, Ind.



At IU, Kacie Monroe, OD, spent three years working with the school’s VOSH chapter, and served as its president the last year. “We saw 1,200 patients during a mission to Guanajuato, Mexico, where some people traveled a four-hour bus ride one way just to get eye exams.”

Monroe is currently working for Fitzgerald and Associates in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. She is pursuing a 100-hour course for certification in vision therapy. She also wants to do more to serve pediatric patients.

HER SCHOOL SAYS...“Dr. Monroe has been an active member of our school, serving in leadership positions with our chapter of VOSH. She confirmed her dedication to service by traveling to Guanajuato, Mexico.”

## Lauren Nelson, OD

University of Houston College of Optometry  
Houston, Texas



“I helped shape the profession by serving on the admissions committee,” Lauren Nelson, OD, tells *VM*. She also worked as a teaching assistant for several courses, and enjoyed helping new students. She is a member of Beta Sigma Kappa, Student Texas Optometric Association, American Optometric Student Association, Student Optometric Practice Management Association and SVOSH.

HER SCHOOL SAYS...“Lauren distinguished herself as a first year student, and continued to do so throughout her academic career, graduating with honors and receiving many awards and accolades. We know she will continue to distinguished herself as a leader and role model within the profession.”

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## Lisa Cudmore

**Erie Community College**

**Buffalo, N.Y.**



After spending many years in the hospitality industry, Lisa Cudmore decided it was time for a change. A friend who is an optometrist encouraged her to interview to get into the program, which was full at the time. Opticianry was, “a totally different language to me. I had no background in this whatsoever!” she said.

Cudmore enjoyed her studies and her internship at Town Park Optical. She also participated in “Friends of the Night,” which helped the homeless get eye exams and free lenses and frames.

Looking ahead, Cudmore would love to have her own business, since “the business end and marketing come naturally to me.”

*HER SCHOOL SAYS...“Lisa’s professional approach is caring and dynamic.”*

## Andrea Edwards

**J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College**

**Richmond, Va.**



Andrea Edwards discovered opticianry while looking at the school’s website researching nursing classes. Even though she had never had an eye exam, she found that opticianry appealed to both her sense of fashion and her aptitude for math.

Edwards mastered multitasking at school—studying, raising a two-year-old daughter, working full time, volunteering to tutor fellow students, and interning at a LensCrafters. She was a member of Phi Beta Kappa and the sorority Zeta Phi Beta.

She would like to be a manager one day, and is interested in pursuing a career as an ophthalmic technician—not bad for someone who never had an eye exam before her studies. “I like to dive in

and learn. I would like to work hands-on with people, performing ophthalmic tests for patients with cataracts and glaucoma.”

*HER SCHOOL SAYS...“Andrea is a shining example of what can happen when determination and passion collide.”*

## Jenni Evans

**Indiana University School of Optometry’s**

**Optician/Technician Program**

**Bloomington, Ind.**



After spending almost two decades as a flight attendant, and then running exercise studios for women, Jenni Evans decided to get into another field that would allow her to work with a diversity of customers. She was also encouraged by a friend, who happened to be the director of an opticianry program.

While attending classes, Evans also worked at the school’s Atwater Eye Clinic, which allowed her to spend time with patients as well as her fellow students. “What we do is an easy fix that can change the lives of many people very quickly,” she noted.

*HER SCHOOL SAYS...“Jenni was awarded ‘Technician of the Year’ by the Optician/Technician faculty, staff, and her fellow students.”*

## Masayo Hashimoto

**New York City College of Technology**

**Brooklyn, N.Y.**



Masayo Hashimoto earned her B.A. in government from Skidmore College and after working 70 to 80 hours a week as a paralegal, she decided that it was time for a career change. Her mother is an optician and co-owns an optical store in New Jersey. “My mom was trying to get me

into the business for a long time,” she said. “I was hesitant about returning to school, however, I felt it was now or never.”

After graduating and obtaining her optician’s license, her goal is to open her own business. “I love meeting and talking with people—I love the idea of helping someone pick out the perfect pair of eyeglasses.”

*HER SCHOOL SAYS...“We have always been impressed with Masayo’s desire to learn and her commitment to her education. Whatever Masayo undertakes, she does so with enthusiasm and high motivation.”*

## Lauren Lessley

**Seattle Central Community College**

**School of Opticianry**

**Seattle, Wash.**



Lauren Lessley always knew she wanted to be in vision care after finishing high school. She enjoyed the school’s opticianry program, saying “I owe my professors all my success.”

She was president of the school’s Scholastic Optician’s Society, and she joined the OAA, the Optician’s Association of Washington, VOSH Northwest Chapter. She was a member of Phi Beta Kappa, and participated in “Project Homeless Connect” in Tacoma. Her first humanitarian mission to Jamaica will be in October.

She is working on a bachelors of biology at Bellevue College and hopes to transfer to Ohio State or UC Berkeley, and then attend either school’s optometry program.

*HER SCHOOL SAYS...“Lauren stepped up to be class co-president in the first quarter she started school. Outside the classroom, she never says no when asked to work with fund-raising activities.”*

*More →*



## Sharyn McCann

**Middlesex Community College  
Middletown, Conn.**



After spending years working in accounting at a desk jobs in medical offices, Sharyn McCann wanted more hand-on experience and more one-on-one work with people.

McCann worked part time at an optical while going to school, but still found time to be the lab manager of the schools student-run clinic. She won the school's academic award, and worked on community health projects in Hartford and performed vision screenings in Middletown. She has been involved in the Connecticut Opticians Association, and a variety of other professional groups.

"I had an eye problem of my own. People take vision for granted," she noted, and wants to get more involved in helping the community.

HER SCHOOL SAYS..."Sharyn is involved in many aspects of the optical industry. She is nationally certified by the ABO and NCLE. She is also a member of the OAA, NAO and CLSA."

## Tiffany McDaniel

**Roane State Community College  
Harriman, Tenn.**



Tiffany McDaniel got into opticianry after hearing the school's opticianry program director discuss the profession at an orientation. "I wasn't sure if I made the right choice, until the first day at school—then it just clicked for me. Opticianry offers many options—I can have it all"

While at school, her classmates nominated her Outstanding Opticianry Student of the Year, and she worked with a Remote Area Medical, a non-profit group that helps provide dental and optical services for the needy.

HER SCHOOL SAYS..."Tiffany won our 'Opticianry Student of the Year' award. She also won a CLSA scholarship to attend the CLSA convention in Austin, Texas."

## Kathryn Plante

**Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology  
Boston, Mass.**



Kathryn Plante "grew up in the profession"—her parents are opticians and she worked in their store. She opted for an accelerated one-year opticianry program while also taking the ophthalmic assisting program at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary.

At Ben Franklin, she was class secretary, assisted teachers, and worked in the school's optical shop. She received the George Borque scholarship, and recently passed her ABO and NCLE exams. She is also involved with the Contact Lens Society of America (CLSA).

Today, Plante is still involved with the opticianry program—she helped with the school's recent makeover of its optical shop, and helps current students in the optical skills lab. Eventually, she would like to design frames.

HER SCHOOL SAYS..."Kathryn is an effective and influential person who cares about others, and can help them to achieve things that they didn't ever think were possible."

## Kelli Sanders

**Ogeechee Technical College  
Statesboro, Ga.**



After changing her major several times, Kelli Sanders found her niche in opticianry. A nine-month internship at a small private doctor's office, allowed her to do a bit of everything. She

was also in the National Honor Society for technical schools.

Sanders landed a full-time job before graduating, and enjoys working in the lab as much as she likes being on the sales floor. "I enjoy what I am doing now," she tells VM, "and I would like to learn more about management."

HER SCHOOL SAYS..."We had several top students this year but Kelli stood out—she is highly motivated and excelled in the classroom and at job sites. She was ambitious and achieved her goal to pass her ABO and NCLE exams on the first try."

## Lydia Wang-DeJesus

**Hillsborough Community College  
Tampa, Fla.**



After working in marketing, Lydia Wang-DeJesus, was looking to get into health services, and opticianry's combination of health service and fashion appealed to her. She started the program on campus her first year, and completed it as a distance-learning student when her family had to move.

Her teachers encouraged her to apply for all available scholarships, many of which she received. She noticed, "Many students don't bother to apply." She gained hands-on experience with the school's vision screening program at a nearby housing project. She took advantage of free student memberships in the Professional Opticians of Florida, the National Academy of Opticianry (NAO), the Contact Lens Society of America (CLSA), and the Opticians Association of America (OAA).

HER SCHOOL SAYS..."Lydia was our representative at the NFOS College Bowl in Cincinnati last September. Lydia earned a student scholarship to the Contact Lens Society of America meeting in Texas." ■