

# POWHERful!

**Celebrating the Accomplishments of Optical's Most Influential Women**



**2023 VM's Most Influential Women in Optical**



**C**ollaborative. Confident. Accomplished. Supportive. These are the characteristics that describe this year's "class" of Vision Monday's Most Influential Women.

Having finally emerged from the shadows of the pandemic, this 2023 group of honorees are at long last looking forward to a brighter and more promising future. Their positivity and can-do attitudes are apparent as they tell us their stories of success in an ever-changing optical industry.

This edition will mark the 21st year of our Special Report. The editors at *Vision Monday* had more than 250 nominees from our readers to choose from and we selected 51 very well-deserving women. This year's

group of Influential Women is made up of executives, sales and marketing professionals, ECPs, administrators, researchers and teachers.

This eclectic mix is emblematic of the broad reach of women in our industry and indicative of how deeply they are embedded in its fabric.

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 invite you to meet these "PowHERful!" optical achievers and join us in celebrating their wide-ranging skills and accomplishments. ■

—The Editors

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

## Rachel Ahlson

### VICE PRESIDENT AND CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

Pacific Artisan Labs, Peak Artisan Labs, Artisan Lab Network  
Portland, Oregon

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She sets the example for a superior work ethic, taking risks and giving back.”



Rachel Ahlson never believed she'd have a satisfying, full-time career in optics—at first, it was just a summer job at her mom's lab. But now, more than 20 years later, Ahlson has worked in nearly every department in an optical lab—ultimately making her way to the peak of the industry as vice president and COO of Pacific Artisan Labs in 2018.

In her current role, she's responsible for the financials and leads all aspects of administrative operations across the Artisan Lab Network. In 2018, she helped build Pacific Artisan Labs in Oregon from the ground up, and recently completed the launch of the company's second lab, Peak Artisan Labs, in Colorado. Ahlson also plays an important supporting role for sister lab, Independent Optical Lab.

Today, Ahlson is one of the few women working in the highest levels of lens manufacturing. But her drive for success doesn't stop there—she also

cares deeply about giving back. “I am most passionate about our company's philanthropic efforts within the prison system,” said Ahlson.

“We have a fresh start program where we actively volunteer at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility for women in Oregon. We have hired numerous women from the program, and I am proud that we have a zero percent recidivism rate.” Ahlson also plays a key role in helping place graduates of optical programs within the prison system and private practices across the West Coast.

SHE SAYS... “I always want to participate in work that has societal benefit. It's important to play a role in improving the lives of others.”

## Vanessa Bernarding

### CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER MyEyeDr. Vienna, Virginia

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “As chief people officer, Vanessa has led MyEyeDr. through a transformation of its Human Resources function. She has stewarded the company through several notable people-focused initiatives including the establishment of certified training centers and a formalized succession planning process.”

Prior to joining MyEyeDr. and the optical industry just two years ago, Vanessa Bernarding spent more than 20 years progressing across multiple industries in the human resources function, nearly 15 of which were with high growth retail



organizations such as Dick's Sporting Goods and Total Wine & More.

“That's where I learned the art of establishing scalable people solutions that fueled future growth through what I consider to be the most critical asset—people,” said Bernarding.

That experience paid dividends for both Bernarding and MyEyeDr. in August of 2021 when she came aboard as chief people officer where she is responsible for the “people strategy that fuels the company's current and future growth.” Her direct areas of responsibility include talent acquisition, total rewards, HR operations, HR consulting, talent and organizational development, and ESG and internal communications.

Under her leadership, the company's HR department has implemented several innovative programs and initiatives that have enhanced company culture, improved associate engagement, and reduced turnover.

Bernarding credits MyEyeDr. CEO and co-founder Sue Downes for sparking her interest in the optical field. Bernarding said, “Sue's story and passion for the vision health and wellness industry was contagious. It piqued my curiosity and that has only grown since becoming a part of the MyEyeDr. team where I have had the honor of working with our doctors and team members.”

SHE SAYS... “Find peers, leaders, teammates and mentors who will listen, provide feedback and help you grow. Trust your ability to take on something new and if you fail, learn from it, pick yourself up and keep going.”

## Jennifer Brown

### SVP SALES OPTICAL CHANNEL Kering Eyewear New York, New York

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “I have never known another VP to roll up their sleeves to get the job done. She will do anything to help her team and nothing is below her. A true class act in terms of leadership. Her influence stretches in so many ways and we are all proud to work under her leadership.”



Jennifer Brown found her way into the industry through a happy accident over 20 years ago, due to her love for fashion and luxury brands. She said, “On my first interview, when I started after college, I was intrigued by the fashion brands that company represented at the time. The opportunity led me to fall in love with the optical industry. It is quite interesting that in the U.S. optical market, I do not know of many people, if any, that leave once they join.”

Over the course of her career in the

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optical industry, Brown has found a niche within the independent channel and sales teams. At Kering Eyewear, she works to set the standard for luxury eyewear in the U.S. Through her and her team's work, Kering Eyewear has grown from a start-up to a major player in the industry.

She built her team and partnerships from scratch and was there every step of the way. She said, "Looking back at my six years with Kering Eyewear, my major accomplishment and greatest pride is the incredible journey that I have been privileged to be part of and the results and partnerships we have established in the market."

For Brown, inspiration and guidance comes from both her leaders and direct reports. She said, "they have shown the importance of being overprepared, finding my why, stepping outside my comfort zone, always to 'sell a lot' and provide a reason to believe."

**SHE SAYS...** "For anyone starting in the optical industry, I would advise them to find their specific talents and passions and identify how they will bring value to set themselves apart. It is okay to ask for help, and to not have the answers for everything. Believe in yourself and never give up."

## Marcy DeWalt

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
PROFESSIONAL RELATIONS**  
Anterior Segment, U.S. Eye Care  
Allergan, an AbbVie company  
Irvine, California

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Marcy has pushed indefatigably for inclusion and diversity within the profession.

In fact, Allergan was the lead sponsor in the First Annual Women's Leadership Summit, which kicked off in 2019."



Marcy DeWalt has over 20 years sales and marketing experience in the pharmaceutical industry and joined Allergan in 2010 as a district sales manager. She transitioned to the professional relations marketing team focused on optometry in 2014 and took over leading the team in 2020 with expanded responsibilities supporting ophthalmology in the spring of 2022. She is a member of OWL (Ophthalmic World Leaders), Women Leaders of Octane, and is active in supporting efforts for both women in ophthalmology and women in optometry.

DeWalt oversees a team of five marketing directors supporting Allergan's overall academic development strategy and conference strategy at the national, regional and state level. She also works collaboratively with the team on the overall KOL, peer to peer and emerging leader strategy, as well as building out key programs like VIEW (Visionary Insights for Eyecare Women) and Optometry Jumpstart.

"I am really passionate about my work with our Visionary Insights for Eye Care Women (VIEW) platform. It is so rewarding to help connect women across eyecare and then watch these

relationships flourish from one of our events," DeWalt said. "I am such an advocate of women supporting women and love to see this play out in front of my eyes."

She said, "I am inspired by the collaborative nature of eyecare from the educators, to the thought leaders, to the community-based eyecare providers, along with my industry colleagues to find strategies and treatments to help patients protect and preserve their sight."

**SHE SAYS...** "Be open to change, growth and continued learning. This industry is full of lessons and learnings, so embrace it and find others to support you in your journey."

## Terri Dykstra

**SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT,  
PROFESSIONAL BUSINESS  
GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT**  
Eyemart Express  
Farmers Branch, Texas

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Her extensive experience enables her to relate to and encourage all Eyemart Express associates—from opticians and district managers to regional managers and doctor partners—to strive for excellence."

With over 35 years of experience in the optical industry, Terri Dykstra has dedicated the last 10 years to Eyemart Express. Throughout her professional journey, she has maintained a strong commitment to learning and delivering outstanding results, driven by a keen business intuition.

She began her optical career as an



optician at US Vision and quickly progressed to the role of optical manager, where she honed her leadership skills and gained a comprehensive understanding of operations. Building on this foundation, Dykstra advanced to district manager, and ultimately, regional manager, where she managed an extensive geographic area and fostered a culture of excellence and customer satisfaction.

Ten years ago, Dykstra joined Eyemart Express as director of professional affairs and soon became vice president of professional affairs, playing a vital role in building and growing the company's network of affiliate optometrists. Today, she is senior vice president of professional business growth and development.

"One of my primary responsibilities includes recruiting friendly people with a customer service-oriented mindset and training them for success," she said. "I'm proud to have one of the lowest turnover rates within the organization, while growing the company over 60 percent."

Dykstra's focus has always been on team-building, which has been instrumental in helping hundreds of her fellow associates experience successful careers in optical. She has cultivated an environment that empowers both associates and doctor partners, fostering a harmonious and cooperative culture.

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This successful mindset has resulted in a high-performing team with low employee turnover. Remarkably, more than 98 percent of Eyemart Express' doctors stated that they've found a home with the company under Dykstra's guidance.

**SHE SAYS...** "I have a strong commitment to empowering others."

## Lynn DiMarco

**REGIONAL SALES MANAGER – SOUTHEAST**  
Silhouette  
Richmond, Virginia

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Lynn's positive attitude radiates from not only herself but her team. Her region is the highest performing region because of her leadership and her passion for Silhouette. She has coached each of her account executives not just on selling skills, but truly how to be business consultants for our customers."



Lynn DiMarco began her 45-year career in the optical industry in private practice, working in Hacienda Heights, California. She worked at store and training managers for many years, before beginning to take on outside sales positions until Maui Jim approached her for an

optical sales specialist role in Southern California.

There, DiMarco supervised 125 Sunglass Hut outlets and trained new employees, while managing her own sales territory. She moved to ClearVision after Maui Jim, achieving rookie of the year status and increasing revenue drastically. DiMarco has held sales roles at Shamir and Essilor.

In February 2016, DiMarco was handpicked by a retiring Silhouette account executive to take over her territory. She took this on to great success, transforming the \$994,000 territory into a \$1.5 million territory within three years. She was named MVP of the year in both 2017 and 2019, and earned President's Club at Silhouette in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019.

In 2019, she took on the role of regional sales manager for Silhouette's Southeast region, and recruited her own replacement who was later named rookie of the year in 2020. Most recently, in 2021, DiMarco was offered the Silhouette Vision Sensation Lens national manager role, while maintaining her regional sales manager role. Under her management, the Southeast was named region of the year in 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022, and DiMarco herself was named regional manager of the year in 2021.

**SHE SAYS...** "Live with passion and do not let fear get in your way. Keep moving forward, even if you feel you are not qualified and/or the goal feels too large. Frankly, what you believe about yourself impacts your success or failure—believe in yourself."

## Carolina Gago Olmedo

**CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER**  
IOT Lenses  
Madrid, Spain

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "She is a key figure in the world of optometry and vision sciences. She is influential for her industry knowledge and experience, as well as the ways she has worked to unify the operations of IOT and deliver a better experience for our customers."



As a 16-year-old, Carolina Gago Olmedo excelled in physics and was determined to pursue a future career in that field. But after finding the field too ambiguous, she dismissed the idea entirely.

One fateful day she found herself needing glasses, so she went to an optical store to get fitted for her first pair of prescription glasses. Amazed by the process, she remembered that optics was a branch of physics—and that sealed the deal for her career in optometry.

In her 18 years in the optical industry, Gago Olmedo has worked as an optician, progressive lens designer, researcher and an unexpected shift into sales and marketing with IOT Lenses.

Today, she oversees the daily operations of 400 partners in over 70 coun-

tries—working hard to ensure united and aligned management teams. Under her leadership, her teams have launched 35 new products, and in the last five years, nearly doubled the company's growth, as well as diversified into new business lines.

Her guidance also helped IOT successfully introduce the concept of private label lens designs that didn't exist in the market—enabling hundreds of laboratories worldwide to compete with greater independence, better margins and greater differentiation points.

"What inspires me the most is the company's vision," she said. "IOT aims to be part of the next major revolution in the optical industry since the advent of free-form technology. It's incredibly gratifying to know that we are working to build an optical industry that aspires to be radically different from what it is today."

**SHE SAYS...** "My greatest accomplishment is in having assembled a team that I am immensely proud of, one that our clients both trust and consider an integral part of their team."

## Barbara Lax

**CO-CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER**  
ClearVision Optical Company  
Hauppauge, New York

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "She has played a tremendous role over the past few years, as the business needed to be thoughtfully shepherded through the COVID storm."

Although Barbara Lax is a finance

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guru—starting as a CPA and climbing the ladder to become chief financial officer of ClearVision Optical Company—she strongly believes in making business choices with people in mind.

Affectionately known as “the Queen of Cash” at ClearVision, Lax leads the financial analysis group and handles all matters of profitability. She also orchestrates the internal operations related to facilities management, business insurance, business intelligence, inventory and logistics, key accounts and the company’s distribution center—with a central focus on the customer experience.

“I love the values of a family-owned business,” said Lax. “I understand how important it is to be customer service-minded and I enjoy bringing a service-first mentality to every aspect of the company.”

She also brings her strong work ethic to every obstacle. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Lax significantly supported the family-owned company’s operations, and was determined to maintain relationships with the company’s employees, customers, vendors and sales consultants.

With her specialized financial and optical knowledge, Lax successfully helped the company provide essential services to customers, manage inventory and maintain profitability during the shutdown.

“I’ve found that by treating everyone with respect, our company was able to easily gain the support of everyone we worked with during a really difficult time,” she said.

Beyond her responsibilities as co-CEO and CFO, Lax loves mentoring young professionals on their career path. She is also a long-time member of the Optical Women’s Association, Financial Executive Women’s Group, Long Island Financial Executives Group and Institute of Management Accounts.

**SHE SAYS...** “It’s important to invest time and effort into people. This leads to doing business the right way from the start.”

## Cynthia McWilliams

**CHIEF OFFICER OF SALES**  
OGI Eyewear  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “In the reboot of OGI, the sales team reaching our goals will be a major influencer of how we are positioned in the market going forward. The sales team is the voice and face of our company and Cynthia’s expertise pulling together the best team in the industry will chart the course for OGI being the company to partner with, succeed with and have fun with as a supplier.”

Cynthia McWilliams’ career in the optical industry began at LensCrafters, with the help of a friend. She explained, “A friend was going to a job interview at a company I never heard of called LensCrafters, and she said ‘hey, they are hiring 2 people.’ I tagged along and got



## Simone Meskelis

**SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT,  
ECP AND RETAIL**  
Hoya Vision Care  
Lewisville, Texas

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Simone shares the passion of her team and has unified our company. She is focused on programs and partnerships that represent the independent market as well as a unique perspective to retail accounts as well.”



the job. I loved the eyewear industry and never left.” At LensCrafters as a merchandizer over a group of stores, McWilliams developed exclusive trademarked frame collections, and eventually took on the role of director of frame purchasing—she was, at the time, the youngest person to be promoted to director at LensCrafters.

McWilliams has worked throughout the eyewear industry over the past 36 years, at companies including Diaco, Viva, Luxottica and Kenmark. She helped launch the first-ever Flexon TV commercial, once set the record for selling the most Ray-Bans in the world per year, negotiated and developed new products with Leonardo Del Vecchio and discovered a VTO technology that was later purchased by Luxottica.

Now, as chief officer of sales for OGI Eyewear, she is helping to grow the company’s sales by focusing on the independent market and developing a state of the art VTO system. “I enjoy helping people to see and feel their best while wearing eyewear,” McWilliams said—something she gets to do every day as part of her job.

**SHE SAYS...** “Surround yourself with a great team and trust your instincts. Women are very committed and passionate, and sometimes their voice is not always loud enough.”

Simone Meskelis has been in the optical industry for more than seven years following nearly 15 years in business consulting in Brazil. She has been involved in projects related to all aspects of optical business management including operational efficiency, financial budgeting and cost control, process improvement and standardization, strategic planning and sales management across multiple industries within the public and private sectors.

In 2016, she began her optical career through sales analytics and implementation of incentive plans. By 2020 she had joined Hoya as the vice president of sales enablement, leading the business intelligence team and the sales analytics and revenue management groups. More recently she took on the

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new role of senior vice president for the ECP and retail channels.

“The optical industry has an inherent noble purpose which is to help improve individuals’ lives through vision and that in itself is an inspiration. Additionally, Hoya is strongly committed to supporting independent practices, which means that we have a strong focus to positively impact business owners through support and partnership. Having a team that works together to help our customers is inspiring to me on a daily basis.”

Meskelis said she entered the optical industry by chance, but has fallen in love with the people and the impact she sees everyday. She said, “I have met so many brilliant individuals that are passionate about their work and bring a strong sense of mission and purpose to their day to day and this has certainly inspired me to contribute to the field.”

**SHE SAYS...** “I think we have a prime opportunity to grow in the optical industry as we are seeing increased diversity in the field and increased female presence. My piece of advice is don’t try to do it alone, take in all the support and help you can get. This industry is filled with talented individuals that are eager to help.”

## Brianna Rhue, OD, FAAO, FSLs

### CO-FOUNDER AND CEO

Dr. Contact Lens + Owner of West Broward Eyecare Associates  
Tamarac, Florida

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Dr. Rhue is

passionate about her businesses and about helping others succeed through technology. She has a proven track record of getting things done and pulling people up along with her.”



Brianna Rhue began her career as a student of optometry in 2005. She became an OD in 2009 and has served the industry for more than 33 years. She founded Dr. Contact Lens with Dr. Jennifer Tabiza in 2017 to help serve patients and practices. This has allowed her to become a voice for innovation and better care.

“What inspires me every day is knowing that we as ODs give so much to our patients to take care of their vision. I want to empower others to know they hold a lot of the cards and that it is up to us to understand this abundant industry and how investing in themselves is the only way to enable them to continue to take care of their patients.”

She said her own experience having myopia as a child has helped shape her journey in the optical field. She first started wearing glasses, then switched to contacts in the third grade, something she said hooked her on the industry and charted her path in optics. Likewise, she is also grateful for the many mentors who have helped her along the way.

“I always had great mentors and

loved seeing my colleagues share their gifts with others. So many of us get busy in our clinics taking care of our patients and forget to take care of ourselves and our businesses and that is how I believe I have made a difference in developing Dr. Contact Lens for optometrists to not only help their patients but for them to develop prosperous clinics and help empower their staff.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Surround yourself with great people both in your life and in your business because it is a long bumpy road, and you need to see others doing it all between career, family and taking care of yourself.”

## Wendy Salle

**CHIEF MERCHANDISING OFFICER**  
New Look Vision Group USA  
New York and Miami

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “She has served as a mentor and advisor to many in the luxury eyewear industry, helping them achieve a better understanding of unique products and their retail business.”



In 1987, Wendy Salle moved to the U.S. from England and went to work for an optician who needed some sales help. She loved the mix of medical and fashion, so she studied, became a licensed

dispensing optician and an illustrious career followed.

Salle owned and operated Salle Opticians in Atlanta, building it into one of the highest grossing independent luxury stores in the U.S. She sold to Luxury Optical Holdings (LOH) in early 2021, staying on while adding the role of chief merchandising officer for the 30-plus LOH stores.

In 2022, LOH was purchased by Canada-based New Look Vision Group and Salle joined them to head merchandising for the expanded group in the U.S., which today is close to 70 stores and counting. Her role harnesses her years of industry relationships to stay a leader in the U.S. luxury market.

“I love luxury product and people,” said Salle, who feels blessed to have had a great peer group. “As a solo business owner, it’s important to have people to bounce ideas off, share successes and challenges and learn from each other. The optical high-end sector is very lucky to have some of the smartest businesspeople I know, and I am grateful that many of these have become friends and confidants.

“I have trained many opticians over the years and always tried to foster a very inclusive, sharing environment. By sharing my path to success and many setbacks with younger industry peers, I hope to have inspired them to create the optical practices of their dreams. It is not an easy path, it takes years, but it is so very rewarding. I am lucky that my daughter Nicola is following in my footsteps.”

**SHE SAYS...** “All women should surround themselves with people invested in their success, find a men-

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tor, join a group such as OWA and see the support that is available to help you succeed.”

## Nicole Skibinski

### VP, BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND OPERATIONS

EyeQue  
Newark, California

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Nicole wears many hats at EyeQue—a little bit of sales, a little bit of innovation and a big passion for the industry. She has a genuine desire to see her clients become more successful in the industry.”



During the COVID-19 pandemic, Nicole Skibinski left her 20 years in clinical work and role as chief operating officer for a multi-doctor, multi-location practice for the opportunity of something even more fulfilling: the rapid innovation and advancement of optical science with EyeQue.

“It was my passion to marry clinical work and technology—and this was the time to jump in,” said Skibinski. “The development of new materials, designs and technology constantly challenges and expands our ability to greatly enhance the quality of people’s lives.”

As vice president of business development and operations at EyeQue, Skibinski ensures seamless transac-

tions and develops strong strategic partnerships that help grow the company and pivot award-winning technology into B2B. She also streamlines eyecare professionals’ workflow to improve their bottom lines, and has led countless optical departments to record growth and sales.

Her marketing strategies and 25 years of knowledge in the optical industry have catapulted business development for EyeQue into forward motion—preparing the company and the industry to reach new heights.

Skibinski is helping eyecare practitioners understand and appreciate the value that EyeQue’s vision testing devices can offer to their patients.

She is also a longtime member of the Optical Women’s Association (OWA) and the Opticians Association of America (OAA).

SHE SAYS... “If you want to grow as a woman in the industry you should advocate for yourself, find a mentor, network with leading women and believe in your potential.”

## Jenny Smith

### VICE PRESIDENT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Neurolens  
Coppell, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Jenny is the most passionate, hard-working and committed employee we have. Her enthusiasm and passion is evident in every interaction you have with her.”

Jenny Smith took many paths to become a leader in the optical industry.



SHE SAYS... “I am inspired by the ability to make an impact in practices and in the lives of patients. Educating practices to level up their efficiencies and service levels and then watching that come to fruition is unmatched.”

## Rasa Tamulavichus, OD

### PRESIDENT, BIG CITY OPTICAL AND CEO, EASY OPTICAL EYE CARE

Chicago, Illinois

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Dr. Rasa’s influence comes from her approachable demeanor and unwavering commitment to patient care. Her team knows her as a person well connected to the outside world seeking out opportunities to evolve the field of optometry. Dr. Rasa has designed a telemedicine platform that maximizes patient choice.”



Dr. Rasa Tamulavichus has been in private practice since 2004, starting her career with a big box lease at Walmart Vision Center. By 2014, she had launched her own business, Easy Optical Eye Care, where she was able to learn the full scope of optometry and her patients. Since 2017, she and her business partner have opened 17 locations of her second business venture Big City Optical.

She also serves as a member of the American Optometric Association/Illinois Optometric Association and as the

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VSP Ambassador for the State of Illinois.

“Optometry has entered its Renaissance Era with new technologies and quick adoption rates from patients have moved the profession at a rapid pace in the last five years. I am excited how these new technologies combined with broader acceptance from practitioners and patients will increase the accessibility of patient care.”

Dr. Tamulavichus said she has gained a lot of knowledge from her mentors over the years helping her to craft her skills and improve patient care. She noted that as a practice owner, she “gets to define what greatness is and those early influencers had a big part of what my companies and I are like every day.”

**SHE SAYS...** “As an immigrant to the United States I came from an area of the world where you had to find a side hustle to support your family. I always believed that private business is at the heart of the American Way. I was always drawn to the sciences and wanted to enter into a field where entrepreneurship was celebrated and I believe that optometry represented that 20 years ago and continues to head in that direction today.”

## Lois Woldt

**DIRECTOR OF MERCHANDISING**  
Shopko Optical Corporate  
Green Bay, Wisconsin

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Her drive, enthusiasm and hunger to learn is a great example for her team. And most importantly, she understands the needs of both the optical patient and the practitioners.”



After spending 36 years in merchandising with Shopko Stores, Lois Woldt joined Shopko Optical in 2019 to lead the merchandising functions of the new organization.

When this happened, Woldt used her merchandising prowess from her experience in fashion apparel and accessories (including fashion sunglasses) to navigate the learning curve she faced transitioning to the optical industry. She not only survived, she shined—gaining an important understanding of the needs of both optical patients and practitioners.

Today, in her current role as director of merchandising, Woldt is accountable for leading the overall merchandise strategies that support 141 centers—including buying, business planning, merchandise presentation, and trend and competition analysis.

She has driven significant financial success through margin expansion initiatives across lenses, frames, contacts and consumables. She also manages vendor relationships, and leads the charge for skill development and career growth of her team, comprised of senior buyers, a senior business analyst and merchandise support staff.

“Through the years, I’ve learned so much from so many fellow teammates,” she said. “I learned that you don’t need to complicate things—you

just need to listen. I also learned that it’s okay to be uncomfortable—that’s how you learn and continue to grow.”

**SHE SAYS...** “I’m inspired by watching my team grow and the biggest compliment I can get is that I developed a strong team.”

## Susy Yu, OD, MBA, FFAO

**DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS STRATEGY AND OPERATIONS SUPPORT**

Vision Essentials  
by Kaiser Permanente  
Los Angeles, California

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “She has demonstrated leadership skills, national regulatory and public policy expertise, and over 20 years of experience as a business strategist and operations manager at a major health care organization.”



Susy Yu, OD, is a senior clinical and business administrator who loves exploring new opportunities, new technology and new tools to improve operations and patient outcomes. She leads a fantastic team of product managers for frames and lenses, finance, marketing and strategic project consultants to

execute on these ideas.

Week after week, Yu’s focus is on population care management, translating the clinical perspective into concrete business outcomes. She’s also influential across all aspects of eyecare, from clinical operations to optical retail supply chain to overall strategy.

“The innovations coming into the health care industry will reshape how we deliver care,” she said. “This is an opportunity not just to improve health outcomes for patients but also to allow our clinicians to streamline their workflows and help them in their busy practices.”

Beyond her work at Vision Essentials, Yu is involved in many industry groups, including the National Board of Examiners in Optometry board of directors, Optometry Giving Sight board of directors, Council on Optometric Practitioner Education governing committee, and as an American Academy of Optometry diplomate in Public Health and Environmental Vision.

What inspires her and what is her vision for the future? “Optical and optometry are related but different fields,” she said. “As someone with a foot in both worlds, I believe that optical has the potential to be about so much more than selling frames and lenses.

“And optometry has the potential to be about so much more than refractions and writing prescriptions. Both fields together create a systemic opportunity to improve the health of an entire population. That’s the main focus of my career.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Be brave. Take risks.”

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### Erin Adler

#### SENIOR MANAGER OF DIGITAL MARKETING

Zeiss Vision Care US  
San Diego, California

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She has an attitude of continuous improvement and elevates the existing business offerings with her unique expertise.”



Erin Adler never sought a career in vision care, specifically. As a marketing strategist, she just wanted to work for a brand she could believe in.

Before her optical career, Adler worked for digital marketing agencies around the San Diego area, earning recognition for her specialized expertise in marketing and search engine advertising. After 12 years building her impressive resume, Adler transitioned to her position at Zeiss Vision Care.

“Zeiss has such a rich history of innovation and scientific thought leadership that I’ve become a passionate optical nerd because of the company,” said Adler. “It’s the only place I’ve ever worked where everyone fosters a familial atmosphere—striving for what’s best for the industry, the customer and society above all else.”

In her current role, Adler works on various cross-functional digital business transformation initiatives, including customer portals, eLearning, sales-force/CRM, electronic ordering and web redesign. Most recently, she assisted in the announcement and launch of Zeiss emerging solutions.

As much as she loves bridging the gap between IT and brand marketing, she also enjoys interesting one-off projects, too.

One highlight was the opportunity to research, craft and curate museum pieces for the Kentucky Headquarters and Zeiss’ previous San Diego office. “I was able to dive into the rich history of optics, and it was one of the most fun and inspiring things I’ve ever been privileged to do,” she said.

Reflecting on how far the optical industry has come—and how big an impact the field has on the lives of others—Adler strives to improve all areas of business and customer relationships.

SHE SAYS... “I’ve always believed leading with passion is the best way to have a positive impact—small or large.”

### Tara Koch

#### SENIOR DIRECTOR OF SALES ACTIVATION

EssilorLuxottica Wholesale N.A.  
Dallas, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Tara devotes her efforts in the organization to making sure we have complete go forward plans. She spends count-

less hours making sure everyone in our organization is successful.”



Tara Koch started her career with Essilor nearly 17 years ago, as a brand sales consultant before becoming a distribution sales manager, then national sales manager. She has led teams of brand and lab consultants, now serving as the sales lead of the sales activation team which supports key plans for the sales team working with independent ECPs. She said she loves the idea that what her work represents makes a difference in peoples’ lives.

“I am inspired by the amazing people I have had the opportunity to work with and for at EssilorLuxottica. The passion they have for doing the best for our customers and working hard for the mission of improving lives by improving sight has motivated me throughout my career.

“Be open to change. I have had the opportunity to work for many leaders in a number of different roles and while it was a lot of change, I learned something that was valuable from each leader and role.”

Koch strives to keep the customer, the independent eyecare professional, at the center of what she does in her role. She is also proud to have partici-

pated in several charitable initiatives during her tenure including the company’s vision foundation adopt-a-school events where she said, you are quickly reminded of the impact a pair of glasses can have on the life of a child.

SHE SAYS... “I would encourage other women to develop a network of colleagues and leaders who you can learn from and who will support you throughout your career. Think about business decisions from perspectives in the organization beyond your own role to have a deeper understanding of their organization.”

### Katie Lauver, ABOC

#### CHIEF REVENUE OFFICER

GPN Technologies  
Front Royal, Virginia

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Katie is a life coach, wellness coach and mentor to women in business and through personal connections. She has been recognized as an OWA Emerging Leader and currently serves on the board of directors as chair of the Website Committee. Katie is committed to supporting women in all aspects of the industry. As a leader she has shown a vulnerability that breaks down walls and allows for anyone who is in her circle to benefit from her experiences and passions. She is surely a rising star in our industry.”

Katie Lauver joined the optical industry in 2012 as an optical sales rep for a private practice in North Carolina. She quickly developed a love for optics and

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### Dr. Chioma Michaelson, OD, MBA, LDO, NCLE-AC

**OPTICIANRY PROGRAM DIRECTOR**  
Georgia Piedmont Technical  
College  
Clarkston, Georgia

knew this would be her career path. She became a certified optician, rising to optical department manager.

“After opening my own business, The Herbal Spectacle, where I made herbal medicine geared toward eye health and overall wellness, I went part-time in the office. I loved being able to feed my entrepreneurial spirit while still providing patient care; and then, GPN fell in my lap. Working for GPN has been an amazing experience and I love supporting our partners and clients to drive their business forward with our technology.”

In 2018, she joined the Optical Women’s Association where she quickly realized she wanted to be “heavily involved in this group of power-house women.” In 2020, she joined the Professional Development Funding committee in the organization and led their ambassador program. Since then she has moved over to chair the Communications and Website Committee for the organization and has been added to the board of directors.

**SHE SAYS...** “Seeing women in this industry rise to the top of their companies inspires me beyond belief. We are in a time where women in optometry are taking over. They are crushing goals and having massive success within their companies, and it motivates me to continue to push toward my goals and always go for gold.”

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Her presence is empowering to a diverse student population in the sense of being a desirable role model. She is responsible for the development and implementation of the curriculum for students enrolled in the degree/diploma program. In addition to her effective leadership as the program director, she is the driving force behind much needed capital improvements in the available program facilities.”



For Dr. Chioma Michaelson, becoming an opticianry educator happened completely by chance.

After graduating with an optometry degree in Nigeria, she practiced for a few years there before moving to the UK where she became certified, joined the British College of Optometrists and practiced a few more years.

When she moved to the U.S., she decided to try something different. It was while she was pursuing an MBA and an associate degree in opticianry

that her world changed.

“I found myself explaining concepts to my colleagues and to my surprise and joy, they all repeatedly told me that I belonged in the classroom,” she said. “I also discovered that I totally enjoyed teaching them and that simplifying concepts came naturally to me—the education fire was lit in my heart. I decided that given the opportunity, teaching would become my career and mission. When an opportunity presented itself at the local opticianry college, I jumped at it.”

In her role at Georgia Piedmont Technical College, Dr. Michaelson develops and maintains the academic curriculum, in addition to being an instructor. Not only has she increased program attendance and retention, she was nominated for Faculty of the Year. She also won the 2022-23 Georgia Piedmont Technical College Student Club Advisor of the Year for her work with the Opticianry Program students in further developing the Student Optical Society.

**SHE SAYS...** “I believe I’ve made a difference by virtue of being an effective role model particularly with young women of color. I represent an example of ‘if you can see it, you can be it!’ I encourage my students to chase the highest heights even if they seem impossible.”

### Krystal Patterson

**SENIOR MANAGER OF BUSINESS  
SOLUTIONS OPERATIONS**  
ABB Optical Group  
Coral Springs, Florida

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Krystal is a

key member of the Business Solutions pillar and helps drive the successful operations of its solutions including Abby, Analyze, Verify and more. As the brains behind much of ABB’s new product, Abby, she is effectively driving implications in our industry that will be felt for years, influencing doctors and their patients to consider different ways to maximize their eyecare through digital commerce.”



Krystal Patterson began her optical journey nearly 25 years ago as a pre-tester while in high school. This love of measuring and tracking brought her to ABB where she took on roles in product development. She is now part of the team that brings the digital commerce platform, Abby to market.

She plays a key role in supporting the company’s business solutions including identifying gaps to improve efficiency in operations, uncovering areas of opportunities to support growth internally and externally for ABB’s independent eyecare professionals, to help maximize and keep the sales in the practice through the company’s digital commerce, Abby.

“I love problem solving and having the opportunity to have influence. The landscape is ever-changing, and we are always facing new challenges, so how

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we pivot and come up with solutions is what will set us apart.”

She enjoys her role because it allows her to make a difference in the lives of her peers, employees and bosses. She said it has been a privilege to encounter so many people during her career who have helped her understand how to approach obstacles, show grace under extreme pressure and to stand by her beliefs.

**SHE SAYS...** “Have the vision to view obstacles as opportunities to grow. Remember to get out of your comfort zone and follow where God leads you.”

### Erika Plank

#### DIRECTOR, PROVIDER COMMUNICATIONS

VSP Vision  
Rancho Cordova, California

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Erika is an impactful leader with 20 years of experience in strategic communications, marketing, brand development and management—overseeing communications to VSP Vision’s more than 41,000 network doctors.”



Had you asked Erika Plank how long she’d be at VSP Vision when she joined

in 2009, she would have guessed about three to five years. After all, that was the average tenure for her previous marketing roles. But today, 14 years later, she’s still with VSP Vision and going strong.

In 2015, Plank started her leadership journey as a supervisor of provider communications. Today, she leads the team responsible for communication strategy, message development and awareness efforts for VSP Vision’s national network of providers. That work includes over one million touchpoints a year to keep doctors informed, engaged and fully supported in their success.

“I feel fortunate to have worked on so many important initiatives that have helped to move the business forward in my 14 years with VSP,” she said. “One thing I’m most proud of is building a team from five individuals focused on running business communications to a team of 13 that provides strategic communications that ladders directly to the business strategy.

“Through collaboration with each other, business partners and our stakeholders, the team has transformed the way we communicate.”

Plank also played a critical role in the rebranding of the VSP Premier Edge program in March 2023. Her understanding of the doctor audience helped ensure the program better reflected the offering’s evolution and how it continues to give a competitive edge to private practices.

She’s been a member of the Optical Women’s Association since 2015 and currently serves as the vice chair of the Connections & Enrichment Committee.

**SHE SAYS...** “I feel strongly that mentors and advocates are critical to professional success, which is why mentorship is a key attribute of my leadership style.”

### Gwendolyn Plummer

SENIOR ASSOCIATE EDITOR  
Vision Monday  
New York, New York

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “During her five years at *Vision Monday*, Gwen has become an integral part of the *Vision Monday* editorial team. Her ease at juggling social media postings, overseeing and writing *VMAIL* product launches and editing and writing *VM*’s e-newsletter, *The Independent Eye*, is nothing short of impressive.”



Gwen Plummer, who wanted to be an editor for as long as she could remember, came to *Vision Monday* as an assistant editor in 2018. She said, “I think it started as a tween when I would tag along to the grocery store with my dad so I could beg him to buy me a copy of *Bop* or *J-14*. I attended Skidmore College and majored in English, all the while getting as much editorial experience as I could through internships, on-campus magazines and online writing.

Today, as a senior associate editor for *VM*, one of her major responsibilities is writing, editing and overseeing our *VMAIL* LaunchPad department which spotlights three new eyewear or eyecare products every day.

“Because one of my biggest responsibilities is managing *VM*’s LaunchPad feature, I like to think that I’ve helped smaller, independent eyewear brands get their hard work in front of more eyes. I’ve also worked hard to make *VM* a supportive and collaborative space for independent ECPs—I love hearing from independents, and I love giving them a platform to show off their life’s work,” she said.

Plummer is also *VM*’s social media maven, who single-handedly manages all of our social media channels, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram. She is currently helping *VM* launch its newest e-newsletter, *Going Green*, which will explore sustainability trends and tactics for ECPs.

*Vision Monday* is lucky to have such an energetic, dedicated and invested writer/editor as part of its staff.

**SHE SAYS...** “Everyone is nicer than you think. I have found myself feeling intimidated and overwhelmed by how experienced, smart and just plain cool the people in our industry are—but I’ve found that everyone is kind, welcoming and happy to talk. This is a tight-knit but ever-expanding industry, so ask questions and get to know as many people as you can. You will be thankful that you were brave.”

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## Tyjia Sherman, LDO, ABOC, NCLEC

**LICENSED DISPENSING OPTICIAN,  
VISION TO LEARN**  
Director, Opticians Association  
of America

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She has successfully brought DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) to the forefront of the Opticians Association of America and other associations. She leads breakout sessions, educates the board of directors and is working toward traveling and educating opticians on DEI at the national level.”



Tyjia Sherman’s interest in the optical field developed while teaching in a marginalized school district where reading, writing and using computers were among the tasks children were expected to perform. “There were many instances where children would attempt to do the work with unsatisfactory levels of efficiency,” she recalled. “Although visual screenings were provided by partnering organizations, this demographic of children was left with untreated vision problems with little to no access to a com-

prehensive exam. This experience left me wanting to change the narrative for future educators and students.”

While studying for an opticianry degree at Georgia Piedmont Technical College, Sherman was recognized for her management skills by the Opticians Association of America, which awarded her its National Leadership Award in both 2017 and 2018. Upon graduating in 2019, she tapped into many sectors of optical work from management, consulting, educating, mentoring and advising.

“My active involvement in industry organizations is a huge contributor to my personal growth and development. This helps to establish and improve professional experiences not just for me but for future generations,” she said.

Currently, Sherman sits on the boards of the Opticians Association of America (OAA), Vision of Hope (VOH) and the Opticians Association of Georgia (OAG). She is the Diversity Equity and Inclusion chair of the Opticians Association of America (OAA) and the second vice president elect for the Opticians Association of Georgia (OAG).

**SHE SAYS...** “What sets you apart is also what makes you great. Keep developing yourself and becoming the best version of you. Find your purpose and pursue it.”

## Cristin Sullivan

**DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS  
DEVELOPMENT**  
PERC and Opti-Port  
St. Louis, Missouri

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Cristin has taken over a sales team and vendor relationships for the PERC/Opti-Port team. Sounds easy enough, but



she has enhanced prior relationships as well as helped grow and lead into new ones. She has strong relationships with vendors and her customers. If there are any significant issues, Cristin can be counted on to solve the issue and help to strengthen the relationship.”

Cristin Sullivan, director of business development for PERC/Opti-Port, didn’t have to look very far for a mentor to jump-start her optical career that began in 2008 at Doctors Vision Center following her graduation from the University of Florida.

“In the first few years of my career, I had the opportunity to work with my father, Buzz Hollis. My family owned and operated Doctors Vision Center and I took a temporary position in the

fall of 2008 when jobs were limited after the financial crisis. As a very green college grad my father allowed me to have a safe space to ask questions, make mistakes and fostered collaboration between all levels of the organization. I never aspired to join the business but after several months of contract work, I loved what I was doing.”

Currently, Sullivan handles all integration and operations for both PERC and Opti-Port. She also heads up vendor relations with major vendors.

“The primary purpose of my role is to lead, strengthen and grow PERC and Opti-Port through effective planning, strategic analysis and management of both the sales team and vendor network channels. I am most proud of what our team has been able to accomplish in the last two years,” she said.

**SHE SAYS...** “It is important to me to pay forward the kindness, mentorship and ‘safe-space’ environments that gave me the opportunity to learn and grow.”

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## Laurie Adams

### CREATIVE MANAGER

Marchon Eyewear  
Melville, New York

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Laurie has mentored numerous creative professionals and perfected her craft over her 25-year tenure on some of the most recognized brands in the world. She works seamlessly with our partners around the globe in connecting the eyewear segment of the brands DNA to the end consumer.”



This past May, Laurie Adams celebrated 25 years with Marchon Eyewear. Her journey began at New York’s Fashion Institute of Technology, where she graduated with a bachelor’s degree in graphic design. Adams then moved to Milan, continuing her studies at Istituto Europeo di Design. As her career took off working in ad agencies, Adams found herself gravitating toward the accessories industry.

She said, “When the opportunity came up to be a senior art director at Marchon, I was intrigued by the health care aspect of this industry, the giving back and improving lives through sight. I love the diverse design opportunities I have, whether it’s designing a new trade show booth or creating a cam-

paign to tell our sustainable frames story, there is always something new and rewarding to design for.”

Adams is responsible for the visual direction of both Marchon and Altair, from trade show book designs to market week event design to corporate branding and communications. In addition, she oversees the creative development of all marketing and branding across all of Marchon and Altair’s brands, and has been a central part of the teams that launched brands like McAllister and Pure Eyewear from the ground up.

“I love design and I love to help people,” Adams said. “I am fortunate enough to be able to make my two passions a career. I work alongside an amazing group of managers and have a team that is so collaborate and always goes the extra mile, no matter how difficult the challenge ahead is.”

**SHE SAYS...** “My team consists of all women. The most inspiring thing for me has been fostering their creativity and seeing them grow. I love to see the results of their success. My advice for women would be don’t be afraid to explore something new.”

## Paula Hamon Boone, OD

### RETIRED OCCUPATIONAL OPTOMETRIST

Civil Service, Department of Defense, Naval Medical Command Norfolk Naval Shipyard, Portsmouth, Virginia

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She has made a difference by influencing students to pursue the profession of optometry and advising them along their career path.”



Paula Hamon Boone, OD, spent the first decade of her career as a staff optometrist. She subsequently spent the next 30 years with the Department of Defense/Naval Medical Command located in Portsmouth, Virginia.

There she served as the division supervisor of optometry and director of the Sight Conservation Program for the Norfolk Naval Shipyard, providing eyecare and safety instructions to 10,000 civil servant employees and over 5,000 military personnel stationed in the area.

She partnered with the Navy Marine Corps Public Health Center and the US Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine to enhance the role of occupational optometry in the larger environmental health community.

Dr. Boone was the first African American female licensed to practice optometry in the state of Virginia and was appointed by two governors to serve two four-year terms on the Virginia Board of Optometry.

Since her retirement in 2016, Dr. Boone now serves as a course reviewer for the Council on Optometric Practitioner Education and on the Indiana University School of Optometry Diversity Council.

“Retirement also allows me the time to fulfill my passion for the recruitment of underrepresented minority students

into the profession,” said Dr. Boone, who serves as the director of the National Optometric Association’s “Visioning the Future” HBCU Mentorship Program, established in 2020 to facilitate African American students’ career advancement in the field of Optometry. “I’m honored to participate in this vital initiative.”

Dr. Boone was also recognized as the 2021 Optometrist of the Year by the NOA for her efforts in this impactful program.

**SHE SAYS...** “I am inspired by the enthusiasm and commitment of my mentees to become highly skilled, compassionate and culturally competent optometrists.”

## Jennifer Coyle, OD, MS, FAAO

### PRESIDENT

Pacific University  
Forest Grove, Oregon

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Last summer, Dr. Coyle became the first optometrist to become president of the entire Pacific University—not ‘only’ the College of Optometry.”



Dr. Jennifer Coyle’s career journey is highlighted by several “firsts.” In 2013, she was elected the first woman presi-

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dent of the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO), and last year, made history when she became the first optometrist to be president of Pacific University and the first alumna to be appointed to the position.

Behind all the impressive accolades is a woman who is simply passionate about making a difference in others' lives. She said, "When I graduated from optometry school 30 years ago, I never would have believed that someday I would be the dean of two colleges, let alone someday be president of my alma mater. Or be the first optometrist to serve as the president of a comprehensive university."

Yet that's exactly what happened.

After completing her Doctor of Optometry and a Master of Science in Clinical Optometry at Pacific University, Coyle spent 14 years teaching the contact lens curriculum at Pacific, while concurrently serving in private practice for 12 years. She served as the dean of the Pacific University College of Optometry for 12 years, followed by nearly three years as the dean of the Southern California College of Optometry at Marshall B. Ketchem University before accepting her current role at Pacific University in 2022.

"For the 29 years I was focused on optometric education and optometric practice, it was such an honor to help students live out their dreams to provide eye and vision care that helps patients function better in their lives," she said.

**SHE SAYS...** "Seek out mentors who are doing things you are interested in doing yourself, and when someone offers to coach you, take them up on that offer."

## Aurora Denial, OD, FFAO, DAAO, (OE)

**CHAIR, DEPARTMENT OF CLINICAL EDUCATION AND CLINICAL SCIENCES**  
New England College  
of Optometry  
Boston, Massachusetts

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Her ability to lead, empower and mentor has benefited years of graduates and so many faculty and students."



As a young woman, Aurora Denial was attracted to her future profession after meeting a friend's mother who was an optometrist. "To know a female optometrist was quite unusual then, when few women were in the field. She practiced with a close friend, and they had a wonderful career.

"It was through visiting and talking with her that I recognized that optometry is a balance between a sort of science that involves working and interacting with people. That's what drew me to optometry," Dr. Denial said.

Today, as a professor at New England College of Optometry (NECO), Dr. Denial blends academic insights with hands-on experience gained through more than 30 years in both the clinic and classroom settings. Currently serving as chair of the Department of Clinical Education and Sciences, her primary area of research focuses on the

educational process.

She develops, teaches and oversees the sequence of clinical reasoning courses that are taught to first, second and third-year students at NECO. Additionally, Dr. Denial is a primary care provider and a clinical instructor at the New England Center for Eye Care.

"I have had the opportunity to work with many students in the clinical setting as well as in the classroom," she said. "I like to think that I have influenced students' critical thinking skills and clinical practice."

**SHE SAYS...** I have always loved being a contributor and leader within a larger organization. The diversity of students and curiosity of the students is inspiring."

## Carla Mack, OD, MBA, FFAO, FBCLA

**HEAD, GLOBAL AND U.S. PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT**  
Alcon  
Fort Worth, Texas

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Carla is an experienced OD who has worked with the largest ophthalmic suppliers and, during the course of her career, has mentored numerous women (and men) ODs."

Dr. Carla Mack has worked exclusively in the eyecare industry since she was 17 years old when she began working for her local optometrist. The initial interest in the optical field came from her father and a family friend.

"My father had two best friends: one was our family optometrist, and one was our dentist. We saw them both on



a regular professional basis, and our families were also quite close. At the age of 12, I had a career project that included a presentation and an interview," Mack said. "I had no real interest in dentistry, so I chose to explore optometry. Once I drew the cross-section of the eye on the poster board, I was hooked and never looked back."

Mack has been in the industry for nearly 15 years, starting in global roles in both medical affairs and professional marketing at Bausch + Lomb before joining Alcon nine years ago. Most recently, she's taken on a new role as head, global and U.S. professional education and development.

"My responsibility is to set the vision and strategy for my team around the world and work with my global franchise partners and U.S. leadership to bring the voice of the eyecare professional to our strategy," Mack said.

**SHE SAYS...** "There are so many possibilities for growth, so explore them and be deliberate about what you want and why you want it."

## Lisa McAlister

**GLOBAL MYOPIA LEAD**  
Johnson & Johnson Vision  
Jacksonville, Florida

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Lisa's

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strengths, dedication and passion in the myopia category has led her to where she is today, currently as the chair of the board of the Global Myopia Awareness Coalition (GMAC), where she and her team raise awareness of childhood myopia.”



Lisa McAlister, global myopia lead, Johnson & Johnson Vision, has more than 19 years of progressive leadership experience in multiple industries, 12 of which are in optical. The interest in optical started close to home for McAlister, who also holds the position of chair of the board of the Global Myopia Awareness Coalition (GMAC) at J&J Vision.

“My dad is a type 1 diabetic, so I’ve always closely watched the impact that disease has made on his life. As I started to learn more, I realized that sight can be threatened by many chronic diseases, including myopia,” McAlister said. “Sight truly is our most precious sense and when it’s threatened, the impact is immeasurable, and I wanted to work in an industry where I could truly make an impact.”

At J&J Vision, McAlister leads a cross-functional team from sales to professional education to marketing to delivery of high quality service and products to the company’s customers and patients.

“As the Global Myopia Lead at John-

son & Johnson Vision (JJV), I am focused on changing the trajectory of myopia around the world.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Be a continuous learner. Take on challenges that are presented to you. Collaborate consistently. Execute with excellence.”

## Gilda Mehraban

### VICE PRESIDENT OF CORPORATE ACCOUNTS AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Zyloware  
Port Chester, New York

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Gilda’s main role at Zyloware includes key account sales and support, developing and growing current relationships with key retail partners as well as cultivating relationships with new perspective retail partners.”



With her background in marketing, licensing, sales, and a law degree to boot, Gilda Mehraban brings a unique edge for fashion and business development to the optical industry.

As former brand director for REM Eyewear, she has worked with Converse, John Varvatos and Lucky Brand. In 2017, she transitioned to Zyloware to work with key retailers with a focus on

sales and opportunities outside traditional product lines.

This year alone, Mehraban launched an exclusive brand for Shaquille O’Neil for MyEyeDr. and won New Product Launch of the Year for a product created with National Vision.

She has not only expanded Zyloware’s retail partners, but also discovered a great passion for personal branding—and encourages other women in the industry to show up as their authentic selves.

“The industry needs more dynamic women at all levels of leadership. The best way to grow your career is to develop your own personal brand,” said Mehraban. “Focus on your strengths and what sets you apart.”

**SHE SAYS...** “I hope I can be an example of bringing feminine traits to the profession—trust, relationship building, listening, thoughtfulness and intuition can create many business opportunities.”

## Lauren Michael

### SENIOR DIRECTOR OF PRODUCT/DESIGN, U.S. GLOBAL BRANDS

Safilo  
Secaucus, New Jersey

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Working for one of the eyewear industry’s key players in the design, manufacturing and distribution of prescription frames, sunglasses and outdoor eyewear, Lauren brings 20 years of eyewear industry experience in optical and sunwear design, and product development.”



When Lauren Michael fell into the optical industry 20 years ago, she had no idea what to expect. She said, “All I knew was that I was interested in product development for accessories and this was my segway into the industry. Eyewear was not a category I knew much about, however, I was immediately drawn to the technical aspects of the development process, combined with the creative elements.” As it turned out, Michael found the perfect career for herself.

Michael’s role oversees the development process of eyewear at Safilo, from ideation through market launch. She works closely with designers, product developers, marketing, and sales teams, while fostering synergies with Safilo’s global brand, innovation, sustainability teams—and working with the manufacturing and fiscal teams.

She maintains relationships with licensing partners, identifies market opportunities and trends, and drives innovative development. In short, she touches nearly every aspect of eyewear at Safilo, and showcases her strategic vision, leadership skills and deep understanding of the optical industry.

Michael understands the importance of having a mentor and mentorship, and has long-standing partnerships with local colleges for internships programs. She has played a critical role

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in the Safilo x Parsons 2019 Student Project, and has stayed in contact with many students and interns to help them make industry connections.

**SHE SAYS...** “Aim high and follow your goals. I am a firm believer in being supportive and helping to inspire others, as this has helped pave the way for my career path.”

## Heather Oliveri, LDO

**SENIOR LEARNING MANAGER,  
HEALTH & WELLNESS, VISION**  
Walmart  
Bentonville, Arkansas

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “She has encouraged and mentored other Walmart Vision Center employees to grow to love the career of optician—helping over a dozen associates become certified and licensed or promoted to Vision Center Manager roles (sometimes both!).”



25 years ago, Heather Oliveri began as a Walmart cashier and worked in several areas of the front-end and accounting office until she found her niche in a Walmart Vision Center, where she worked her way up to a certified and dual-licensed Vision Center manager with a passion for sharing her love of opticianry.

“Over the years, I had the opportunity to travel to other stores in our market, region and division, teaching and mentoring market leaders and Vision Center managers. This led to special projects with our home office, which led me to my current role as senior learning manager in 2019.”

Today, Oliveri is responsible for the end-to-end learning strategy for Vision Center and optical lab associates at Walmart, as well as program management for optical associate learning at Sam’s Club.

“I’m most proud of launching our new optical education platform, OpticalU, from the Optical Training Institute, to all of our vision/optical associates,” she said. “It includes the new Optician Development Program (ODP) that will help more than 9,000 associates access higher-paying roles and more career opportunities through certification and licensure.”

**SHE SAYS...** “I can’t believe I get to share my passion every day with our 15,000 Vision Center associates while bringing them education and programs to further their careers.”

## Amanda Shapiro

**VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING**  
Europa Eyewear  
Vernon Hills, Illinois

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “She always leads her team by example, while also taking the time to teach and mentor those in and outside of her department.”

Amanda Shapiro’s career has taken some unexpected turns—ultimately



## Rhonda Sizemore

**REGIONAL VICE PRESIDENT  
OF SALES**  
EyeMed Vision Care  
Mason, Ohio

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Rhonda has been crucial in the building of our sales development program in partnership with a local university. The time and care that she gives to our interns who become sales development trainees is incredible.”



Rhonda Sizemore’s passion for mentoring within the optical industry is both the reason for her professional success and the driving force behind her personal legacy.

Almost 16 years ago, Sizemore went to work for EyeMed. With a background in sales and account management, she believed in the company’s culture of innovation and scientific growth—as well as the optical solutions they provide.

“When you believe in your company and product, your passion shows to the client,” said Sizemore.

As regional vice president of sales, Sizemore leads several sales teams, including 18 sales representatives across several states. She also manages the sales intern program, which partners with local universities to recruit new talent, convert interns into

taking her from researching the genome to marketing eyeglasses. She worked in genetics after college, eventually transitioning to marketing and starting her own production company. But when she met her husband, Scott Shapiro (CEO of Europa Eyewear), she started attending optical events, helping him with projects and advising on brand strategy. It wasn’t long before she started working full-time for Scott’s family business.

In her role as VP of marketing, Shapiro translates top-level organizational objectives into a strategic marketing approach and creative direction. She played an important role in creating and launching the STATE Optical Co. brand. She also led the initiative to build a new Europa website, reintroduce the American Optical brand to consumers and create a new AO Eyewear website—all while building and leading the internal marketing team and cohesive network of agencies and freelancers.

The success and happiness of her team and of each member of the Europa family is always her number one professional priority, and it’s reflected in everything she does.

**SHE SAYS...** “Everything you’ve done up to this point is something you can draw on for the career you want today.”

## WOMEN WHO ARE TEAM BUILDERS AND DEVELOPERS OF TALENT

EyeMed sales executives, and relocates representatives to various territories throughout the country.

When speaking in college classrooms, her advice is always simple and twofold: “Work hard and love what you do.” Since 2015, the sales intern program has successfully converted 13 interns into full-time positions.

“Observing the success of the young interns and sales representatives within our organization is one of my proudest career accomplishments,” said Sizemore.

**SHE SAYS...** “I hope my legacy in the optical industry is that I helped others develop their careers; I truly want to see everyone in the field flourish.”

### Stacey Soltis

**NATIONAL SALES MANAGER**  
Eyewear Designs LTD  
Bethpage, New York

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Stacey leads by example. There is no one better one-on-one. She helps individuals see a vision of the future and guides them on how to achieve their goals.”

Like many people, Stacey Soltis fell into the optical field by accident. While she was searching for something new in marketing and business, she met an OD and his wife who amazed her with their practice’s growth story and values. That inspired Soltis to become a sales consultant with Rem Eyewear, where she



earned a long and distinguished list of accolades over nine years.

In 2019, she joined Eyewear Designs LTD as regional manager, and was promoted to national sales manager in 2021.

Today, Soltis excels at growing relationships with key accounts nationwide, building and mentoring the sales team, and serving as the liaison between sales consultants and the corporate office. In fact, Soltis’ expertise, ability to motivate her team, and

unwavering commitment to her customers’ success, have all played a key role in tripling the growth and sales for Eyewear Designs’ direct sales force.

“Under her leadership, our sales team has achieved outstanding results in an era where sales reps are experiencing new challenges and need new solutions to succeed,” said one colleague. “Her dedication to the success of her team and her tireless work ethic places her in the first rank of the many sales managers I have worked with over my 40 years in the industry.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Never give up on your dreams. Stay motivated and focused on what you want to achieve. A strong work ethic and dedication will lead you to success.”

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to Bruder®  
a Hilco Vision Company

## Congratulations

from your teammates at Bruder Healthcare & Hilco Vision

**Open your eyes to Bruder.** You know Bruder for our #1 doctor-recommended moist heat eye compress, lid hygiene products and our new Dry Eye Drink. Now, meet one of our team members, awarded **Vision Monday’s Most Influential Women in Optical 2023.**

### SHARON BURKART

SENIOR DIRECTOR, MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS



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

## Sharon Burkart

### SENIOR DIRECTOR, MARKET- ING COMMUNICATIONS

Bruder Healthcare  
Alpharetta, Georgia

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Her dedication and connections within the optometry industry, especially the dry eye category, drive awareness and provide innovative solutions.”



Sharon Burkart never imagined that a mountain bike accident—and a stick in her boyfriend’s eye—would inspire a lifelong career in the optical industry. “I was amazed at the talent and kindness of an ophthalmologist who opened his practice to do an eye exam and remove shards of debris from my boyfriend’s eye,” said Burkart. “I can truly say that the eyecare market found me.”

It’s no surprise that such a personal experience shaped Burkart’s love for the industry and its members. Now celebrating 20 years at Bruder Healthcare, Burkart has worn many hats in marketing communications, including brand and accounts management, online marketplace, social media, catalog printing and production, and customer service.

As senior director of marketing communications, she leads marketing initiatives for all brands, in all channels of trade, and across all mediums.

Burkart is also the leader of the new

product introduction program. She has provided multi-platform and channel support for seven Bruder Healthcare products, including Bruder Moist Heat Compress, Eyeleve Contact Lens Compress, Thermalon, MediBeads and Proto-Cold.

Her team is particularly active in working to advance the science and education for dry eye disease. With Burkart’s leadership, they are preparing to launch three new dry eye innovations to the market soon.

“My days are full and enriching, but there is still so much to learn and do in the field,” said Burkart. Always learning, she’s an active member of Ophthalmic World Leaders and a champion of the Bruder Healthcare Optometric Education Connection Program.

**SHE SAYS...** “It’s inspiring to work in this industry and to provide products that bring relief and comfort to so many.”

## Mikki Collins

### FOUNDER OF ROWT MAGAZINE

Business Development Lead  
for Groups & Alliances with  
Safilo  
Lake Stevens, Washington

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Mikki is super passionate about business growth, leadership and personal development. She is the founder of ROWT (Reps and Opticians Working Together), a magazine focused on supporting reps and opticians. She is super active on many committees in the Optical Women’s Association and is definitely one to watch—she is a superstar.”

More →



## Congratulations

Carla Mack, OD, MBA, FAAO, FBCLA  
Head, Alcon Global and US Professional  
Education and Development  
for being recognized as one of Vision  
Monday’s 2023 Most Influential Women in  
Optical – Mentor Category.

Dr. Mack is an amazing leader who serves as a true inspiration. Her unwavering dedication and belief in the potential of others has enabled them to flourish. We want to express our heartfelt appreciation for the positive impact she has made on eye care professionals, practices, and patients around the world. Thank you, Dr. Mack, for being such an incredible mentor.

Alcon congratulates all women honored this year.

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



Mikki Collins began her career in the eyecare industry in 2009 as a certified surgical technician assistant in cataract surgery and in 2011 she joined a private ophthalmology practice and earned her certification as a certified ophthalmic assistant. “After spending over a decade in patient care, I found a love for eyewear and pursued a career outside of the office,” Collins explained. “I began my journey as a sales rep in 2020 working with independent brands and moved into a national man-

agement role in 2022.”

Along this journey, in early 2021, Collins founded *ROWT Magazine* (Reps & Opticians Working Together). Through *ROWT*, Collins has created a space for the industry to bring up issues, listen to one another’s experiences and try something new.

She explained, “Before *ROWT*, I felt reps were stuck in only knowing what their company taught them, but with *ROWT* this has given reps a chance to learn from one another’s experiences and can help aid in bringing new ideas to their business. The gap between reps and opticians has hindered our industry for far too long, it’s time for us to work together with more empathy and understanding.”

In addition to her work as founder of *ROWT*, Collins is a member of the OWA

and an associate chair on the Association’s digital and marketing committee, as well as a member of the communications and website committee.

**SHE SAYS...** “Network with like-minded women and find yourself a mentor. Join organizations like the Optical Women’s Association and get involved in conversations like we are having at *ROWT*. Your voice can make a difference.”

## Susan Daly

**DIRECTOR, OPTICAL STRATEGY & DEVELOPMENT**

IDOC

Stamford, Connecticut



CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Susan is an innovator at her core and has great passion for helping small businesses, because she was once one herself. Susan joined IDOC as an optical consultant and over time recognized the need for a better process and efficiency in how a practice manages their frame inventory, selection and data insights.”

Susan Daly, director, optical strategy and development at IDOC, has worked in the optical industry for 20 years, tak-

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# Prevent Blindness

Our Vision Is Vision.

Congratulations to our own

## Kira Baldonado, MPH

*Vice President, Public Health and Policy*

for being named one of the

**MOST INFLUENTIAL WOMEN IN OPTICAL.**

For twenty years, you’ve been leading the way to improve our nation’s vision and eye health. We’re looking forward to what the future holds.

– *Your friends and colleagues at Prevent Blindness.*



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

ing breaks during college to study abroad and during the recession in 2008-09 to run her own business (a coffee shop in the Catskill Mountains in New York) for seven years.

"I keep coming back to optical because of the people, the challenge and the ability to help small business owners, what this industry was built on, and on which it continues to depend," Daly said. "I enjoy the complexity, the relationships and the autonomy, because while the industry is old, the opportunity to innovate is broad."

As a director at IDOC, Daly is responsible for the successful ongoing delivery of the portfolio of optical services, along with the ongoing innovation pipeline to offer even more to the independent optical.

"I'm happy to still be working directly with our frame partners and other

frame companies whose product we purchase in our service, IDOC Inventory Management. The community of strategic professionals at this industry's frame companies is unmatched and I count myself lucky to be part of it," she said. "I am also managing a group of consultants, buyers and inventory planners who make me look like I know what I am doing through their hard work, dedication to the independent optometric practice and daily demonstration of their expertise."

**SHE SAYS...** "My advice may be controversial but forget that you are a woman. Being a woman is a single data point, and one that has become more fluid in recent years. It describes neither your fullest capacity nor your biggest opportunities."

## Rose Harris

**SENIOR DIRECTOR MARKETING,  
NORTH AMERICA**  
Transitions Optical, a division  
of EssilorLuxottica  
Pinellas Park, Florida



**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Rose began her career at Transitions Optical in 1991 and has served in various sales and marketing roles. During her career, she has led launches of numerous generations of Transitions products, driven key account marketing programs, overseen brand activations and managed education initiatives, including Transitions Academy, one of the optical industry's most well-recognized educational events."

Rose Harris has always been focused on helping people improve their vision working her way up the ladder at Transitions Optical in the areas of consumer and B2B marketing, and taking on positions in sales and business development to help gain broader perspective. Today she is involved in strategic development, implementation and integration of all marketing programs for North America.

She was recently the project lead on launches of products such as Transitions Signature GEN 8 lenses, helping

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## Heather Oliveri

LDO, Senior Learning Manager,  
Health & Wellness, Vision

# Congratulations

On being recognized by Vision Monday as one of the **Most Influential Women in Optical**.

Thank you for **inspiring** our Vision Center associates with your passion and helping create even more pathways so they can build great careers!

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

to present some of the first national consumer advertising campaigns.

“The uniqueness of our industry, being both health care and retail, makes it interesting. Not only do we help people see the world, but we also allow them to express their personal style to the world.”

Harris said she has always tried to share the breadth of her experience and understanding of the optical industry with her team to deliver the highest level of support to partners and eyecare professionals. She said this begins with understanding patient expectations, purchasing behaviors and needs.

**SHE SAYS...** “Know your value and how you contribute best. Become ‘known’ for that ... i.e. being innovative, or a problem solver. This will lead

to being asked to be on more projects. Then, take any opportunity to work across the company or in the field with customers and with successful industry professionals.”

## Stephanie Woo, OD, FAAO, FSLs

**OWNER AND FOUNDER, CONTACT LENS INSTITUTE OF NEVADA,  
FOUNDER AND CEO  
OF WOO UNIVERSITY**  
Las Vegas, Nevada

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “As the founder of Woo University, an online educational platform that delivers high quality CE to over 20,000 optometrists and optical staff, she has truly revolutionized

continuing education in our field and continues to innovate.”

Dr. Stephanie Woo has been an optometrist for 12 years, owning three large private practices in Arizona and California. In 2020, she sold the practices to start a new one in Nevada with a focus on specialty contact lens patients for hard contact lenses, scleral lenses, custom soft lenses, scleral cover shells and myopia management. She is also the founder and CEO of Woo University, a non-profit organization that has delivered over 100,000 certificates to eye doctors all over the world.

“I founded the Contact Lens Institute of Nevada in 2020 to provide excellent specialty contact lens care for extremely complex eyes. My clinic is dedicated solely to contact lenses, and we do not accept medical or vision insurance.



She said education was the passion that led her to create the Woo University.

Now, with the Woo U platform, doctors have access to speakers and topics from the comfort and safety of their own home.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Life is too short to spend it doing something you don’t truly love. If there is something you would rather be doing, it is completely possible, you just need to develop it and take action.”

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## Congratulations to ZyloWare’s Gilda Mehraban

VP, Corporate Accounts & Business Development

*for being honored as one of  
Vision Monday’s  
Most Influential Women in Optical*

**Your ZyloWare Family is Very Proud of You!**

Congratulations and thank you to all of the winners for your contribution to our industry!

**100** YEARS OF  
ZyloWare  
SINCE 1923

# Above and Beyond

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

## Kira Baldonado, MPH

### VICE PRESIDENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND POLICY

Prevent Blindness  
Chicago, Illinois

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “In her 20 years at Prevent Blindness, Kira Baldonado has grown the organization’s impact by developing strategic partnerships, elevating the patient voice and advancing the knowledge base available for vision nationally.”

Currently serving as vice president of public health and policy, Kira Baldonado oversees the organization’s community programming and policy. She serves on a number of coalitions and committees to ensure that the broad



public health and patient advocate perspective is considered in planning and implementation, including the National Eye Health Education Program Partnership, the Global Retina Patient Council, the Time in Range Coalition, Global Coalition on Aging, and coalitions related to retinal conditions (AMD/DR), thyroid eye disease, and NMOSS (neuro-myelitis spectrum disorder).

“Vision health sits at the intersection of child development, learning, lifelong productivity, social engagement, and

personal independence. I have the incredible opportunity to make sure that vision health is addressed to make sure there is success in all of these areas.”

As director of the National Center for Children’s Vision and Eye Health (NCCVEH) at Prevent Blindness from 2011 to 2018, she was responsible for providing direction and leadership to early detection efforts and other essential public health interventions related to children’s vision and eye health systems in the U.S.

She coordinated the strategic and programmatic efforts of the NCCVEH, including the work of the National Expert Panel, the NCCVEH Advisory Committee, program initiatives in seven states, and Federal agency relationships.

SHE SAYS... “I have witnessed the devastating impact of uncontrolled diabetes on vision health, and the pain and regret of not paying attention to vision health when there was a chance of preventing blindness. In each case, there were social determinants of health, cultural beliefs and systems of care to be understood before the patient engaged with vision care professionals. We should all go beyond the clinic door to find out what drives health behaviors at the individual, community and systems level.”

## Maureen Cavanagh

### VICE PRESIDENT KEY ACCOUNTS

Safilo  
Canton, Massachusetts

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Maureen is

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# CONGRATULATIONS COURTNEY MYERS

on being named one of

## ***Vision Monday’s***

## **Most Influential Women in Optical**

Your colleagues at Red Havas are proud of your long-standing dedication and commitment to your clients, especially in eye care and eye health, and to our agency.

We are thrilled to celebrate this well-deserved recognition with you and are honored call you a teammate and a friend.

***Cheers to you!***



# Above and Beyond

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

a highly regarded, well respected and proven senior sales executive who has manifested an impressive career spanning over 30 years working in progressively high level positions for industry-leading eyewear and vision care companies. Her remarkable career path encompasses her current and most recent roles with Safilo Group as well as spending 15 successful years at Essilor of America.”



Back in 1992, a recruiter representing Johnson and Johnson Vision Care approached Maureen Cavanagh about selling Acuvue contact lenses. At the time she was searching for a Fortune 50 company that had an exceptional training program to lay the foundation for a successful career. She took the job and over the next 30 years Cavanagh worked for Marine Optical, The Spectacle Lens Group at Johnson & Johnson, Essilor of America and Prive Revaux.

Cavanagh joined Safilo in 2022 as VP of key accounts and today is responsible for the growth revenue of this important sales channel where she manages a dedicated team of key account managers who service the needs of retail chain customers across the U.S. Cavanagh is also a member of the company’s extended global leadership team and serves on Safilo’s Diversity and Inclusion Committee in North America.

She said, “I love that I work for an

industry that helps people see better and a company that has a strong Mission statement—‘See the world at its best.’ Working for a purpose-driven company elates me and gives me a sense of pride and inspiration.”

Cavanagh is also proud of her time with the Optical Women’s Association. She said, “as president and board member of the OWA, we were able to accelerate our financial independence by increasing our sponsorships and memberships as well as building a rich pipeline of talented board members. This is what I am most proud of as I am now on the nominating committee and see the short list of amazing talent being poised to join the board and give back to their community.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Walk in the room with purpose, sit at the table with pride and always keep climbing the ladder to your personal and professional goals.”

## Rebecca Giefer

**CEO, MODO AMERICAS**  
Modo Americas  
New York, N.Y.

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Beyond being a leader in the highly competitive frame vendor category, Rebecca and her team have committed to an ecologically and sustainable future. Under Rebecca’s guidance, Modo has committed to and actually plants a tree for every frame they sell. I wish others would embrace sustainability the way Rebecca has.”

Rebecca Giefer’s career at Modo began 18 years ago, when she joined the company as a temp in customer service after



her graduation from NYU. Over the years, she rose through the ranks at Modo, serving as customer service liaison, manager of the CS team, director of operations, VP operations in 2010 and chief operating officer. In 2020, she was appointed CEO of Modo Americas.

She served on The Vision Council’s Emerging Optical Leaders committee and board of directors, chaired the marketing committee and is currently part of the DEI task force. A strong work ethic and leadership skills are what have propelled her throughout her career.

At Modo, Giefer is responsible for strategic planning and development, as well as implementing the company’s overall growth plans and driving business in the Americas. She also oversees the management of all teams, as well as the financial performance of Modo Americas. What Giefer is inspired by, though, is the value of Modo’s work, especially in its relationships with charitable organizations.

She said, “I love the people I work with and am constantly reminded about the value of my work when I connect with the charitable organizations Modo supports. For our Modo brand, we fund a child receiving eyecare services for each frame we sell, so far we’ve sponsored the screening of over 1.3 million children, by the work of Seva Foundation.

“For our Eco brand, we fund the plant-

ing of trees (by donating to Trees for the Future), reaching 3.3 million trees planted and becoming carbon negative. We also collected over 40 tons of ocean waste material and used it to make frames. Doing this work alongside my amazing team inspires me.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Work hard, seek mentors, network, build authentic relationships, continuously learn, champion DE&I and stay true to yourself. I think an influence of my success is that I ended up at a company that values my exact superpower, which is work ethic.”

## Judy Lew

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
DIRECTOR-OPTICIANRY**

EssilorLuxottica  
Dallas, Texas

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Judy is always willing to help. She develops amazing relationships and will jump in whenever asked or even when not asked. I always know if I call her, she will find time for me and to answer my many questions. She has been in various roles throughout her very long career at EssilorLuxottica. She is the definition of going above and beyond.”



Judy Lew has been committed to helping people see better for more than 40 years, working for several key players in

# Above and Beyond<sup>75</sup>

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

the industry. Most recently, she has served as an EssilorLuxottica ambassador, following many years working in sales and training. She is also a member of the Customer Development Group at EssilorLuxottica, helping to support and influence those in the opticianry.

"I'm working in a profession that truly impacts the quality of a person's life yet is so misunderstood. My inspiration is knowing we make a difference in people's vision as well as educating about who we are and what we do. As I emphasize to optician students, the profession can take you in so many directions as well as build lifelong friendships. The profession still has a small, family feeling."

Lew said she has received tremendous support from family and colleagues throughout her career, particu-

larly her parents and her first manager at MultiOptics, Dave Cuffe. Her journey into optics began with her own family's vision problems, including a father and five sisters who all had myopia.

"While I didn't like wearing glasses at the time, I was fascinated with our optician, Mr. Pfeiffer. Helping us see, making sure your glasses fit properly, and always having a friendly conversation. When I was 14, I decided I must figure out what I was going to do with my life. Between my experiences with the optician and realizing people will always need health care, I felt this profession would be interesting and sustainable."

**SHE SAYS...** "It may sound like a cliché, but networking is essential. Invest time building relationships that many times turn into friendships."

Once you do, you have this vast network of people with whom you can collaborate with at any time. You are not alone in this industry."

## Amélie Morel

**PRESIDENT, SILMO INTERNATIONAL, PARIS  
CO-OWNER & COMMUNICATION DIRECTOR, MOREL GROUP  
Morbier, France**

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Amélie proudly carries her father's legacy, taking bold, creative risks to expand Morel's market worldwide. Her dedication to the optical industry shows in her commitment to Silmo Paris. As its president since 2017, she is the first woman to head the exhibition. The continued success

of Silmo and its international presence is a true testament to Amélie's inspiring leadership."



Amélie Morel is from a family of Jura-based eyewear manufacturers spanning four generations. She said, "It was only natural for me to pursue a local optical curriculum in Morez, one of the cradles of the eyewear industry in France, for my early years of study." Later, she had the opportunity to enhance her optician training with a marketing degree from Berkeley (California) →

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WE SHARE YOUR VISION

**CONGRATULATIONS, Vanessa Bernarding,**  
for being honored as one of Vision Monday's  
Most Influential Women in Optical!

Thank you for guiding and inspiring  
our organization with excellent leadership,  
commitment, and dedication.

Your friends at MyEyeDr. applaud you and all the 2023 honorees.

# Above and Beyond

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

fornia, USA) and then an MBA from Geneva (Switzerland)."

Morel initially worked as an optician but she soon turned her focus toward the eyewear industry, starting with an internship in the company's subsidiary in the U.S., where she ended up staying for five years. Upon her return to France, she took the helm of Morel France and later assumed the role of communication for the Group.

Morel is an independent and family-owned company that she co-manages today with her two brothers, Jérôme and Francis. "We work hand-in-hand to make Morel the French reference in the optical industry. We are fortunate to have complementary areas of expertise where each of us can contribute to the company's success. Jérôme oversees general management, Francis handles

export development, and I am responsible for communication."

Morel, however, wears another hat. In 2017, the Silmo board of directors offered her the position of president of Silmo, the International Trade Fair for optics, eyewear and ophthalmic equipment. "I was unanimously elected and am deeply honored and grateful for the trust the board of directors placed in me. I am particularly proud as I was the first woman to be elected at the helm of an international trade fair like Silmo.

Morel acknowledges many connections throughout her career, but two individuals have left a lasting impression. First, Jacques Morel. "As my father, he taught me everything. He was an open-minded man who trusted us and supported my brothers and me in ensuring the continuity of Morel.

**SHE SAYS...** "My slogan is 'Nothing ventured, nothing gained,' which means one must dare and have confidence in oneself. For someone who has a passion for their profession, nothing is impossible."

## Courtney Myers

**SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT**  
Red Havas  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** Courtney is a rock star at the public relations company Red Havas where she handles PR for Transitions Optical. She has co-chaired the events committee of the Optical Women's Association for several years, and her commitment to go above and beyond to

ensure the OWA's success has been phenomenal. Courtney is most deserving of this award."



Courtney Myers graduated from Carnegie Mellon University with a bachelor's degree in industrial design and minors in psychology and fine arts, which "is not your typical PR degree," Myers said. Combining experience in business-to-business, consumer, health care and technology with her background in art and design Myers provides clients a unique perspective on marketing and

More →

# NECO

New England  
College of Optometry

## Congratulations

### Dr. Aurora Denial

Professor of Optometry  
Chair, Clinical Education & Clinical Sciences Department  
Attending Optometrist, NECO Center for Eye Care, Roslindale

We are #NECOProud of Dr. Denial being named a Woman of Influence for her mentorship. Thank you for sharing your passion and expertise with our community.



public relations.

“At my core I am a storyteller. Whether you are a photochromic dye chemist or a CEO I want to speak your language, dig into your business and tell your story,” Myers said.

From strategic counsel and planning to execution Myers advises clients on public relations, social media, experiential events, CSR programs, brand development, company vision, thought leadership and direct marketing campaigns. She has helped Transitions Optical create, communicate and build their brand around the world.

For Transitions, Myers is heavily involved with Transitions Academy, an annual educational forum for industry partners on company marketing programs and industry trends; she created and managed the Transitions Pro Forum advisory group and Diversity Advisory board, which identify important patient challenges and oversees the development of programs directed to ECPs; and she developed the Transitions Change Agents, a social-savvy group of ODs and opticians who are changing the conversations ECPs are having with their peers and patients around Transitions lenses.

Myers has a special place in her heart for the Optical Women’s Association—she helped execute the OWA’s key events at Vision Expo East and West including the Champagne Breakfast and Connection Series events.

**SHE SAYS...** “Join the OWA. The OWA is a positive and uplifting organization where every interaction is about encouraging, supporting and uplifting each other. I appreciate how inclusive the organization is of all parts of the optical industry.”

## Louise Sclafani, OD, FAAO, FSLs

**HEAD, SPECIALTY LENS PORTFOLIO**  
CooperVision  
Chicago, Illinois

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “She is relentless in her pursuit of knowledge and as equally passionate about sharing her expertise with others in the industry.”



Louise Sclafani has shaped her career with clinical work, leadership and mentoring, and a unique knowledge base in the field of specialty lenses—and her resume is sprinkled with impressive titles.

As a high school student working at a Sears department store, Sclafani helped a customer get a piece of broken glass out of her eye. “I found that I really liked digging around in her eye, and I loved that I could bring her some relief,” said Sclafani. “I knew then I wanted to spend my provide life providing eyecare solutions.”

In her 24-year teaching career at the University of Chicago in the ophthalmology department, Sclafani trained over 70 ophthalmology residents and 175 optometry interns. During this time, she also provided eyecare solutions for customers in clinics across the Chicago area.

“My clinical experience has given me the opportunity to work with amazing surgeons, who helped me flex my skills

and opened my eyes to my role in visual recovery utilizing specialty lenses,” said Sclafani. Now, as head of the specialty lens portfolio for CooperVision, Sclafani presents cutting-edge specialty lens options to eyecare providers nationwide.

Sclafani, who was named one of Newsweek’s Top 200 America’s Best Optometrists in 2023, is a founding member of the Global Ophthalmic Women (GLOW) group, is chair and diplomate of the American Academy of Optometry, serves on the Medical Advisory Board at the International Keratoconus Academy, and continues to see patients at SoLo EyeCare and Gallery in Chicago.

**SHE SAYS...** “Every day, I realize I can change someone’s life with contact lenses.”

## Carol Wilbur

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
Optical Women’s Association  
Dallas, Texas

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “She holds the entire Optical Women’s Association together. Carol works endlessly to keep all of the working cogs of the OWA aligned and moving.”



Carol Wilbur never thought that a bachelor’s degree in applied mathematics and an entry-level job as a print music buyer would eventually lead her to a fulfilling career in the optical industry—

especially as executive director for the Optical Women’s Association (OWA).

For a time, she worked with music educators and wholesale publishers on an international basis. But in 2017, she left the music industry and joined Madeline Crouch and Company as an assistant administrator for the OWA.

Only six months in the position, Wilbur was praised for her attention to detail and ability to answer almost any question—and the rest is history.

Today, Wilbur oversees the administrative aspects of the organization—everything from memberships, sponsorships, advertising, budgeting, event planning and outreach programs.

With her leadership, the organization has experienced tremendous growth in membership, committee involvement, and industry sponsorships, as well as record-setting attendance at Vision Expo events, increased programming and new partnership opportunities.

Her work at the OWA has also expanded educational and mentoring opportunities, broadened the scope of OWA’s annual awards and added a charitable donation element to many regional and award events.

One of her proudest moments was the creation of a Leadership Scholarship program which has already provided over 30 scholarships to future leaders in the optical field.

“The ripple effect of these efforts can be felt throughout the industry,” said Wilbur. “I love seeing women thrive—embracing new roles and taking off to new heights in their optical careers.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Starting your career with access to industry knowledge is a great step-up—join the OWA and see what it can offer you.” ■



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