

#MIWO2024

Meet Vision Monday's 2024 'Class' of Most Influential Women in Optical



This 22nd edition of our Most Influential Women in Optical feature brings a class of leaders, changemakers and trailblazers who are as impressive and exciting as it gets. These are women who are continuing to shape the face of our industry from every angle; they are ECPs, executives, sales and marketing professionals, teachers and so much more. But above all, they are women who have had and continue to have profound impacts on the lives and careers of those around them. And they change our industry for the better while doing it.

This year, the *Vision Monday* editors selected 40 women who are honored in five distinct categories: Executive Suite, Rising Stars, Mentors, Innovators and Above & Beyond. Each of these 40 women have trailblazed their way onto this year's list thanks to their motivation, impact and genuine care for this industry and the people who make it so special. Whether

they're just starting their career or have been an industry backbone for decades, the common thread between all of this year's honorees is the exceptional and influential work they do.

In this special feature you will get to meet and hear from these Most Influential Women in Optical themselves, as well as the people who nominated them, and learn about their careers, inspirations, hopes for the future and more. As always, we invite you to join with us in celebrating these remarkable women, and hope you come away from this year's feature both impressed and inspired.

Here's to another special year of honoring the women that make our industry so extraordinary—we continue to be so proud to bring this issue to you, our readers and the wider industry. ■

—The Editors

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

Kayla Ashlee, ABOC

CEO AND CO-FOUNDER

Spexy
Boise, Idaho

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She’s one of the most well-known leaders in the entire industry, running one of the most recognizable brands.”



Kayla Ashlee never set out to work in the optical industry, but her career passions have certainly found the right home. After college, she started working for two optometrists, learned the trade and became hooked when she realized how much profitability was being left on the table in eyecare practices. She wanted to figure out what was missing, and once she did, it was pure addiction. There was no turning back.

After learning the role of practice manager, she started consulting for other optical practices who wanted to improve their capture rate. Later, she worked for Hoya as a sales rep and refined her training skills. In 2019 she took the leap to launch beSpexy.com, an online training platform for ODs and their teams.

“I believe I’ve made a difference by giving opticians and optometrists everything their school and training failed to mention—the proper way to

build, manage and lead a team, and how to properly purchase, retail and merchandise their massive frame inventory investment,” she said. “We’ve created a solution to help independent practices master both—and we’ve made it amazingly affordable.”

Today, Spexy is one of the fastest-growing training and education companies for optometric staff and practice leadership. Ashlee speaks frequently at conferences and private events and has written a sales column for *Invision* magazine for the past two years. Her communication training is becoming the most effective and trusted way to sell eyewear for ECPs and their staff because her philosophy is simple: “What’s best for the patient is best for the practice.”

SHE SAYS... “My biggest accomplishment is building a culture and team with a reputation for being real, honest, approachable and human. Our authenticity is what sets Spexy apart.”

Kelly Bowling

PRESIDENT

Robertson Optical
Laboratories, Inc.
Loganville, Ga.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “On a daily basis, she inspires everyone at Robertson Optical with her willingness to work shoulder to shoulder with every employee, regardless of their role.”

Kelly Bowling is much more than the president of Robertson Optical Laboratories—many consider her the matriarch



of the family business. Not surprisingly, Bowling grew up in the optical industry, working after school in different areas of the lab. She graduated from the University of Georgia, moved into accounting and a few years later became vice president of the company. In 2016, she became president and CEO.

In her current role, Bowling mainly manages administrative functions and finance. However, she’s also still very involved with the day-to-day operations of the labs, including marketing and decisions on new technologies, both in prescription eyewear and the equipment used to process them.

Her mentors were her father, Richard Robertson, and her uncle, Calvin W. Robertson, Jr., who taught her much about the family business. Now she strives to carry on their legacy through her passion to help ECPs and their patients through innovative solutions.

“I like to think that I’ve made a difference through our legacy and company values to always keep the independent eyecare community thriving in this competitive, ever-changing industry,” she said.

Robertson Optical Laboratories was started in 1958 and is one of the only independent labs left in the southeast, which is why Bowling strives to ensure the company maintains a healthy balance, continuing to evolve to help not

only her company stay relevant, but independent doctors as well.

According to Bowling’s colleagues, she leads the organization with a humility rarely seen among executives, and there’s no problem too small or large that she isn’t fully committed to solve. She always considers the good of the company as a whole—and goes to great lengths to make sure the company progresses.

SHE SAYS... “The wholesale lab business is always changing with new technologies, and it inspires me to learn something new just about every day in our industry.”

Janel Burnett

HEAD OF IT, EYEMED

EssilorLuxottica/EyeMed
Mason, Ohio

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Her innovative technical solutions provide a better vision care experience for our clients, members and providers.”



Janel Burnett’s career is the culmination of smart moves across a variety of industries, ultimately landing her where she is today—head of IT and a member of EyeMed’s senior leadership team. Throughout her career, she has

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held leadership positions and roles in multiple industries, including defense, paper and packaging, manufacturing, retail, insurance and now optical. She has also supported a wide range of responsibilities, including application development, off-shore support models, acquisitions, data center migrations and service management.

“By traversing through IT organizations through promotions and lateral moves, and accepting new roles in current positions, I gained extremely valuable experience, exposure and knowledge that has made me successful in my career,” she said. “I consider this one of my biggest accomplishments.”

With her career movement, Burnett felt fortunate to accept an opportunity within Luxottica’s IT department to support the company’s SAP implementation. Taking this role helped her view the optical industry from a different vantage point, and with her prior experience, Burnett found that she was able to bring many insights to the organization.

Today, she is responsible for EyeMed’s IT organization supporting the managed vision care business. She leads project coordination and delivery of all IT initiatives and maintains EyeMed systems to ensure data integrity and security, as well as performance to service level expectations.

Her most recent achievement was a technology stack modernization to enable growth and innovation, improve user experience and meet changing client requirements.

SHE SAYS... “I’m inspired when I hear feedback from clients, members and providers on how our systems and

technology positively impact their business operations and lives.”

Kaelin Currie

VP OF LAB OPERATIONS
Neurolens Inc.
Coppell, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Throughout her years in the industry, Kaelin has been a mentor to countless people in many fields. Her hand has touched everything from training to corporate strategy to lens designs, lab partnerships and communications. She is a wonderful professional who always maintains the highest level of integrity.”



Kaelin Currie began her career in accounting and finance before transitioning to operations when she joined Neurolens in 2017. The company specializes in prescription lenses that use a contoured prism to treat headaches, neck and shoulder pain, and eye strain caused by eye misalignment.

In this role, she broadened her scope of work and established a commercial launch strategy for the company’s first version of the Neurolens Measurement Device. She was also a driving force behind building a training

and onboarding platform for new providers.

Currie was instrumental in launching the Neurolens Lens Design Software, the freeform design calculator developed by Neurolens to create design files to be manufactured at optical labs around the world. This included integrating the company’s first optical lab partner in November 2020.

“The continuous innovation within our organization makes me excited to go to work every day. Beyond the technology, we continue to expand the impact our work is having on patient’s lives,” Currie said. “Each time I see a patient testimonial or talk to an excited doctor, it reminds me how meaningful the work we are doing here is.”

She said her biggest inspiration personally and professionally has been her mother. “Seeing her in her career showed me how to have grit, resilience, and gratitude in every moment.”

Currie said her open mind has allowed her to propel her career far beyond where she started. She said her desire to learn new things and take on opportunities has helped her achieve the role of a female leader within Neurolens.

SHE SAYS... “I attribute my growth within this industry to a work-hard, learn-hard mentality. When I started at Neurolens, my humility in being new to the industry allowed me to be a sponge and learn from smart and talented colleagues, partners and vendors. Each new lab management system or lab we integrate with continues my growth, network and knowledge.”

Sarah Dacko

CHIEF OPERATIONS OFFICER
Randolph Engineering
Randolph, Mass.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “As the chief operations officer and a third-generation family member of Randolph Engineering, Inc., Sarah brings a wealth of experience and insider knowledge to the table. Her influence in the optical industry is evident through her strategic vision, collaborative spirit, and commitment to the growth and development of her company and its employees.”



Sarah Dacko has a unique perspective on the optical industry. As a third-generation team member at Randolph Engineering, she has been deeply influenced by the passion for the optical and engineering industry that her grandfather and father passed on to her.

She began her career pursuing a degree in social work from Boston College. She said the foundational experience in social work provided her with a unique perspective on human needs and care, which she carried into several subsequent roles.

“Before joining Randolph, I explored various fields, including finance and

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

VM to Celebrate 2024 ‘Class’ of Influential Women in Optical at Luncheon Event at Expo West

NEW YORK—This year, *Vision Monday* will once again be hosting a special luncheon event and program to pay tribute to this year’s roster of 2024 Most Influential Women (MIW) in Optical on Sept. 20 during Vision Expo West in Las Vegas. These women, along with many prior-year MIW honorees and other guests, will be celebrated at this special event. The luncheon will take place from 12:00-2:00 p.m. in Room 3003 of The Venetian Hotel.

“This special, one-of-a-kind event and program in Las Vegas during Vision Expo West marks an exciting and enjoyable opportunity to connect with colleagues, enjoy time together over lunch, celebrate industry leaders and continue to build on the valued and meaningful relationships that make our industry unique,” stated Anne Cooper, edito-



rial director of *Vision Monday* and *20/20*. “We look forward to seeing you there.”

The special program, marking the 22nd year of VM’s Most Influential Women in Optical annual issue and special report, will recognize the accomplishments of 2024’s MIW honorees, whose achievements span an exclusive and unique group of Rising Stars, Innovators, Mentors, Executive

Suite execs and those who go Above and Beyond. Be a part of the celebration as we salute this amazing group of women.

Tickets to the luncheon are priced at \$95 and registration includes the program and lunch. Go to www.visionmonday.com/women to register for the event.

As of press time, Visionary Sponsors for the event include VSP Optics and EssilorLuxottica. The Supporting Sponsors are Advancing Eyecare, EyeMed, Hoya and the Optical Women’s Association. Partner Sponsors are Walmart and Zeiss. For more information, or for companies and individuals interested in sponsorship, please contact James DeMatteis, publisher of *Vision Monday* and *20/20*, at jdematteis@jobson.com.

—The Editors

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

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store management. These experiences enriched my understanding of diverse business operations and prepared me for the multifaceted challenges at Randolph,” she said. “Driven by a commitment to making a positive impact in a macro environment, I transitioned into human resources at Randolph, at a time when the company lacked a formal HR department. I was instrumental in establishing a comprehensive HR department to support our staff.”

In recognition of her leadership and contributions, she was named a member of Chief, a private women’s business networking organization for senior executives. In 2023, Dacko was promoted to chief operations officer at Randolph Engineering, overseeing 10 direct reports across various facets of the business.

Dacko said she is inspired by the ever-evolving nature of the industry, which challenges her to continuously learn, grow, and adapt to new technologies and trends.

SHE SAYS... “Remember, your passion and dedication will shine through, making a lasting impact on your career and the industry as a whole. Embrace every opportunity to learn, grow and connect—your journey in the optical industry will be as rewarding as you make it.”

Becky Fritz

VP, PRACTICE OPERATIONS
VSP Ventures
Rancho Cordova, Calif.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Becky serves a critical and influential role as the day-to-day leadership ‘face’ of VSP

Ventures for our practice teams across the country. Her leadership plays a pivotal role in building goodwill with acquired practices, demonstrating our value to the professional community, and fostering continued growth across the organization. Becky has been instrumental in taking Ventures into the next phase of high performance and a thriving culture. Her sharp talent and dedication make her an industry leader who sets the tone for our teams and organization as a whole.”



Becky Fritz started her optical career journey as a receptionist at a private practice while pursuing her pre-med degree at St. Cloud State University. Following graduation, she planned to attend optometry school but found her calling in operational leadership at a single-doctor commercial practice.

“Since then, I’ve held nearly every role in an optical practice as well as leadership roles supporting both optical operations and clinicians,” she said.

In her role at VSP, she oversees field and central operations to advance the organization’s business strategy. Her primary focus in her first two years at VSP Ventures was to introduce operational processes to deliver better support to practices, ensuring their long-

term success and growth. She said, “I am proud of the progress we’ve made in that time. Since 2022, our organization has experienced unparalleled success and is better positioned for future growth than it was when I first joined.”

She is also a member of several industry organizations focused on women’s success including the Optical Women’s Association, OneSight EssilorLuxottica Foundation, VSP Vision’s Women’s Business Resource Group and VSP Vision’s PRIDE Business Resource Group.

SHE SAYS... “When you do have a seat at the table or the ability to influence, be sure to make space for others to join. Pave the way for future female leaders because there is room for everyone, and teams are made better with diverse perspectives. Above all, be authentic—there is only one you!”

Pamela Riedy, OD, MBA

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF HEALTHCARE SERVICES
Visionworks
St. Louis, Mo.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She’s an integral part of developing and executing Visionworks’ growth strategies—she’s a perfect blend of clinical, operations and strategic leadership.”

Pamela Riedy, OD, has always been fascinated by the health and wellness fields. In fact, an early career in veterinary care exposed her to eye diseases and disorders in pets that then inspired her to study optometry.



Now, 20 years into her career in eyecare, Dr. Riedy has equally focused on seeing patients as an OD and has served in various leadership positions to support health care providers and patient care. Specifically, she’s developed a unique skillset in clinical strategy and operations, transformational change management, training and development, recruiting and retention, digital innovation and telemedicine.

As senior vice president of health care services, she leads the clinical department for Visionworks. In the past year alone, she’s built a new clinical structure where doctors report to other doctors within the organization. She has also introduced new leadership and development programs for optometrists, clinical assistants and the company’s support center.

Dr. Riedy oversees more than 1,300 ODs, clinical partners and business leaders, and is tightly involved in the patient care protocols and doctor satisfaction within Visionworks. She has paved the way to support optometrists and clinical assistants in their patient care, professional networking and career advancement.

“It’s extremely fulfilling to help people grow their confidence and excel in ways they never dreamed they could achieve,” she said.

Her expansive knowledge in the clinical realm of vision care directly influ-

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ences her ability to connect, mentor, and support doctors and other leaders in the industry.

SHE SAYS... “I believe everyone has something to contribute; by uncovering and developing talents in others we ignite a contagious passion that leads to endless possibilities in the optical industry.”

Kristen Tobin

ASSOCIATE DEAN OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

New England College
of Optometry
Boston, Mass.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Kristen not only serves as a leader of the college but also leads ASCO’s (Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry) student affairs and admissions group supporting all the schools and colleges in their efforts to improve both categories. Her leadership is not just local and ASCO-related. Kristen is a mentor for so many women in helping them attain their goals of leadership and discovery. She inspires all of us to be our best.”



Kristen Tobin has worked in higher education for 20 years and at the New England College of Optometry for

nearly 10 years. In her current role, she oversees the student life cycle from admission through graduation. She also manages the school’s office of admissions, the registrar’s office, and the center for academic preparation and achievement.

Further, she oversees enrollment goals and enrollment management. She is responsible for ensuring NECO makes its admission class goals and for managing the support of current students, including student life, activities and events, academic advising and support, NBEO Board preparation and career services. Tobin also sits on the school’s president’s leadership team, representing the student voice and experience, and participates in strategic conversations and oversight for the institution.

“Before working at NECO, I knew little about optometry or the optical field. I am constantly impressed by the field, its new technology and growth, and the wonderful and dynamic people I meet,” said Tobin.

“I gravitated to college admissions and recruitment because it combines education, sales, communications, event planning and strategy. I have always been attracted to small, mission-driven institutions, and NECO is an incredible place to work,” said Tobin.

“I am inspired by students and humbled by the opportunity to be a small part of their journey. I especially love working with optometry students as they are intelligent, dedicated and compassionate people. Higher education and optometry are both fields that are constantly evolving, and I love that I am continually challenged to grow and learn.”

SHE SAYS... “Confidence, hard work, humility, strong communication skills, and the desire to learn and grow are all traits that will serve women well in the optical industry and beyond. Seek mentors and learning opportunities, take risks, and never underestimate the power of humor.”

Jennifer Trakhtenberg

CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER/ CO-CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

ClearVision Optical Company Inc.
Hauppauge, N.Y.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Jen’s passion, generosity and humbleness is unusual in the ‘me’-centric world in which we live. She has an exceptional talent for growing teams, building employee programs, and developing tools to enhance each individual’s personal growth and success. There is never a moment when she does not have the time to lead, mentor or guide ClearVision’s employees.”



For as long as she can remember, Jennifer Trakhtenberg has had a keen interest in the human resources (HR) field. After obtaining a bachelor’s degree in business management with a dual HR/marketing concentration from Binghamton University, she went on to pur-

sue a master’s degree in industrial/organizational psychology from New York University.

After working at Morgan Stanley for seven years as part of their HR asset management team, she joined ClearVision Optical 15 years ago and has never looked back. Trakhtenberg said, “I started in the early days of establishing our talent management (HR) function and progressed to leading the team in 2014. My focus is on the people, culture and philanthropic endeavors of this 75-year-old, family-owned business.”

In 2020, Trakhtenberg assumed the additional role of co-chief operating officer, partnering closely with the company’s leadership team. “Many of my efforts are geared to growing and coaching high performing teams, developing intentional career pathing for retention and succession planning, along with creating an environment that rewards innovation, sales excellence, and where great ideas are welcome. I work closely with sales team members, and across the company to steer projects, develop programs, and to ensure our efforts are aligned with the values of the organization.

“Find resources that help you to stay on top of what trends are coming next. When we are inspired and challenged, we are still growing and can become the best version of ourselves,” she said.

SHE SAYS... “Every single day, I have the chance to share in people’s stories—helping them to be successful, to find a work home where they can thrive, and supporting leaders who genuinely serve others. I have the chance to direct meaningful actions to drive the success of moving our business forward.”

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Crystal Anthony, ABOC

SALES STRATEGY AND PLANNING MANAGER

Hilco Vision
Kewanee, Ill.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Crystal helps to formulate strategic business planning for key accounts at Hilco Vision. She’s a shining example to young opticians everywhere.”

Three years into her career at Walmart (cooking rotisserie chickens at Sam’s Club), Crystal Anthony took a job in the Walmart Vision Center and her optical career began. She fell in love with the industry, soaked up every bit of knowl-



edge she could, and knew she had found her career home.

During the next 17 years with Walmart, she served a wide variety of roles—a dispensing optician; a manager of Vision Centers in Illinois and Missouri; an expert in optical billing and compliance at Walmart headquarters; and a buyer at Sam’s Club specializing in lenses, safety and accessories. She

especially enjoyed buying fun sunglasses for Sam’s Club stores in Puerto Rico, which jump-started her obsession with sunglasses.

After “retiring” from Walmart after 20 years, Anthony took an exciting opportunity at Hilco Vision—her current role as a sales strategy and planning manager for key accounts. As a certified optician and speaker, she uses her 20+ years of optical and retail knowledge to strategize ways to increase sales for key accounts and strengthen Hilco’s relationship with those customers.

Anthony enjoys working with other Hilco Vision experts to develop continuing education, and teaches at conferences, expos and other educational opportunities every chance she gets.

“I will be forever grateful that the optical industry found me because I found a community and sense of purpose,” she said.

In addition to her other responsibilities, Anthony is also the current treasurer for the Illinois Opticians Association and said she feels honored to be part of helping grow the organization and empower more opticians to invest in their careers through membership, community and education.

SHE SAYS... “Find a community that will push you past your comfort zone. Ask for opportunities and stretch roles—don’t wait for them to come to you.”

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Premilla Banwait, OD, MPH, FAAO

VICE PRESIDENT OF CLINICAL PROGRAMS

UnitedHealthcare Vision
Minnetonka, Minn.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She leads efforts to advance thought leadership and clinical programs, delivering value and overall care to customers and members alike.”

After graduating from UC Berkeley Optometry School in 2009 and completing her pediatric residency, Premilla Banwait, OD, worked in pediatric optometry for nearly eight years. Even though clinical work is her passion, she



wanted to learn more about the industry. In 2017, she took a consulting role with Zenni Optical and began overseeing optical product development, educational content and philanthropic initiatives.

“During the pandemic, I was compelled to improve health care access for under-resourced communities and decided to return to school in 2020 to

obtain my master’s degree in public health,” she said. “I’ve since used this degree to assist in eye health campaigns, projects, research and systematic reviews. One project I’m particularly proud of securing is a social impact grant with a group of optometry students to provide vision resources for Oakland Head Start preschoolers.”

In 2023, Dr. Banwait landed her current role as VP of clinical programs at UnitedHealthcare Vision, where she advances eye health programs to support the well-being of members and collaborates with clinicians to make quality eyecare more affordable and accessible.

As a pediatric optometrist, Dr. Banwait’s insights are key as UnitedHealth-

care Vision expands its children’s eyecare programs, including myopia management. She is also involved in various philanthropic efforts and is a staunch advocate for improving vision care access for children from under-resourced communities.

For example, she partnered with Prevent Blindness to develop educational eye health toolkits and resources for diabetic youth. She is also working alongside the UnitedHealthcare Children’s Foundation to develop a myopia management fund for lower income families.

SHE SAYS... “I strive to use data, technology and innovation to develop clinical programs that can evolve with the changing times.”

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Jamy Borbidge, OD

SENIOR DIRECTOR OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

AEG Vision
Dallas, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She leverages her expertise to provide valuable insights, guidance and solutions to complex problems, earning the respect of her colleagues and stakeholders.”



Jamy Borbidge, OD, always knew she wanted to work in either health care or education, and thanks to her current role as senior director of professional development at AEG Vision, she’s been fortunate to do both.

After completing her undergraduate degree, she decided to pursue optometry school to fulfill her desire to be in health care. Her first career role was working as an optometrist in Boston providing direct care and precepting optometry students from the New England College of Optometry. Dr. Borbidge spent the next few years in private practices in Maine, then took a role as assistant professor and director of community outreach at Pacific University in Oregon—enabling her to draw on her passion for education.

In 2022, she joined AEG Vision as

director of professional development and was recently promoted to senior director. Today, Dr. Borbidge excels at providing educational and professional development growth opportunities to doctors at AEG Vision Managed Practices. That support includes developing a new doctor onboarding program, starting a bimonthly continuing education webinar program, and creating a customized online coding module series.

This natural born leader has also been fortunate to help start and run the AEG Optometric Leadership & Advisory Council, which empowers doctors to support doctors through equipment pilots, developing clinical protocols, doctor engagement and education. Her ability to anticipate change and adapt to evolving circumstances enables her to stay ahead of the curve.

“With a focus in optometry education, I’d like to think that I’ve made an impact, if even in small ways, by supporting current and future doctors in providing high-quality, compassionate care to their patients,” she said.

SHE SAYS... “The optical field has many diverse opportunities. Follow your passion and you’ll find success.”

Mary Bowman

SENIOR DIRECTOR, PROGRAM MANAGEMENT, CHIEF OF STAFF

MyEyeDr.
Vienna, Va.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She excels at picking up new initiatives in

unfamiliar areas and driving them to success, while engaging and valuing those around her.”



When it comes to leadership, Mary Bowman is the quintessential Swiss Army knife every organization aspires to have. Her journey in optical began in 2006 at her local optometrist’s office in North Carolina.

“Picture a young, non-compliant contact lens wearer, blissfully unaware of the risks, who ended up with corneal ulcers,” she said. “Treated with kindness by a local optometrist, my experience led to a surprising job offer for a working interview. The camaraderie with coworkers and the fascinating versatility of optics and optometry, along with ever-changing trends in eyewear, quickly turned a mishap into a lifelong passion.”

Starting her career at MyEyeDr. as an ABO-certified optician, Bowman progressed through roles such as practice manager, district manager, and director of operational excellence. She now serves as the chief of staff to the CEO, supporting the company’s strategic framework, serving as key liaison between the CEO and external stakeholders, and driving efficiencies that support the company’s purpose of helping patients live their best lives.

Over the years, she has managed single-unit locations and multimillion-dollar districts, supported internal operations, was the product owner for multi-year projects, and most recently, directly supports the CEO and MyEyeDr.’s strategic framework.

One of Bowman’s major accomplishments was managing the development and successful implementation of a custom web scheduler, which has dramatically improved appointment reliability and ease for both patients and staff. Her focus is always on making operational improvements and fostering collaboration to drive overall company growth.

SHE SAYS... “It’s not every entry-level job that turns into a multi-decade career and I am deeply grateful for the journey I’ve had. Working with people from diverse backgrounds and learning from every department motivates and inspires me every day.”

Katherine Christy

REGIONAL MANAGER

Shopko Optical
Grayslake, Ill.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “As a regional manager, Kat plays a pivotal role in shaping the effectiveness and cohesion of the Shopko Optical team, influencing managers, opticians and doctors through her leadership, coaching and support. Through dedicated coaching and mentorship, she enhances the skills and confidence of opticians, enabling them to provide top-tier patient care and maintain high standards of service.”

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



Katherine Christy began her eight-year career in the optical industry in leadership roles with MyEyeDr. and Sears Optical before joining Shopko Optical as a regional manager in 2020. Today, she is responsible for the overall sales, profit and service performance

of multiple optical centers in a geographic region. She also plays a key role in developing and executing strategies consistent with corporate direction to drive business.

“I find immense joy in helping people be the best version of themselves. Each day, I am inspired by the positive impact I can make in others’ lives, and I strive to motivate those around me to find the same passion and fulfillment in their own work,” she said. “By embracing the opportunities to assist and uplift others, I believe we can all cultivate a sense of purpose and love for what we do.”

Christy said she attributes much of her individual growth and accomplishments to the collaborative efforts and unwavering support of her family, friends and colleagues. She also credits her peers and leadership teams within the optical field. She said, “Each of these groups has played a pivotal role in my professional development. Their collective knowledge, expertise, and support have enabled me to expand my skills, gain valuable insights, and navigate the complexities of this industry and others with confidence.”

She said she joined the optical pro-

fession because, as a child, she struggled with vision problems. Through eye exams and discussing her journey with a close friend, she was inspired to delve deeper into the optical field. As a result, the optical industry has given her the opportunity to help others, especially families, obtain the correct information and eyecare they need.

SHE SAYS... “Empower yourself to reach beyond your limits. Most importantly, make sure you empower another woman to reach beyond her limits because there is room for all of us at the top.”

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Cira Collins, ABOM, NCLEC, MPH

PRINCIPAL AT OPTICAL INTUITION
Lafont Account Executive
Portland, Ore.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Cira is one of the most engaging speakers currently in the optical industry. Her passion for optics, education, patient care, and amazing frame styling is apparent in every course she teaches. After receiving her ABOM designation, she has been working diligently to inspire and mentor other women in the field to pursue their advanced and master’s certifications.”



Cira Collins is a principal at Optical Intuition, a consulting company providing sales, optical education, and public speaking services in the optical industry. She prides herself on only working with independent frame lines, lens manufacturers, labs and other companies serving the independent ECP. She represents Lafont in Washington, Ore-

gon, Idaho, Alaska and Hawaii.

Collins sits on several boards and committees within the optical industry, including the board of directors for the ABO-NCLE and the board of directors of GoodVision USA. She also serves on a committee to build an optician apprentice program in Oregon and is a faculty member of Opti-Con at Vision Expo.

“I began my career at LensCrafters when I came home from living in West Africa. I was not finding work in the field of international public health development and needed a job, but had no intention of creating a career,” she said. “I began as a frame stylist,

became a technician for an optometrist, and spent some time in the lab making eyewear. I moved to a private practice where the hours were a better match for my growing family.”

Collins worked as a dispensing optician and a buyer for five years before being promoted to management, where she served four clinics for the large ophthalmology group.

“I have come to my role in the industry with a focus on a specific mission. I am lifting up opticianry. I do that by building other leaders (lifters), by working to expand the scope of our profession, and by living and teaching new ideas and concepts,” she said.

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“To lift, I have to be visible and wield influence like a tool. I am careful in my messaging so that I can have the most impact. I build up other leaders by speaking about leadership, by making space at the table for new leaders to step up, and meeting them where they are.”

SHE SAYS... “You may suffer from many things, but do not suffer from a crisis of imagination. Fan the flames of what you could do or who you could be. We need you to play bigger than you currently are. And when you finally become the person you want to be, tap others on the shoulder and point them toward their better selves.”

Crystal Crawford

OWNER

Liberated Eyewear
Los Angeles, Calif.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “As the owner of a Black-owned, independent eyewear brand, Chrystal is influential in breaking barriers by reshaping the industry’s landscape. Her brand not only celebrates diversity but also sets trends by infusing unique cultural perspectives into eyewear design, paving the way for inclusivity and innovation in fashion.”



Crystal Crawford began her career in clinical research in oncology, dermatology and ophthalmology. She played a vital role in ensuring the rights and safety of clinical research participants are protected and the integrity of the clinical trials is sustained, which she said impacts the approval of new drugs

and therapies. She also led operational incentives for Fortune 500 pharmaceutical companies that improved and developed departmental processes.

Crawford said she doesn’t believe in following trends or following others, noting that she has always found true liberation “in just being myself and making some noise along the way. I love inspiring others to be themselves and celebrate who they are. Go bold, make mistakes, fail and do it all over again, but most importantly, be yourself,” she said.

This philosophy compelled her to create an eyewear brand that represents everyone who doesn’t fit into the standard ideology of what someone

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should be while reinforcing the importance of eye health, and combining authentic style and quality for all.

“Being passionate about making an impact outside my career, I developed a passion for entrepreneurship and created Liberated Eyewear. Working in clinical research and drug safety required confidence and ‘know-how,’ and I was able to see firsthand how eyecare is just as important as any other sector of health care,” she said.

She pointed to her own experience of needing to wear glasses, and said that the burden of shopping for eyewear compelled her to start her own company. “I was never able to find a pair of frames that gave me confidence, and I wanted to create a brand that empowers others to celebrate their unique style.”

She said the path to a career in optical has been challenging and rewarding, adding that her advocacy for inclusivity allows her to create a supportive and diverse environment in all forms.

SHE SAYS... “Taking risks and failing is not an easy feat, but always stick to why you got started. Learn from and follow the experts, and address challenges. Keep your knowledge and skills sharp, know what’s going on in your industry, and become an expert.”

Heather Harrison

**KEY ACCOUNT MANAGER,
LDO, ABOC**

Carl Zeiss Vision
Virginia Beach, Va.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She is willing to jump in headfirst—and with

such risk-taking, she helps her customers achieve the highest level of success.”



Heather Harrison never believed her senior year job at a Walmart Vision Center would evolve into a 26-year career in the optical realm. Her first job became her passion, and after graduation she pursued every effort to rise in the industry.

First, she completed the apprenticeship program for licensed dispensing opticians in Virginia, followed by an optical license and ABOC designation, while working as a licensed optical manager for Walmart.

During her time with Walmart Optical, she received Vision Center Manager of the Year and Optician of the Year awards for several consecutive years. In 2018, she transitioned her career as a business development representative for Carl Zeiss Vision, and in 2022, she was promoted to associate and key account manager.

As a key account manager, Harrison oversees the management, objectives, and plans for the assigned customers within the wholesale and regional customer base within the United States, including U.S. territories. Her management extends the full range of whole-

sale and regional retail relationships across all business segments, including lab Rx services, lens substrate, dispensing tools, AR coatings, lens accessories, and lab enablement across Zeiss-branded, non-branded and OEM product portfolios. She also implements new product rollouts and upgrades.

“The industry is a blend of technical innovation, personal interaction, and the opportunity to positively impact people’s lives—and I think my career reflects how truly inspiring and rewarding that can be,” she said.

With over 25 years of experience in the vision care industry, Harrison has an expanded footprint across the U.S.—she regularly shares her experiences and optical knowledge with fellow opticians, lab managers and optical business owners.

SHE SAYS... “Innovation in the industry keeps it dynamic and exciting—there’s nothing like taking on a challenge and finding a creative solution.”

Heather Kowalczyk

VICE PRESIDENT

McDougall Communications
Rochester, N.Y.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She shapes how the eyecare community communicates with their audiences. If you’re within the optical industry, it’s a near certainty you’ve seen and been influenced by her content strategies. Yet her role is more than managerial—it’s the

caliber of her ideas, the quality of her writing, and her ability to collaborate that has been instrumental in helping more than 150 optical industry professionals become more knowledgeable, capable and successful spokespeople.



In her current role as vice president of McDougall Communications, Heather Kowalczyk works with editorial teams to develop comprehensive public relations programs that reflect their brand, mission and messaging. And although she’s worked with a wide variety of industries, including optical, medical device telecommunications, accounting, high technology, education and more, she’s found optical to be the “friendliest.”

Kowalczyk, who has an accredited in public relations designation, provides executive level counsel to the likes of CooperVision, Lumenis, Optometry Giving Sight and BioTissue. She also coaches eyecare professionals worldwide, helping them grow clinical and practice management initiatives. Her programs and content are regularly used by *Vision Monday*, *Women In Optometry* and other optical industry media.

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"I've dedicated my career to partnering with eyecare professionals to innovate their practices and improve their patient experiences," she said.

Kowalczyk's 20-year career has an impressive list of accomplishments, including two coveted PRSA Silver Anvil Awards for McDougall's work on CooperVision's launch of MyDay multifocal contact lenses, and content which is read and shared by thousands in the optometry community each week.

SHE SAYS... "There are so many optometry stories to tell. Nothing is more satisfying than uncovering a story that has yet to be told and figuring out the best way to get it out to the masses."

Nadine Lewandowski

VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES AND MARKETING
IDOC
Tampa, Fla.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "She has brought numerous innovative programs and offerings to the optical world, and she is a powerful voice and role model for other women in the industry."

With both parents as doctors, Nadine Lewandowski had always hoped for a career in health care, specifically in pharmaceutical or medical device sales. However, as a recent college graduate, she found herself going into B2B sales that directed her to clients in the optical field.

After 14 years at Alcon, working in sales leadership, training, strategic



accounts, and marketing roles for both Optometry and Ophthalmology, Lewandowski joined IDOC as vice president of sales and marketing in 2023. Earlier this year, Lewandowski was also promoted to lead the organization's optometry marketing services and books & benchmarks services.

Currently, she leads over 30 team members, including seven senior leaders in sales, marketing, services, and strategic partnerships. In total, she oversees the management of 60+ vendor partnerships, 45+ member directors, 1,600+ OD members, 200+ marketing and bookkeeping accounts, and an annual conference with 1,000+ attendees. Lewandowski has both rebranded and relaunched the Financial and Marketing Services at IDOC.

"I pride myself on having helped optometrists grow their practices and help give their patients access to the latest technologies," she said.

In the strategic partnership space, Lewandowski has brought innovative approaches that have been incorporated in the variety of programs offered to IDOC members, leading to the continued growth of vendor partners with IDOC members.

Her awards include President's Club (Top 10% in Sales in Vision Care), Masters Club (Marketer of the Year in Surgi-

cal Marketing), Global Marketing Awards, North America One Team Awards, and US Surgical Team Awards.

She also mentors and coaches IDOC team members; Lewandowski is proud to have coached several team members to also earn their own President's Club sales awards and several promotions while at Alcon.

SHE SAYS... "I am passionate about helping others unlock their full potential so that they can feel inspired by what they do every day."

Melissa Parker

DIRECTOR OF PLEXUS OPERATIONS
VSP Vision
Rancho Cordova, Calif.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Her expertise in the industry results in improved products—and productivity."



Melissa Parker fell into the optical field by chance. She was invited to a VSP job fair while studying communications in college. Thinking she'd only work with VSP until she graduated, she surprised herself by rising in the company ranks to director of Plexus Operations within her 27-year career.

In her current role, Parker manages

the Plexus Operations team, a wholly owned subsidiary of VSP that administers supply chain through a streamlined distribution model, with its primary objective to deliver a wide range of ophthalmic products and services.

Her main responsibilities as director include managing the VSP Lab Network and the VSP Ophthalmic Formulary. The development of her team has expanded the VSP Lab Network to work with most of the ophthalmic labs and key manufacturers within the industry.

Parker is passionate about the technological advancements in optical over the years. She ensures that VSP Vision offers competitive, relevant, and high-quality ophthalmic products, and improves the industry standard of building collaborative teams who are dedicated to top-notch eyecare solutions.

"One of my biggest accomplishments would align with the development and support of my team," she said. "It's important to build a team that enjoys working together, that works toward the same goal, and that support each other. We share in the same successes at the end of the day."

She has had the opportunity to work with many audiences, including members, doctors, clients and brokers in her work with VSP. Parker also participates in the Optical Women's Association (OWA) and The Vision Council.

SHE SAYS... "When it comes to professional development, find a mentor who has a skill or a strength you want to develop. Then do what they do."

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Jacquie Bowen, OD, FAAO, Diplomate, American Board of Optometry

FULL SCOPE MEDICAL OPTOMETRIST

MyEyeDr.
Greeley, Colo.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Her exceptional service and leadership in optometry make her a standout figure in the industry.”



Dr. Jacquie Bowen always knew that she wanted to work in health care but honed her focus while in college—sparked by a conversation with an optometrist in her hometown of Helena, Mont. What started as interest quickly evolved into passion for the eyecare industry that has sustained her career for 36 years.

After graduating from Southern California College of Optometry and completing an ocular disease residency, she opened a small solo practice in Greeley, Colo. The next two decades brought vast change for the practice, ultimately growing into an operation with four doctors and 24 staff members. In 2005, the practice joined

Vision Source, then merged with another practice six years later. In 2021, Dr. Bowen and her partner decided to join forces with MyEyeDr.

Along the way, Dr. Bowen never shied away from serving the industry. She worked for the Colorado Optometric Association (COA) as a member of various committees and as the Northern Colorado Society president, chair of the Leadership Institute, and as a board member for seven years. In 2005, she served as COA president.

Her service continued when she was elected to the American Optometric Association (AOA) Board of Trustees in 2016. This past June, she was named president-elect of the AOA at Optometry’s Meeting in Nashville.

Her dedication to the field has been recognized with numerous awards, including the Colorado Optometrist of the Year and the Colorado Distinguished Service Award.

“Having served as a leader in the industry for many years, I’ve seen the strength of this profession, and frankly, the existence of optometry and opticianry lies in working together as one unified voice in the health care community,” she said.

Overall, she has been instrumental in developing many programs and policies that have improved her practice and the overall industry as it tries to remain ahead of societal, cultural and health care changes.

SHE SAYS... “I am both proud and humbled every day as I work with the most dedicated professionals in the world.”

Wanda Davis

DISTRICT MANAGER

Eyemart Express
Farmers Branch, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Wanda has been instrumental to her store teams as a district manager and mentor. An experienced teacher, she genuinely enjoys investing in the professional development of her team members from the start of their optical careers and beyond, by sharing her extensive retail and optical knowledge. Her valuable feedback challenges team members to improve, reach their goals, and shine in the growing company.”



Wanda Davis is a 25-year district manager veteran with 17 years of district leadership in the beauty industry. As district manager at Eyemart Express, she oversees the operations of more than 20 locations in the optical retail field.

“In this role, I ensure we are growing our markets in the B2B field and doctor detailing so we can be successful year after year. We lead by example to ensure that we have the

right associate in every location to meet the needs of our customers,” she said.

Davis said she draws inspiration from lifting others up professionally and acknowledging their efforts in contributing to the company’s success. She loves to celebrate her leaders’ successes and help them believe in themselves to further their achievements in the optical industry.

SHE SAYS... “I feel like I have made a difference by mentoring others to believe in themselves and in what they can achieve, in any role they choose in the optical realm. Build a network in this field, know your role well, then mentor and train your replacement so that you can move into your new role.”

Mylène Émond

EASTERN CANADA SALES MANAGER

WestGroupe
Ville Saint-Laurent, Quebec

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Always smiling, attentive and efficient, Mylène knows how to help others reach their full potential and goals. She’s always there to motivate and encourage her team and those around her. She consistently finds ways to solve problems and develop new avenues. She is a true leader.”

Before joining WestGroupe, Mylène Émond studied to be an optician, a skill that would help make her a key

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member of the WestGroupe sales team. Committed to personal and professional development, she continued her studies, adding several certifications to her list of credits, including certified professional coach.

“Through strategic recruitment, comprehensive training programs and consistent coaching, I have developed a high-performing team capable of exceeding sales targets. My efforts have not only strengthened our market presence but also fostered a culture of continuous improvement and excellence within the team. This accomplishment reflects my dedication to nurturing talent and driving sales performance to new heights,” she said.

Émond finds inspiration in her work by unlocking the full potential of her sales team. Surrounded by supportive leaders, she said she is encouraged to be herself, which generates positive results.

She credits Mike Debono, COO and VP of global sales at WestGroupe, as a pivotal mentor, adding that his guidance and insights have played a significant role in shaping her professional journey. Émond said, “From providing valuable advice on navigating complex challenges to offering

support during critical decision-making moments, Mike’s mentorship has been invaluable.”

SHE SAYS... “Stay informed about what’s happening in the industry, network, seek out tools like training, be confident, seize opportunities, be yourself and don’t be afraid to stand out. Shine!”

Amanda Frugé

VP OF SALES, PREMIUM FASHION AND LUXURY, CENTRAL REGION
EssilorLuxottica
Houston, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Amanda has built her career at EssilorLuxottica for over a decade. She grew rapidly from a rep position to a field manager, then to director and now vice president. She is a very strong and talented people leader. Her great coaching approach has helped to turn every sales group in her charge into a top-performing team.”



With 24 years of sales experience, Amanda Frugé joined the EssilorLuxottica team in 2014 as a Ray-Ban sales consultant. She quickly rose within the company, and was named

vice president for premium fashion and luxury in 2023.

She has received several honors during her tenure with EssilorLuxottica, including president’s circle and regional sales manager of the year in 2020.

“I am inspired by the people I am honored to work alongside every day. My teammates, direct reports, and sales leaders have taught me so much. Each day, we work together to perfect our craft. I love that our company mission is to ‘See More, Be More,’” she said. “It is never lost on me that our frames hold the lenses that change the way people see the world.”

Frugé said she strives daily to maintain a positive mindset, positive energy and lead by example, keeping her perspective and passion at the forefront every day. She said, “I believe these two traits go hand-in-hand, solidifying trust and relationships. I coach my team on doing hard things.”

SHE SAYS... “Seek and live your passion, approach everything with an open mind, and believe in yourself. Be open to new challenges, take the step forward when given the opportunity, and never stop learning.”

Nicole Jensen, OD

DIRECTOR OF PROFESSIONAL RELATIONS, OPTOMETRIST
Bard Optical
Peoria, Ill.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She has an infectious personality and a desire to see all ODs practice full-scope optometry.”



When Dr. Nicole Jensen, OD, was two years old, she had a strabismus that had to be patched for four years. And with countless hours of vision therapy, a career in the optical industry was inspired by the care she received from her doctors.

Dr. Jensen graduated from Illinois College of Optometry in 2011 and started working for Bard Optical shortly after graduation. At the time, she was also the journal editor for the Illinois Optometric Association and was on the development team for Eyefinity EHR.

Enjoying leadership and teaching roles, she worked her way up to director of professional relations for Bard Optical in 2016. The same year, Dr. Jensen received the Illinois Young Optometrist of the Year Award. She has also received the Patient First Award from Bard Optical in 2019 and 2023.

In addition to seeing patients during the week at Bard’s Center of Excellence, she also trains all the new ODs in the EHR system, teaches about new billing and audit regulations, and recruits new ODs from schools nationwide. Her priority is to help ODs learn the skills necessary to run a well-rounded practice.

Dr. Jensen says her biggest accom-

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plishment is her children—and she is inspired by helping families like her own find vision solutions. “There’s nothing like solving real eye mysteries for patients and doctors: fitting difficult contact lenses, finding the right eye drops to help red eyes heal, or helping anyone with their prescriptions,” she said.

Through her efforts at Bard Optical and beyond, she is essential in helping ODs complete quicker exams without compromising patient care.

SHE SAYS... “There is true power in the women leaders who work in such a male-dominated profession. Go break barriers!”

Diane Jessen, OD

OPTOMETRIST

EyeCare Partners
Wentzville, Mo.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Her efforts have been integral in creating the inaugural mentorship program for EyeCare Partners’ optometry division, which helps shape the next generation of optometrists in reaching their full potential.”

Diane Jessen, OD, has been in the optical business since she was 18, first working at her grandfather’s practice after graduating high school. What started as a front desk job inspired a passion for eyecare—and resulted in a lifelong career in the optical industry.

She began her professional career in a private practice that specialized



in binocular vision and low vision. She then joined Clarkson Eyecare in 2007, and in addition to seeing patients, Dr. Jessen began serving as a mentor to other doctors in 2009.

As a mentor with Clarkson Eyecare, Dr. Jessen learned precise coding, evaluated treatment options for a variety of medical conditions, and built lasting relationships with doctors in her group. When Clarkson Eyecare became part of EyeCare Partners, Dr. Jessen launched a mentorship program across the United States that helps onboard new doctors and connect them to a mentor-advocate in their state, ultimately growing and enriching the EyeCare Partners network.

“I hope I have only begun to scratch the surface in helping other doctors perfect their practice,” she said.

Dr. Jessen is also chair of the mentorship committee of the medical executive board at EyeCare Partners. She is dedicated to developing leaders within the optometry division.

She is inspired by the ability to network and solve problems across a large company. Specifically, Dr. Jessen enjoys studying and evaluating best practices within the industry to enhance Clarkson Eyecare’s level of service throughout the country.

SHE SAYS... “There’s value in sharing wisdom with others. It builds relationships and eases the anxiety of the next generation of doctors joining our group.”

Christina Jones

DIRECTOR OF RETAIL CHAINS AND KEY ACCOUNTS ECP

Hoya Vision Care
Lewisville, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She consistently demonstrates resilience in her leadership; she’s unafraid to challenge the status quo and implement processes that strengthen her teams and benefit her customers.”



Christina Jones fell into the optical industry by accident at the age of 19, in response to a “help wanted” ad in the newspaper. She had no idea she’d stick with the industry for the rest of her life— “I know many would agree: once you’re in optical you never want to leave!” she said.

Jones has worked in every corner of the industry, from her first job as an optician in a strip mall in 1990, to

working with inventory, to customer service management, team training and special projects. In 2014, she made a move to optical sales. In 2017, Jones joined Hoya Vision Care as an individual contributor in the wholesale division, and most recently, in 2023, she was promoted to director of retail chains and key accounts.

Currently, she leads the U.S. retail division for Hoya, as well as large key accounts in the ECP channel. During her year as director, she launched new strategic portfolios for retail customers and has developed new processes to grow Hoya’s business. Specifically, she successfully developed and launched new turnkey Rx solutions for her commercial team. During this same time, Jones has doubled her team—and continues to develop professional relationships across the nation.

“My team is my extended family, and we inspire each other,” she said. “I couldn’t be more proud of what we’ve built together.”

Her true passion in the industry is mentoring her team and enriching their careers. She attributes her success in the optical industry to her mentors—and sometimes, if necessary, turning failures into learning experiences.

SHE SAYS... “With all the industry knowledge I’ve gained in my 30-year career, now I get to pay that forward into the new talent on my team as a mentor to each of them.”

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Donna “Dede” Reyes, FCLSA

MANAGER, CONSULTATION & EDUCATION

ABB Optical Group
Kansas City, Mo.



CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Dede is a knowledge-base in the industry and she shares her passion with clarity, but it is her enthusiastic presence, infectious smile, and ever-changing hair color that make her a joy to work with every day.”

With an impressive list of titles, accomplishments, publications and presentations, and almost 40 years in

the industry, Donna “Dede” Reyes is inspired by perpetual learning and sharing her knowledge with others.

As manager of consultation and education for specialty vision products at ABB Optical Group, Reyes leads a team of 11 specialty contact lens consultants in day-to-day activities and education improvement. She plays a critical role in supporting both

her team and customers when they are looking for specialty lens consultation, educational opportunities and resources.

Reyes also serves as president of the Contact Lens Society of America, hosts her own podcast (“Dede Talks – The Art of Specialty Lenses”), is a content creator for educational pieces for ABB staff, authors articles for the ABB Optical Quarterly Newsletter, and continues to fit specialty contact lenses with patients.

“My love for both science and vision continues to push me forward,” she said. Additionally, she is a member of the Contact Lens Association of Ophthalmologists, Inc. and the Pacific Coast Contact Lens Society.

Through all her avenues of educating and networking in the optical field, Reyes helps practitioners learn the science behind specialty contact lenses, but also the art form connected to successfully fitting specialty and scleral lenses.

“I hope that the knowledge I have in the industry causes the next generation of optometrists to be just as passionate about their careers,” she said.

SHE SAYS... “My philosophy is to never give up and never stop learning. Each barrier you face is a learning experience placed there for a reason—to teach you something.”

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

Kelly Cai, OD

CO-FOUNDER AND COO

Barti Software, Inc.
San Francisco, Calif.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “As one of the youngest female executives in the industry, Dr. Cai has led Barti to become a trailblazer among EHR start-ups, revolutionizing U.S. health care.”



While working at Manhattan Eye, Ear & Throat Hospital in 2022, Dr. Kelly Cai met Colton Calendrella (Barti co-founder) through LinkedIn. They both knew that optometry practice management software hadn't seen any major innovation in decades, and after a few conversations, Calendrella asked Dr. Cai to join him full-time working on Barti.

Today, Dr. Cai serves as partner to the CEO and plays a pivotal role in advancing Barti Software's financial objectives and product development. She's also responsible for a seven-figure annual budget and the financial health of the company.

“From product inception and development to testing, I work closely with industry experts, customers and Silicon Valley software engineers to build a world-class EHR and practice management software for the vision industry,” she said. “Those of us on the industry

side of the profession have a unique opportunity to enhance the tools available to our peers while working to move the industry forward.”

Dr. Cai takes her role seriously and she's proud of her results, which include 10x year-over-year growth and 100 percent customer retention since Barti's launch in 2021.

Within just five years of graduating from optometry school, Dr. Cai's visionary leadership has had a transformative influence on the industry—pushing the boundaries of software available to eyecare providers. She also helped implement industry-first advancements like myopia management templates and native AI-assisted charting.

In the digital world, we're all familiar with the experience of going to the doctor, only to have the doctor spend much of the appointment interacting with a screen. Through Barti Software, Dr. Cai is able to redefine a provider's expectations for their software—enabling doctors to spend more quality time with their patients.

SHE SAYS... “Transitioning from patient care to running a high growth software company in the industry has been exciting, challenging, and above all, a real joy.”

Eva Chamorro

DIRECTOR OF CLINICAL RESEARCH

IOT
Madrid, Spain

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Eva Chamorro is directly responsible for some of the most innovative technologies currently utilized in creating ophthalmic

lens design, including the three patented foundational technologies currently used by IOT in their free-form digital lens designs. She is also deeply engaged in the scientific community as an active participant and presenter at conferences throughout the world.

Dr. Chamorro is a contributing author to countless scientific publications. Her most recent work centers on making myopia management spectacle lenses more accessible to children around the world.”



Eva Chamorro began her career working in an optical store while studying for her degree at the University Complutense of Madrid. During this time, she said she learned the intricacies of running an optical store, including patient care, conducting visual exams, adapting contact lenses, dispensing spectacles, managing supplier relationships, processing orders and handling administrative tasks. She also continued her studies, learning about rare retinal pathologies and genetic factors.

In 2013, she joined the team at IOT as a technical support manager, supporting lens manufacturers worldwide. She was soon promoted to director of clinical research.

“Throughout this period, I have acquired outstanding knowledge in the

field of free-form lenses, from the design and calculation to lens optimization that meets user expectations to the manufacturing of lenses ensuring the best quality of production or evaluation of the visual performance that each type of lens provides using a research methodology,” she said. “This role has also allowed me to travel worldwide, sharing experiences with many professionals in the optical industry.”

Chamorro said her primary goal as clinical research director is to design and develop innovative lens technologies and tools that enhance visual performance for patients and improve the dispensing experience for opticians. “Our department focuses on designing new innovative products through patented and technological proposals focusing on meeting the user's needs. We rigorously test all products through controlled clinical trials evaluating visual performance and user experience, leading R&D projects in visual perception,” she said.

Her inspiration comes from the opportunity to learn new things every day while continuing to think of new ideas and initiate new research projects that add value for spectacle lens manufacturers, opticians and users alike.

SHE SAYS... “Developing a career in the optical industry requires time, dedication and continuous training. I advise women pursuing this path to find a job that aligns with their interests and makes them feel comfortable and motivated. Focus on your strengths, build confidence in your abilities and never stop learning. Always seek to improve your knowledge and skills to advance in your career.”

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

Julie Helmus, OD

CEO, HELMUS OPTOMETRY

Medical Advisor, Avulux
Facilitator, PERC
Davis, Calif.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She is a leader in identifying and embracing innovative approaches to patient care.”



Julie Helmus, OD, is a second-generation “thoroughbred” optometrist. Helmus’ parents are retired ODs and she grew up alongside the family practice. She even celebrated her first birthday in the Berkely College of Optometry student lounge. In 2015, approaching her adult career, she graduated from Pacific University College of Optometry with distinction.

“I had to follow the passion passed down to me from my parents—optometry is in my DNA,” she said.

Since her parents’ retirement, Dr. Helmus has been the sole owner of 37-year old Helmus Optometry, a large single-location private practice. As CEO, Dr. Helmus oversees over \$4 million in sales annually—and she is fully

engaged in the company’s marketing, human resources, staff development, website and social media content, equipment upgrades, facilities maintenance and more.

Dr. Helmus also serves as medical advisor for Avulux, providing clinical guidance to the marketing teams, sales teams and eyecare providers. As a PERC (Professional Eyecare Resource Co-Operative) facilitator, she leads a group of 10 OD-owners across the U.S.

Her career has had a grand impact on the optical industry—Dr. Helmus has lectured on practice management at Vision Expo, Heart of America Eye Care Congress, Great Western Council of Optometry, PERC, Academy of Ophthalmic Education and more. She’s also appeared on most eyecare-specific podcasts and has written articles for *Review of Optometric Business*. Yet, she is just as committed to serving her hometown, the Davis community.

SHE SAYS... “I see myself as an advocate for private practices in a challenging and dynamic business climate. If private practices can maintain reliable teams and systems, there’s freedom to innovate and expand.”

Lisette Sacks

VICE PRESIDENT, BRAND + CREATIVE

Eyemart Express
Farmers Branch, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Lisette spearheaded the first trans-

formation of Eyemart Express’ 34-year-old brand. Throughout the process, she strategically led her team to reimagine and modernize the company’s visual appeal across all internal and external touchpoints. Lisette also fosters a culture of openness and creativity, encouraging out-of-the-box thinking by challenging her team to ask how a task or project can elevate the brand and remain true to its legacy. This approach is instrumental in driving innovation with Eyemart Express’ rebrand and integrating diverse perspectives into the company’s impactful marketing campaigns that deepen connections among existing consumers and drive new business.”



Lisette Sacks joined the optical industry in 2019, though she has been collecting vintage and designer eyewear for about 12 years. Before taking on her role at Eyemart Express, she held the creative director title at several leading ad agencies, creating global campaigns, branding and more for companies including American Express, Face-

book, General Mills and many more. Now, she leads Eyemart Express into a new era, helping a team that won two 2024 Telly awards for its recent See The Moment campaign.

Central to Sacks’ leadership style is the way she emphasizes empathy and cultural understanding, both for her own team and for customers. She explained, “Tapping into the overall culture and individual local communities allows us to appreciate diverse perspectives. This same cultural sensitivity has helped us build a dynamic and inclusive team where everyone’s input and perspective is valued and keeps us learning, growing and listening.”

Sacks continues to be inspired by the next generation of creatives in marketing and branding and their out-of-the-box thinking, as well as the many mentors she looks up to. She said, “I’ve learned from many people across the industry and in marketing and I think of them all as my personal board of directors—I go to each of them for different takes on my career path.”

SHE SAYS... “Don’t be afraid! Ask people in positions you admire for a phone call or a cup of coffee—even if they aren’t in your direct field of expertise. I’ve learned so much from informational meetings with people in finance, IT and other sectors unrelated to optical. It seems scary but we’re all just humans trying to learn and do our best. Most people are so happy to tell their story and help along the next generation. It’s always a win-win.”

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

Susan Shafer

DIRECTOR, GLOBAL CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

VSP Vision
Rancho Cordova, Calif.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Susan is an avid learner and builder who takes great interest in trying something new and succeeding at it. Her passion for strategic communications recently manifested in the development of VSP Vision’s first two social responsibility impact reports... When she’s not giving back within the organization, she’s often giving back in her community. She currently serves as a board member for the American Red Cross, California Gold Country Region.”



Susan Shafer joined the industry in 2011 with VSP, after spending time both in state government and on Wall Street. Through it all, Shafer has primarily focused on communications—today, she leads and works with two communications teams at VSP: the public affairs team and the corporate social responsibility team.

When Shafer came to VSP, it wasn’t because she was looking to work in eye-wear specifically. She said, “I wasn’t

looking for a job in the optical industry, I was looking for a job with a company that had a strong reputation and was committed to its purpose.” VSP fit those parameters perfectly, and Shafer now continues to bolster the company’s reputation and purpose firsthand. In particular, she is proud of her work with VSP’s Eyes of Hope Mobile Clinics, and volunteers at least once a year to help staff the clinics.

Her work has helped show the power and importance of good communications over the years, including during the pandemic. She said, “[Communications] was never more important than during the pandemic when people were scared, uncertain, and hungry for connection because we were physically removed from so many people in our lives. Our ability to communicate literally changed overnight, and I think at VSP we rose to the occasion. I played a very small part in that, but I’m proud of the work we did to evolve our communications and that continues to play out as we remain a distributed workforce.”

Shafer takes inspiration from many of the people she’s worked alongside, including VSP’s chief communications officer Pat McNeil and her VSP colleagues Kelly Freitas and Jill Novelo.

SHE SAYS... “See an opportunity? Take it. Don’t worry if you don’t have all the skills or knowledge to be successful on day one. Instead, take all that worrisome energy, and: 1) apply it to learning what you ‘think’ you don’t know, 2) surround yourself with smart colleagues who empower you, and 3) focus on the possible right now, not everything that could be or might be.”

Jennifer L. Stewart, OD

FOUNDER AND VISIONARY:
LOOK NEW CANAAN
FOUNDER AND CHIEF VISION OFFICER,
OD PERSPECTIVES
FOUNDER AND CHIEF VISION OFFICER,
PERFORMANCE 20/20
New Canaan, Conn.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Look New Canaan is a completely innovative, brand new cold-start practice. Dr. Stewart focused on design, the patient experience and a high-end optical in this beautiful studio which has already been featured numerous times in optometric publications. She challenges ODs and business owners to change the status quo and build an authentic practice that supports them personally, professionally and financially.”



Dr. Jennifer Stewart founded her cold-start boutique optical studio, Look New Canaan, in February 2024, but it is just the tip of her iceberg. In addition to Look New Canaan, Dr. Stewart founded Performance 20/20, her sports and vision training business in 2015, and her consulting and advisory firm OD Perspectives in 2022. She is also an adjunct professor at NECO (New England College of Optometry), the professional editor of Jobson’s Independent Strong and a speaker/KOL (key opinion leader) for

MacuHealth and CooperVision.

With such a full plate, Dr. Stewart finds inspiration everywhere. She said, “Just when I think I’ve done everything in the optometric/optical field, another amazing opportunity comes along. This industry is ever-changing, always adapting and there is always a way to learn, engage and be inspired. I’m also always inspired when I speak to and work with students.” In turn, she hopes her own career journey continues to inspire female optometrists in particular, showing them that they can continue to reinvent themselves and never settle.

Dr. Stewart finds support in the Optical Women’s Association and the many women she has met through the group, who she considers friends, colleagues and mentors. She said, “We have so many opportunities in eyecare to build and run a practice that is authentic to us—whatever that may look like. I truly love what I do and hope my story can inspire others to take a leap and find joy in their every day.”

SHE SAYS... “Find EVERY opportunity you can to connect, engage, ask questions, learn and network. So often the optometric/optical field can be a lonely space—but the real magic happens when you connect with others... I’m honored and thankful for all the friends and connections I have in all parts of the optical industry. It has made me appreciate how many people are out there working to help us be successful. Lastly, don’t do something the same way because that is how it has always been done. Listen to your gut, think differently, and take a chance! You never know what the outcome will be.”

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

Felicia Timmermann, OD, MS, FAAO

**SENIOR MANAGER, MYOPIA
MANAGEMENT**
CooperVision
Miami, Fla.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Dr. Timmermann has truly devoted herself to fighting the rising myopia pandemic. She not only brings to CooperVision’s myopia management team her experience on the front lines of the fight against myopia but also her academic understanding of the health care landscape across the globe. As she engages with academics and professionals from her role at CooperVision through national educational initiatives, she maintains that credibility as an ex-

pert who has walked in their shoes in treating individual patients.”

Since graduating from the Illinois College of Optometry just a decade ago, Felicia Timmermann, OD, has been busy furthering her career while helping to stem the current myopia epidemic. She currently holds the position of senior manager, myopia management, at CooperVision. “It has been a transformative decade within the optical field,” said Dr. Timmermann.

In April 2022, Dr. Timmermann transitioned to a full-time role as a member of the professional and academic affairs team at CooperVision in the sector of myopia management.

“In my current role, I have the great privilege to interact and collaborate with various personnel in the optical field. As a member of the PAA team at



CooperVision, I’ve been provided a platform to connect with students, doctors, and other members of the eyecare team to generate greater awareness on pediatric eyecare and myopia management to institute this necessary care for children,” said Dr. Timmermann.

“The consistent expansion and evolution of the optometric field is inspiring since it contributes to a wider scope and impact on clinical outcomes. With a background in pediatric eyecare, it has been inspirational to see the mon-

umental growth in research and treatment options for children that leads to a greater effect on their visual and ocular health. Either by sharing this knowledge or implementing it into practice, it is truly inspirational to change the outcome of so many pediatric patients.”

SHE SAYS... “My advice for women developing their careers in the optical industry is to never set limits for yourself. This is a dynamic and continuously accelerating field that provides the opportunity to grow and develop with it. With this growth, it allows one to incorporate and pursue keen interest to tailor your career that provides ultimate joy and fulfillment. When you enjoy what you do, it allows you to be the best version of yourself and invigorates that drive and motivation to only propel you further.”

Above and Beyond

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

Arlene Barringer

SENIOR MARKETING MANAGER
Transitions Optical
Pinellas Park, Fla.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “It’s her strategic leadership, solution-oriented mindset and deep-rooted passion to give underserved communities opportunities that makes Arlene influential at Transitions and within the optical industry.”

As a seasoned marketing professional with 30 years of experience, Arlene Bar-



ringer brought her results-driven focus to the optical industry five years ago when she joined Transitions Optical. Today, she leads trade communications and spearheads the rejuvenation of the diversity advisory board for Transitions.

Barringer is a first-generation college graduate from the University of South Florida in Tampa, and she’s fueled by her commitment to excellence and inclusivity. Since joining Transitions, she has partnered with Black Eyecare Perspective to create and launch the HBCU Light Intelligent Tour, which creates awareness of optometry careers and recruits students into the Black Eyecare Perspective Pre-Optometry Club. This work earned her an honorable mention from Ragan Communications 2023 Diversity Awards.

She has also partnered with Latinos

en Optometry to develop educational videos on different optometric modalities and worked closely with the Transitions diversity advisory board to create new education content covering multicultural topics. With Barringer’s guidance, Transitions is preparing to launch the Diversity in Optical Grant, which will provide funding for one optometry student, one ophthalmology student, and five students going to opticianry school.

“All my work with the Transitions Diversity Board is laying a solid foundation to change the face of the industry to better serve diverse patients,” said

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

Barringer. “I hope these efforts draw more students of color into optometry, expand the minds and hearts of eyecare professionals to embrace diverse patients, and that the optical grants will keep diverse students focused on their education.”

SHE SAYS... *A good challenge inspires me. I love the opportunity to be creative and enact change, either within the business or within the community.”*

Kristy Stone

DIRECTOR OF MEMBER EDUCATION
PECAA
Boca Raton, Fla.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Kristy delivers when it comes to educating ECPs. For every event she offers or is part of, she constantly delivers timely, creative, interesting, progressive and original educational offerings. Having worked in the industry for 18-plus years, Kristy is extremely well-versed in what ECPs want and need, and she always performs at the highest level. As an active volunteer for the OWA’s Membership Committee, Kristy leverages her experience and vivacious personality to draw in new members. Kristy always goes above and beyond in everything she does.”

An optical industry veteran of more than 18 years, Kristy Stone has held many different positions and worn many hats, many of which helped to prepare her for her current role as director of member education at PECAA (Professional Eye Care Associates of America). She started



as a technician at Ossip Optometry in the fall of 2006. During her tenure there she worked as an optician, assistant manager, general manager and finally area manager. After Ossip she worked for a revenue cycle management company focusing on vision claims. In January of 2021, she began at PECAA as the director of member education.

“From being in a practice and interacting day-to-day with patients, providing solutions to help their daily lives, to now being in a behind the scenes role where I get to help independent practices with tools and resources to further their knowledge so they can focus on their patients and elevate the care they provide, I’ve always found this industry so rewarding,” Stone said.

As director of member education at PECAA, Stone has numerous responsibilities, including providing continuing education opportunities for members and non-members. She is currently a member of the Optical Women’s Association and serves on their membership committee. Stone has also earned PECAA’s office manager certification and office manager leadership academy certification.

“In my current role, I take pride in providing quality education that is current, relevant, and unique for all roles within an optometric practice. I know that all roles within a practice are vital to the

success of the business. I want to encourage and provide easy avenues for anyone to pursue a leadership path, grow within their career, and stay current on industry education to provide the best care possible to patients.”

SHE SAYS... *“Use all experiences as learning opportunities to help you meet and exceed your personal and professional goals. Embrace change and challenges, they help you more than you think. Above all else, be happy in what you do, let pride and passion drive you.”*

Tammy Thurston

DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER SERVICE,
NORTH AMERICA
EssilorLuxottica
Northvale, N.J.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Tammy is a star performer within the organization—she works with both operations and sales to facilitate customer centric solutions for our doctors. While every solution is tailored to the customer, she has gone above and beyond to improve upon processes to create a new standard of customer care across the organization. More specifically, she has automated many processes to ensure that the customer is kept informed throughout the entire buying process. Tammy is one of those unicorns that possesses strong operational understanding combined with a sincere love for customers and her team members.”

In her role as director of customer service, North America, Tammy Thurston is



responsible for customer support for the overall customer service team for EssilorLuxottica. She partners with operations and sales to ensure exceptional customer care for the eyecare provider. An optical industry veteran of eight years, Thurston is a member and participating mentor in EssilorLuxottica’s Women’s Network as well as a member of the Optical Women’s Association.

“The optical field is amazing and is so vast and multidimensional. It is also one that impacts every human. The idea of knowing I can be part of a field that reaches so many was in line with my inner desire to work in a field that provides longevity and the ability to make an impact,” said Thurston.

She added, “I have utilized my experience, both from an operational and customer service perspective, to advance how we communicate and connect with our eyecare providers, advancing more of what the eyecare providers need to support a strong partnership. I would hope I also supported that women of all colors and backgrounds have a place in the optical field, at all levels.”

SHE SAYS... *“Never stop seeking an opportunity to learn. Creating and being the best version of yourself is to ensure you are ready for all opportunities.”*

More →

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

Judy Walrath, OD

DIRECTOR OF PROFESSIONAL RELATIONS

Dr. Tavel Family Eyecare
Indianapolis, Ind.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “In our industry, it’s rare to see a doctor who can speak on behalf of her peers with passion, grace and influence in a non-elected position. In our business in particular, Dr. Judy has completely transformed how we view optometry inside our organization. We went from seeing doctors as part of our corporate strategy to now viewing doctors as the key driver of our strategy.”



Judy Walrath, OD, always knew she wanted to go into the health care field. “I was a high myope as a child, and during my junior year of college, I shadowed my optometrist and found the career to be very emotionally rewarding. Today, although there are times when I have to deliver devastating news, most people leave their visit with a vision solution, which is incredibly fulfilling.”

After earning a bachelor of arts degree from Indiana University in 2008, Dr. Walrath attended optometry school and graduated from the

Indiana University School of Optometry in 2013. She has been working in the optical industry for 11 years as a practicing optometrist.

As the director of professional relations at Dr. Tavel Family Eyecare since 2019, Dr. Walrath leads doctors, collaborates with the leadership, and aligns office initiatives with doctor activities. “My responsibilities include recruiting new doctors, improving office efficiency, building relationships with the doctors on my team, and being their voice and liaison for decisions that affect how they practice. I ensure high-quality patient care and implement strategies for revenue growth while fostering a supportive environment for doctors,” she said.

“I believe I have helped change the culture of how doctors are viewed at our organization, which then spreads to our community. We have served Indianapolis for over 80 years, and in the last 10 years, we have dramatically shifted our focus to our doctors. This includes providing them with more opportunities to practice full-scope optometry, encouraging them to share their opinions, and integrating eye health and patient wellness into all organizational decisions,” Dr. Walrath said.

SHE SAYS... “First and foremost, I went into optometry to help people achieve a better quality of life by providing exceptional eyecare. Along the way, I’ve found great satisfaction in thinking creatively to find solutions, collaborating with leadership and doctors, and being part of the forward-thinking evolution of the profession.”

Bonnie Whitfield

DIRECTOR, MEMBER SERVICES

The Vision Council
Baker, Fla.

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Within just a year and a half of joining The Vision Council, Bonnie has shown an extraordinary ability and dedication to improving the relationship between the organization and its members. She has driven The Vision Council’s ability to advance students and professionals across the industry, nurturing the entire optical community’s growth.”



Prior to joining The Vision Council, Bonnie Whitfield spent over a decade with the Choctawhatchee Electric Cooperative (CHELCO), growing her people skills in member communications, community affairs and marketing. She led a wide range of initiatives at CHELCO, including overseeing an external and internal communications and public relations program, serving on strategic planning committees, and supervising crisis communications.

Whitfield feels most at home when she is building relationships. She joined The Vision Council in 2022 as the senior manager of member com-

munications and was recently promoted to director of member services. Today, she is responsible for ensuring high satisfaction levels for all members. She heads up the member recruitment, retention and engagement strategy, expanding and enhancing member benefits, onboarding new members, and organizing impactful events and initiatives.

“I enjoy working with and forming relationships with people. Serving our members is a true passion of mine. I enjoy getting to know the history behind a company and an individual and connecting them with the programs and benefits The Vision Council can provide to help them grow and thrive in the optical industry,” she said.

“I’ve worn glasses for 25 years, but my true interest in the optical industry began when I joined The Vision Council. I find the industry fascinating because it involves so many different aspects, and I’m constantly learning new and exciting things. I also appreciate the sense of community in the optical industry, even among competing companies. They all network, collaborate, and support each other, creating a great work environment,” Whitfield observed.

SHE SAYS... “I would advise other women who are trying to build their careers to remember that there will likely always be challenges to overcome. It’s important to never give up on your career goals. Additionally, always be willing to be a student. As an employee and a leader, you can always learn new things to improve, especially with rapid technological advancements.” ■



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See an [Alphabetical List](#) of prior years’ honorees and a complete PDF of this year’s feature.