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## **Optical Women's Association Announces 2026 Award Honorees**

**DALLAS, TEXAS – January 12, 2026**

The Optical Women's Association (OWA) is proud to announce their 2026 OWA award honorees:

**Susy Yu, OD**, Vision Services Administrator for Kaiser Permanente, will receive the **Pleiades Award**, recognizing her exceptional dedication and support in advancing the leadership role of women in the optical industry.

**Liz Friedfeld**, Head of Business Development for ClearVision Optical, is the **Pyxis Award** honoree, acknowledging her service and commitment to growing the OWA and promoting it throughout the optical industry.

**Cathy Firman**, Senior Director of Customer Success for GPN Technologies, will receive the **Emerging Leader Award**, given to rising stars within the optical industry who display exemplary leadership qualities.

**Alessandra Senici**, Executive Leader at EssilorLuxottica, will be the first recipient of the OWA's new **Polaris Award**, honoring her work in promoting the mission of the OWA globally.

Megan Molony, OWA President, had this to say: "The Optical Women's Association is proud to honor four extraordinary women whose leadership, vision, and dedication have made a lasting impact on our industry. Their achievements inspire all of us to continue breaking barriers and shaping a future where innovation, curiosity and inclusivity thrive. I have the pleasure of knowing all these winners, and they are not only amazing women, they are experienced professionals, thought leaders, and shining examples of advocacy for women in our industry. A heartfelt congratulations to Susy, Liz, Cathy, and Alessandra. As we celebrate their contributions, we reaffirm OWA's mission to empower, connect, and elevate women across the optical industry—creating opportunities that drive progress for generations to come."

The award recipients will be honored at the OWA's annual **Champagne Breakfast** on **Wednesday, March 11, 2026**, during International Vision Expo. Sponsored by **EssilorLuxottica** and the OWA, this event will be held at the **Hyatt Regency Orlando**. For more information, [click here](#).

## **About the Honorees**

**Susy Yu, OD, MBA, FAAO, FACHE**, is a healthcare leader who has dedicated her career to strengthening eyecare delivery, supporting the next generation of clinicians, and advancing the profession through collaborative leadership. As Vision Services Administrator for Vision Essentials by Kaiser Permanente in Southern California, she leads more than 400 optometrists and multidisciplinary teams to expand access, enhance patient experience, and develop value-based care models that reflect the needs of diverse communities.

A champion of digital transformation and future-focused care, Dr. Yu has led systemwide initiatives in eCommerce, virtual care, remote diagnostics, and assistant-driven workflows. Her work has contributed to care redesign, expanded patient access, and reinforced the integration of optometry within broader healthcare systems.

Dr. Yu's commitment to service is reflected in her extensive board work. She is a former Vice President of the California State Board of Optometry, former President of the National Board of Examiners in Optometry, and former President of the Association of Regulatory Boards of Optometry, where she spearheaded the equivalency of optometric continuing education across health professions and supported interprofessional accreditation. She currently serves on the boards of the American Academy of Optometry and Optometry Giving Sight. Across these roles, she is known for building consensus, mentoring emerging leaders, and having a strategic and systematic perspective.

Dr. Yu was recognized as one of Vision Monday's Most Influential Women in Optical in the "Executive Suite" category in 2023. In all her leadership roles, she has focused on reinforcing the essential role of eyecare as a component of overall health.

**Liz Friedfeld** is a strategic and trusted industry leader whose career has been shaped by a deep commitment to connection, growth, and purpose. As Head of Business Development for ClearVision Optical, Liz serves as an ambassador for the organization, building meaningful relationships that strengthen partnerships and support independent eyecare professionals.

After a successful career in advertising and a financial start-up, Liz returned to optical with a renewed purpose to carry forward her family's legacy. She has become a valued mentor for many who are navigating their own leadership journeys, earning recognition as one of Vision Monday's Most Influential Women in Optical in the "mentor" category and as an OWA Leadership Scholarship recipient. She is well-known for her passion, curiosity, and a genuine dedication to uplifting others.

For more than a decade, Liz has been deeply involved with the Optical Women's Association, currently serving on the Board of Directors and as Co-Chair of the Membership Committee. Under her collaborative leadership, OWA membership has surged to record levels year after year, supported by innovative initiatives and a passionate, dedicated team.

Liz also recently completed her 500-hour Yoga Teacher Training combining her passions for wellness, balance, and community.

**Cathy Firman** began her optical journey in 2003, stepping into the field as a paraoptometric and quickly falling in love with the profession. Early on, she discovered a passion for eye health, exceptional patient care, and operational excellence—interests that propelled her into roles as Practice Manager and Optical Manager. Along the way, she earned her Certified Paraoptometric Technician credential and became an ABO Certified Optician.

In 2018, Cathy joined GPN Technologies as an Assistant Customer Care Manager and has since grown into the

position of Senior Director of Customer Success. Today, she leads the Practice Performance Team, guiding practices in leveraging business analytics to drive smarter decisions and sustainable growth. She is also a proud contributor to GPN VISIONS, where she shares stories, strategies, and data-driven insights with the broader eyecare community.

A dedicated educator at heart, Cathy has developed and facilitated hands-on training workshops that help paraoptometric build confidence, strengthen their technical skills, and grow their careers. Beyond her day-to-day contributions, Cathy has a long record of service to the optical industry. She has been an active member of the Optical Women's Association (OWA) since 2017 and currently serves as Co-Chair of the Events Committee. She also volunteers with the AOA CPC Item & Test Review Committees and previously served nine years on the AOA's Commission on Paraoptometric Certification, where she helped advance national standards and elevate certification for paraoptometric professionals.

**Alessandra Senici** is a pioneering leader in the optical industry whose contributions have helped to shape education and drive awareness around topics such as vision care, practice management, and people development. She has held several leadership positions at EssilorLuxottica and Luxottica, including Head of Leonardo, the most comprehensive digital learning ecosystem for the vision care world, and Head of Investor Relations and Corporate Communications during the company's most significant evolutions.

Please visit [www.opticalwomen.com](http://www.opticalwomen.com) for more information.

About the Optical Women's Association: Founded in 1997 as a nonprofit, the Optical Women's Association is committed to supporting and promoting the professional development of women involved in all facets of the optical industry. As the vision of the OWA evolves and expands, it maintains the focus of the OWA's founding principles and core mission: to enhance and promote the leadership role of women in the optical industry through networking, education and peer support.

