



NEW YORK—We hear the term “influencer” a lot these days. It’s frequently used to describe celebrities, media personalities or the latest YouTube stars whose words and actions are magnified through the lens of social media. They connect with millions of people, but their impact is often fleeting, as our attention shifts to the next big thing.

But there’s another type of influencer, those who are outstanding in their field, and who touch us in ways that are profound and lasting. They are the people VM honors each year as “The Most Influential Women in Optical.”

This special program, now in its 17th year, is eagerly awaited by

VM readers. This year they nominated 213 women for recognition. The Most Influential Women are nominated by their bosses, co-workers and colleagues, with nearly 40 final selections made by VM editors. They are always a diverse group consisting of executives, sales and marketing professionals, ECPs, administrators, researchers and teachers. This eclectic mix is emblematic of the broad reach of women in our industry and indicative of how deeply they are embedded in its fabric.

We invite you to meet these optical achievers, and join us in celebrating their accomplishments. ■

—The Editors

# Executive Suite

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

## Jane Mell Balek

### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Think About Your Eyes  
Alexandria, Virginia

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Jane leads the Think About Your Eyes campaign, evolving the initiative to drive more eye exams, attract additional partners and create impact.”



As executive director of Think About Your Eyes (TAYE), Jane Balek works with the program’s Advisory Board to develop and execute an integrated marketing strategy designed to increase awareness of the importance of annual comprehensive eye exams. Since the campaign was launched in 2014, the initiative has helped more than 8 million people get eye exams, said Balek. “In the past six months, our campaign awareness and intent to get an eye exam are at the highest levels in five years,” she said.

According to Balek, one of the program’s top priorities is to get TAYE’s message to new audiences in nontraditional ways. She has spearheaded two new partnerships, one with the NFL and National Dairy Council to convey eye health information within their summer youth wellness program, and another with Airstream using a social media celebrity road trip to disseminate information about eye exams. “These partnerships will help amplify our message

and create new TAYE message champions,” explained Balek.

Balek has spent most of her career working in the nonprofit sector, first as a public policy analyst and then with individual membership associations. “I found that I really had a passion for developing creative partnerships that would support the mission of the organization, but also serve the business goals of the partners.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Find ways that you can contribute your talents and if you can’t find opportunities, create them.”

## Barbara Barclay

### PRESIDENT

RightEye LLC  
Bethesda, Maryland

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “As president, Barbara is focused on the expansion of RightEye’s eye-tracking technology offerings into new markets and industries. She was one of RightEye’s first employees and has played a pivotal role over the past four years in the company’s rapid growth.”



As a partner at RightEye, an eye tracking technology company, Barbara Barclay runs operations for RightEye including marketing, sales, purchasing, training and support, inventory man-

agement, and partnerships. Together with the CEO and CMO, she was instrumental in helping to build the business to over 300 providers. Today, she serves on the executive management team where they make most company decisions as a group, and Barclay drives enterprise sales including sports teams, hospitals, schools, optometric chains, and global distribution agreements.

After a brief stint in banking, Barclay got an MBA in marketing and spent the first part of her career in marketing information with AC Nielsen, IRI, comScore and LexisNexis. She helped build and launch businesses for both Nielsen and IRI in multiple countries. Ten years ago, Barclay joined the eye tracking tech firm Tobii and “this opened my eyes to all of the incredible research being done using eye tracking, including concussion, reading, autism, glaucoma and Parkinson’s—yet nothing was being commercialized.”

In 2014, she started her own business and “met Adam Gross, the CEO of RightEye, who persuaded me that if I teamed up with him and Dr. Melissa Hunfalvay, we could do more as a team—and he was right.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Be genuine, honest and direct and people will want to do business with you. Learn about your business, your customer’s business, and your products, ask questions, and you will quickly piece things together faster than most people.”

## Chrystel Barranger

PRESIDENT OF ESSILOR  
PHOTOCHROMICS AND  
TRANSITIONS OPTICAL

Transitions Optical  
Charenton-le-Pont, France

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Since joining Transitions Optical in 2017 as president of Essilor Photochromics and Transitions Optical, Barranger has led the Transitions brand rejuvenation. Under her direction, the company unveiled a new advertising campaign in February 2018 which created desire for Transitions lens products in a simple, modern and innovative way. She also oversaw the introduction of Transitions style colors and mirrors.”



“I want to help the industry push eyecare and protection to more consumers that don’t get the care they need,” said Barranger, who is also a member of the Transitions Optical board of directors. “I believe this is a brand that the whole industry can push and benefit from.”

Barranger also led the Transitions team as their years of collaboration with Johnson & Johnson Vision (JJV) came to fruition with JJV’s launch of Acuvue Oasys with Transitions Light Intelligent Technology. “I’m a strong believer in combining the unique capabilities of different companies to be able to meet more consumer needs,” she said. Currently, Barranger is directing the launch of Transitions Signature GEN 8, which is set to be released this month.

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Read previous *Most Influential Women in Optical* Special Reports on [VisionMonday.com](http://VisionMonday.com).

See an Alphabetical List of prior years’ honorees and a complete PDF of this year’s #Achievers feature.

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

Barranger started her career at Kraft Food (Mondelez) in 1993 as a product manager and worked for Mondelez for most of her career. As her career progressed, she gained experience and her responsibility increased as she held positions such as president of cheese & grocery Europe, where she was instrumental in a turnaround of that category, with full P&L responsibility. She was senior advisor at Boston Consulting Group (BCG) from 2015 to 2017.

**SHE SAYS...** “Find a way to bring value, and bring all the value you can. But if you have to disrupt, and surprise, just go for it. You will have an impact.”

## Marjolijn Bijlefeld

### MANAGING EDITOR Women In Optometry

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “As co-founder of *Women In Optometry* 15 years ago, Marjolijn has provided a platform for women ODs to voice their perceptions of the profession of optometry. Younger female ODs have grown up under the influence of *Women In Optometry's* inclusive, optimistic and thoughtful view of the profession. And Marjolijn, herself, embodies that view.”

The power of the written word is not always apparent, but as the managing editor of *Women In Optometry* Marjolijn Bijlefeld has made quite an impact on established women ODs, newly minted graduates, students, new practice owners, and rank-and-file employed ODs. “I’m not an OD, but I’ve been supremely lucky to spend so much time talking to smart and inspiring ODs. They’ve



been generous with their time and advice, much of which is applicable to every person.”

*Women In Optometry* magazine launched in March 2006 with a goal of providing a platform for women optometrists. “Then—and even now to a lesser degree—women ODs were underrepresented in leadership, lecture circuits and publications. We set out to create a community where women ODs could share their experiences, inspire each other and gain greater exposure in the industry,” she said.

The publication has expanded to include an online presence, an active social media following and several annual networking events, including the annual Theia Achievement Awards, which Bijlefeld instituted to recognize the contributions women ODs have made and are making to the profession.

**SHE SAYS...** “I’ve been a reporter since high school. There’s nothing I’d rather do than listen to people’s stories and find a way to present them. I’m so grateful that people let me tell their stories.”

## Victoria Hallberg

### CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER Safilo North America Secaucus, New Jersey

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “She’s a dynamic, highly motivated leader who has successfully launched many brands and delivered impactful, strategic business development programs to national retail chains, key accounts and independent sales teams.”



Hallberg started her 30-year career in optical very early, while finishing high school and college, working first at San Diego Contact Lens, a small finishing lab, then for opticians in Los Gatos Calif. and Charleston, S.C., then two different optometry practices in Fresno, Calif. While at one time she considered a pre-med path, she joined a young company called Marchon as a sales representative in 1986, working up to district sales manager, Coach brand specialist, then director of special projects, director of brand sales and more recently VP/key account sales. She became VP of retail relations and chief merchant of VSP’s omnichannel division.

This year, she was tapped by Safilo North America to fulfill the new role of CMO and is now leading the company’s brand, trade marketing and PR teams, working to maximize how Safilo markets, sells, services and communicates to its customers.

Throughout the journey, Hallberg recalls, “I was fortunate to learn from several mentors. Barry Lerner taught me to believe in what you’re doing and help others achieve their goals; Al Berg

encouraged me to be creative and take risks; Larry Roth taught me to pay attention to the numbers; Jeff White emphasized every person in the organization matters, and Steve Wright encourages building strong teams across the organization.” She is an OWA member and an Accessories Council board member.

**SHE SAYS...** “Find mentors. Love learning. Have confidence that you belong in the room and your ideas are worth sharing. Value your team and your external partners/customers.”

## Elizabeth Hoppe, OD, MOH, DrPH, MPH

### FOUNDING DEAN

College of Optometry, Western  
University of Health Sciences  
Pomona, California

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Dr. Hoppe is an innovator, mentor and expert in education. She has influenced faculty, other administrators and several hundred students. She created the optometry program, implemented the curriculum, hired and mentored faculty, and oversees all didactic and clinical programs related to optometry.”



Dr. Hoppe has been working in optometric education since 1990, starting off as a faculty member at the Southern Califor-

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nia College of Optometry, then associate dean at the New England College of Optometry, before returning to California to take on the role of founding dean at the College of Optometry at Western University of Health Sciences in 2007. Since then, she has worked to create the college from the ground up: creating curriculum, hiring faculty and more.

In addition, Dr. Hoppe has served in leadership within the board of directors of the National Board of Examiners in Optometry (NBEO) and the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO). She completed her term as president of NBEO in December and will be taking on the role of president of ASCO this June.

"I have received so much support and advice over the years from so many people whom I greatly admire," Dr. Hoppe said. "Leaders in optometric education, in public health optometry, in the American Academy of Optometry, and the American Public Health Association have all had a tremendous impact on my thinking and so many people have helped me grow over the years. My greatest supporter for the past 23 years has been my husband, Jack Barton."

**SHE SAYS...** "Always be sure to say 'yes' to yourself because there are plenty of people out there who are going to say 'no' to you. Be your own best supporter and your own number one fan. When you believe in yourself, anything is possible."

## Millicent Knight, OD, FAAO, FAARM

**SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT,  
CUSTOMER DEVELOPMENT  
GROUP**

## Essilor of America Dallas, Texas

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Her extensive background in the industry affords Dr. Knight a unique, customer centered perspective. She feels very passionate about Essilor's mission of 'improving lives by improving sight.'"



Millicent Knight, OD, represents the voice of the doctor within Essilor's North American leadership team. As senior vice president of customer development, she and her team are responsible for professional relations with eyecare professionals and academic institutions, and help align ECP interests with sales force education and training.

One of Dr. Knight's key roles is to identify and encourage eye health programs implemented by employee volunteers and eyecare professionals in their communities and globally that reflect the spirit of Essilor's mission of improving lives by improving sight. She serves as leadership sponsor of Essilor's Difference Makers Program and Mission Trip, which recently provided eye exams to school children in Thailand. "Eyecare professionals working together with industry on a common interest can accomplish so much more in advancing patient care," she noted.

Dr. Knight also leads the Essilor Myopia Task Force of Key Opinion Leaders

dedicated to bringing modern approaches to managing myopia and progressive myopia around the globe and developing consumer awareness and educational support. "Early in my career, I realized that my passion was providing the best in innovative patient care, and helping to shape my profession and our industry through change."

**SHE SAYS...** "Keep the patient at the center of decision-making whether in clinic or business; build relationships; learn to manage up and down. Bring your best and authentic self to your work."

## Joyce Pokoy-Kurtulus

**EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT,  
PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND  
MANAGEMENT**

Randolph Engineering  
Randolph, Massachusetts

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Everywhere Joyce has worked, she elevated the company to new heights in product, sales and internal structure. At Randolph, Joyce transformed the company into a superior player in premium sunglasses and ophthalmic eyewear while streamlining in house Made in America manufacturing, reducing costs, improving productivity and elevating morale through mentoring and hands on involvement."

"Managing a manufacturing facility has been my biggest challenge as well as accomplishment in the short time I have been at Randolph," said Pokoy-Kurtulus, who has been at Randolph Engineering since early



2018. Before joining this team, she worked at Swan Optical Inc., Fiorucci Occhiali and B. Robinson Optical Inc. As part of her role at Randolph, Pokoy-Kurtulus directly manages at least seven other team members, and many more indirectly, who benefit from her compassionate and empowering management style.

Her secret to managing such an expansive team? "Communicate and show integrity," she said. "Share your vision to inspire your team. Empower them and allow them to make decisions. Don't be afraid to make mistakes. Have an open door policy. Show your appreciation for their work and ideas. Check in on a regular basis. Encourage creativity and innovation."

For Pokoy-Kurtulus, work is all about building and maintaining these fulfilling, valuable relationships. No matter who she's working with, from interns to presidents, Pokoy-Kurtulus said, "there is always something to learn. Keep an open mind."

**SHE SAYS...** "All relationships should be held in the deepest respect. Everyone is busy. Anyone who makes time for you is giving up valuable time of their own. Be thankful of this and don't forget to say thank you."

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## Tiffany Lione, OD

### FOUNDING PARTNER AND PRESIDENT

Associates in Eyecare  
Optometrists  
Stone Ridge, Virginia



CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Dr. Lione has been instrumental in developing and growing Associates in Eyecare to the 36th largest U.S. optical retailer according to VM’s 2019 report. Dr. Lione has continually demonstrated expert-level leadership, strategic thinking, business acumen, problem solving/analytics, decision-making, performance & financial management, and communication skills.”

At its inception in 2005, Associates in Eyecare was a single, cold start office

with three partners: Dr. Lione, Rob Allen, OD, and Hieu Vu-Gia, OD. Some 14 years later, the practice has grown to contain 10 locations in the D.C. Metro area, becoming one of the largest optical retailers in the country—and Dr. Lione, who earned her doctor of optometry from Pennsylvania College of Optometry in 1997, was instrumental in this success.

For Dr. Lione, success is about leading by example. She said, “Be a good role model for your staff. Be firm, but

fair and the respect will follow. My staff is a family; I’ve had some staff members with me for 10+ years. They are greatly respected by me and me by them.”

Cultivating a cohesive, trustworthy team comes down to management, something Dr. Lione excels at. Her best advice? “I make a point to tell people when they are doing a good job and reward them for behavior above and beyond. We also make sure to have three to four staff outings per year to keep up morale.” This level of respect means Dr. Lione can trust her team, no matter what. “I have no doubt my patients are well cared for even when I’m not in the office because my staff enjoys what they do and that is reflected in our patient care.”

SHE SAYS... “Whether you have partners in business or in life, it’s really hard to do it on your own. Find those great partners and fulfill your dreams.”

## Theresa Lundahl

### SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAIN

CooperVision Inc.  
Victor, New York

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “After beginning her career in computer programming and industrial engineering, Theresa jumped into the supply chain world in the late 1990s. After 26 years with Eastman Kodak Company, she joined CooperVision in 2011 and rapidly

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began driving cultural change that accompanied a more formal planning process. Two years later, she assumed her current role, developing a global function consistently charged with balancing ever-increasing customer demands for customization of product, packaging and business model innovation.”



At CooperVision, Theresa Lundahl's organization is responsible for global sourcing, global packaging and end-to-end supply chain planning. The driving metric for the group is customer service worldwide or, in other words, how does it deliver the right product in the right place at the time a customer needs it? “In my tenure, the global supply chain organization has doubled in size to support the significant growth of the business and to deliver consistent supply and service,” she said.

She added, “We have worked as an organization [to develop] our supply chain processes in order to shield customers from any unanticipated issues.” The most poignant demonstration of this was the lack of impact on customers in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, which devastated Puerto Rico where a major manufacturing facility is located. Lundahl said her management philosophy is based, in part, upon driving ownership and independence for people

who work for her. “I am very data-driven and strive to continuously learn and improve, and work to propagate that across the organization.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Always remember that business relationships, like all relationships, need to be developed and maintained. At the end of the day, it's always about people. In addition, take the time to understand the processes that drive the business—even the ones that you do not drive yourself.”

## Megan Molony

**SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT  
OF MERCHANDISING**  
National Vision, Inc.  
Duluth, Georgia

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “She is a critical senior leader on the executive team and drives decisions for over 1,100 stores at NVI.”



A Purdue University graduate, Molony started out as a buyer at May Company, and then became a planning and distribution manager for Lazarus, a division of Federated Stores. She first joined the optical industry as a senior manager for lens product strategy and sourcing at LensCrafters. As her knowledge of spectacle lenses and technology expanded, she moved into several director, associate and ultimately VP roles leading

operational strategies, building teams, and brand strategies, spending some 20 years at the company. She became VP innovation/commercialization at LensCrafters.

After a stint as SVP helping on strategy at U.K.-based Adlens, for its variable power optics business, she then moved to a key role of VP of integrated services at Essilor of America, partnering with ECPs and their affiliated groups to develop new supply chain, inventory and frame merchandising solutions.

Molony joined National Vision, Inc. (NVI), one of the U.S.'s largest optical retailers, in March 2017 where she now brings her expertise and merchandising strategy for the group to all of its retail businesses.

**SHE SAYS...** “Stretch yourself. Take on tasks and projects that are outside your comfort zone. Set up a network you can count on for support and idea sharing. Find an organization like the Optical Women's Association.”

## Denise Mogil

**DIRECTOR OF PROFESSIONAL  
SERVICES**  
Costco Wholesale  
Mercer Island, Washington

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “She is responsible for all things optometric at Costco Wholesale, including doctor relationships, education, recruiting, support, equipment, vision insurance business relationships, accounting, systems and optician training.”

To call Denise Brown Mogil optically well-rounded is an understatement.



Since starting as a cashier at LensCrafters 36 years ago, she has performed a broad array of jobs, rising to the top ranks of management and acquiring a deep knowledge of optical along the way. She has edged lenses, worked as a frame stylist and dispensing optician, and has managed stores.

At Costco, her employer since 1994, she has served as a corporate manager, an optical buyer and head of professional services. She developed an online training site for optical employees as well as Costco's Optical Vision Insurance Program. Currently, she negotiates all the contracts for 520 Costco locations, recruits the optometrists and develops education, including a CE website for opticians. Mogil holds a bachelor's degree in business management and is ABO- and NCLE-certified with a California Spectacle Registration.

“I'm a people person. That the key to my success,” said Mogil, adding, “I really like to give back to the community and do a lot of charity work.” She is proud of having started a program in Seattle in which military veterans package and sell dog biscuits, with the proceeds going to a guide dog charity. “This program helps people, especially those who have mental health issues and have a hard time interacting with people.”

Mogil is also on the board of New Eyes for the Needy and spearheads

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the organization's fundraising efforts, which have raised over \$1 million dollars to date.

**SHE SAYS...** "You must listen to the people you serve, as they are your key to success."

## Sarah Wells

**SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT  
OF OPTOMETRY OPERATIONS  
& INTEGRATIONS**  
EyeCare Partners  
St. Louis, Missouri

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Sarah is a cornerstone of our business operations. She is a true leader and her influence is felt at all levels of EyeCare Partners. The

decisions Sarah makes today will be felt for years to come by each of our providers, their optical teams and our growing centralized service organization."



Sarah Wells manages field operations for more than 220 EyeCare Partners' optometry offices across 11 states. In addition, she oversees numerous national support center teams, including marketing, frame buying,

office merchandising, call center operations, project management and new office integration.

"Through a concerted and disciplined process over the past two years, my team has initiated new programs to enhance patient care and accelerate business growth," she said. "Our patient satisfaction, measured by Net Promoter Scores (NPS), is extraordinary, reaching a market-leading rating of 92."

The way she ended up in this role, though, surprises even her. Nineteen years ago, Wells was a college student looking for summer work and happened upon an entry-level position at Clarkson Eyecare. "Almost immediately, I found myself on a career path I never imagined," she said. In 2015, Wells was promoted to

director of operations. FFL Partners subsequently acquired Clarkson and EyeCare Partners (ECP) was formed.

Programs introduced recently include new approaches to lifestyle dispensing, investments in medical technology, expanded product offerings and enhanced marketing efforts to encourage patient compliance with annual eye health exams, Wells said.

**SHE SAYS...** "Build relationships founded upon honesty and transparency, and whenever possible, make data-driven decisions that remove emotions. You can still be sincere and make tough decisions, but when those decisions are informed by facts, you will pursue the right path and your team will follow."

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## Pamela Andrews

### ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, RETAIL GO-TO-MARKET

Carl Zeiss Vision  
San Diego, California

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Pamela “brings creative innovation to the company, constantly going beyond her duties to help all succeed.” She has been recognized by Zeiss with Support Staff of the Year and two Above & Beyond Awards.”



A native of Australia, Pamela Andrews is well-acquainted with the strength of the sun and its harmful effects, so her path into eyecare was a natural fit. While working as an optician she studied marketing at university, bringing her new expertise into the workplace. She then joined Carl Zeiss Vision as a marketing assistant, working her way up through a variety of roles within the Australian and global teams, moving to the U.S. in 2018 and being promoted to associate director, retail go-to-market. There, Andrew’s team supports Zeiss’ retail partners in mutual growth via marketing, merchandising and communications including major product launches, digital campaigns, and development of new demo tools.

Her passion for implementing symbiotic business relationships is also evident in Zeiss’ partnership with the MDSolarSciences skin care company. The campaign launched with a joint, interactive display in the 2019 Vision Expo East registration lobby where attendees experienced a personalized interactive and educational journey showing the effects of UV on their own skin and how lenses protect—promoting a complete UV protection message for face and eyes.

**SHE SAYS...** “Enable your team to work within their areas of genius, while also allowing space to develop new skills and pursue passions. There is ample opportunity to develop one’s optical career in many different disciplines, while always making a positive impact on the way people see their worlds.”

## Crystal Bermudez

### DIRECTOR OF PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Tura Inc.  
New York, New York

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “With her extraordinary design vision and unique sense of color, Crystal has been leading the product team responsible for the success of the Ted Baker, L.A.M.B. and Buffalo David Bitton brands.”

Crystal Bermudez discovered her love for designing eyewear working as a product development intern at B. Robinson Optical. “My journey in the optical industry began 11 years ago



## Jillian Marro

### GLOBAL BRAND DIRECTOR, ALTAIR EYEWEAR

Marchon  
New York, New York

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Since joining Altair Eyewear in 2013, Jillian has taken on increased levels of responsibility, strengthening not only Altair’s portfolio of licensed and owned brands but also creating new capabilities and raising the bar for Altair’s marketing, trade marketing and corporate messaging.”



when one of my dearest friends and mentor, Lauren Michael, hired me as an intern,” said Bermudez. After graduating from The Fashion Institute of Technology in 2010, she was hired full time at the company as a product development specialist by Joyce Kurtulus, another early mentor.

In 2014, Bermudez joined Tura and was soon promoted to senior product manager in charge of the Ted Baker brand. She launched the Gwen Stefani, L.A.M.B and Buffalo Ted Bitton brands and contributed to eight of Tura’s 10 EyeVote awards. Recently promoted to director of Product Development, she now leads her team in the design, product development and merchandising of all Tura brands.

Bermudez credits the women who have mentored her along her career path, including her current boss, Jennifer Coppel. “I’ve learned a lot from mentors who were instrumental in shaping me, and I am excited to share what I’ve learned in this new role.” Her personal philosophy is “to always lead by example, get your hands dirty and know your trade.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Always be ready to learn; do not get in your own way; make something that people want and thing big; don’t be afraid to be bold.”

Among her many accomplishments as global brand director for Altair Eyewear, Jillian Marro has successfully launched six optical brands in six years. This major undertaking succeeded, she said, with the hard work of her team members who tweaked and accelerated their marketing efforts to make each successful launch execution even better.

In addition to launching new products, Marro is responsible for Altair’s corporate narrative, brand portfolio, licensing negotiations and strategic marketing plans. She recently oversaw the contract negotiations and launch of Reese Witherspoon’s Draper James Eyewear

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while simultaneously launching a proof of concept Frame and Lens program for VSP.

“Juggling celebrity licensing while learning about cross lines of business was rigorous, complex and exciting,” she said. “It took me out of my comfort zone and allowed my team and I to explore new ways of doing business.”

Before joining Altair six years ago, Marro was a brand manager and director of sales for B. Robinson Optical, where she honed her skills at launching new products and developing brand positioning and product strategies that have served her well in her career.

**SHE SAYS...** “I encourage women developing their careers to ‘find a way or make your own’ if you have conviction in an idea or thought. Don’t let the first ‘no’ stop you, blaze your own trail.”

## Catherine Satterfield, PhD

### DIRECTOR OF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Hoya Vision Care  
Lewisville, Texas

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “She has been instrumental in pushing Hoya initiatives and culture forward. She has shown the company and all teams to think beyond the job description and do what is best for the customer and the company.”



Satterfield discovered the optical industry as a college student, when she went to buy a pair of glasses at a local Minnesota LensCrafters and ended up getting not only the glasses, but a job too. “I accepted thinking it would maybe last a year, but it turned out it would eventually become my career,” she said.

She started as a frame stylist, then studied opticianry and got her ABO certification. While working as an optician, she went to graduate school and earned a doctorate in neuroscience at the University of Minnesota. Satterfield sees a common thread connecting optical and neuroscience. “A lot of science is about figuring out puzzles, and opticians try to figure out solutions for patients.”

In 2012, she joined Hoya as a territory sales manager. Four years later she was promoted to a new role within Hoya—customer development manager (CDM)—and was named director of training and development in 2018. She manages customer development managers tasked with creating transition plans for new Hoya customers, facilitates growth and education programs, and consults on customer development.

She also oversees the creation of

training programs involving optical knowledge, Hoya products and patient consulting protocols. Her accomplishments include creating an onboarding transition strategy for new Hoya customers and internal ECP sales managers, and creating and launching a CDM team.

**SHE SAYS...** “At end of the day, the patient needs to understand what they’re purchasing. If we can’t simplify it for them, they’ll find someone else who can.”

## Jill Saxon, OD, FFAO

### SENIOR DIRECTOR, PROFESSIONAL STRATEGY

Bausch + Lomb  
Bridgewater, New Jersey

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Ever since Dr. Saxon first joined Bausch + Lomb in 2014, she has been an agent of change, dedicated to doing whatever she can to impact the future, and to ensure that those around her knew that she was someone they could count on.”

Jill Saxon, OD, began her optometric career in the U.S. Navy in 2004. As an active duty Lieutenant optometrist, Saxon says she began to truly understand the importance of instilling change. “I had the opportunity to completely renovate the clinic aboard the USNS Comfort, and to



provide critical vision care to military members and their families,” she explained. After leaving the Navy, she worked in private practice for several years until she was offered a full-time position with Bausch + Lomb in 2014.

“Initially, I was hesitant to leave my practice and patients, but I quickly realized that the opportunity would allow me to have positive impact on so many more patients,” she said. “It was, ultimately, an opportunity that could affect worldwide change, and I have been dedicated to supporting the growth of the future of eyecare ever since.”

At B+L, Saxon’s two key priorities are: professional education and outreach, and developing and launching new products. This work includes: leading a team responsible for engaging with eyecare professionals to ensure the perspectives and insights of optometrists and patients are foundational to the company’s new product development, developing and delivering the company’s training curriculum, developing and leading educational events for ECPs, and fostering relationships with optometric industry members.

**SHE SAYS...** “It’s been my mission to not only serve health

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professionals and patients, but also to inspire young professional women to grow in their careers and to develop their own purpose. I believe that one of the most powerful things we can develop is a network of people that beyond just connecting, can be a there for support, guidance, advice and direction. I encourage every woman to be courageous when their career presents challenges or opportunities; to embrace change [and] to make goals, but always strive to go beyond them."

## Giulia Valmassoi

**THEMA OPTICAL  
NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION**  
Miami, Florida

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Giulia is a "champion of family business," with her strong support for independents and commitment to providing solutions that bring innovation to the wholesale/retail relationship."

A native of Venice, Italy with a background in real estate, Giulia Valmassoi is CEO of Thema Optical's North American division, which opened in 2013. In six years, sales have grown to over \$2.5 million and Thema brands are present in over 1,000 optical retailers across the U.S. Valmassoi is responsible for developing and implementing strategic plans to grow brand awareness and expand the business in the U.S. and Canada, as



well as daily operations.

Thema was one of the first companies to offer bespoke frames in response to growing consumer demand for personalized expression via eyewear, with the option to mix and match hundreds of design elements. Today, with Valmassoi's strategic direction, biometrics is taking customization even further—the Virtual Eyewear Assistant, paired with their patented 3D Acetate technology, takes a 3D scan of the customer's face to create a unique facial profile rendering. It then provides virtual try-on of over a million style/color combinations and manufactures the glasses based on the customer's unique facial measurements in under one week—a nod to the importance of meeting the fulfillment expectations of the "Amazon consumer."

Valmassoi is a member of The Vision Council's Emerging Optical Leaders committee and the OWA, and embraces the power of mentorship. On her leadership style, she said, "I don't hire people to tell them what to do and how to do it all the time. I need new ideas and fresh points of view to constantly improve our services."

SHE SAYS... "We've all found people who have inspired us or been role models—always aim to be that kind of person. Realize the power of a single idea; your voice; your actions."

## Alana Whitaker

**RAY-BAN SALES CONSULTANT**  
Luxottica  
San Diego, California

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Supporting others in this field is influential as hell, and Alana's killin' it at that! She has stayed true to her goals, providing valuable tips to reps and helping ECPs with social media."



If you follow social media eyewear influencers, then you know @CaliforniaGlassesGirl, a.k.a. Alana Whitaker, is widely considered "a top optical follow." Part of the optical industry for seven years, with a background in fund-raising and event planning, Alana now represents Ray-Ban and is responsible for wholesale sales and account management of independent opticals and sun specialty stores in San Diego County. She educates

accounts on best practices for growing business and maximizing profits, including social media, visual merchandising, inventory management, optical dispensary sales and sell-through.

Prior to Ray-Ban, she created @CaliforniaGlassesGirl on Instagram to network and gain new business, which evolved into an engaged national audience that trusts her opinion because "I only talk about things I believe in," whether it's optical trends, new products or business. Alana passes that expertise to her accounts, teaching them to leverage social media and translate that to sales—an important service, as the industry continues its digital shift.

Finding her "work tribe" has made a world of difference as she develops her career. Alana is now an active member of the OWA, serving on its Digital Marketing Committee and giving and receiving support among many women (including competitors) who help each other succeed.

SHE SAYS... "It's never too late. Go after what you want—usually the worst that happens is you're told 'no.' Don't wait for things to be handed to you. Women are often paid less, passed up for promotions, etc. because we're scared to ask. Find a mentor—I wish I'd done it sooner."

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## Monique S. Anderson

**PMO DIRECTOR,  
PORTFOLIO SOLUTIONS**  
VSP Vision Care  
Rancho Cordova, California



CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Monique’s team helps business leaders at VSP define executive programs and projects that support the growing needs of the VSP Vision Care leadership team. The result has been exceptional year-over-year growth that benefits VSP network doctors, clients and members.”

As director of Portfolio Solutions, Monique Anderson oversees 45 to 50 programs and projects encompassing a spectrum of VSP business initiatives. These include the planning and execution of corporate essential efforts for VSP lines of business and global priorities. Her division focuses on strategic decisions and tactical services that

assess organizational impacts, technology solutions, business architecture and program life cycle management.

Anderson refers to her team of 28 project managers and analysts as “the most amazingly talented and diverse group who make me laugh and learn something new every day!” Her approach to leadership, she said, is to figure out what makes each team member unique, to bring out those unique skills and abilities and to amplify them to create better teams.

Anderson joined VSP in 1998 as a communications specialist. She has held positions as a business

analyst, program manager and senior project manager before assuming her current role in 2018. Active in her community, she helps raise funds to support the Pleasant Grove high school marching band and serves as a mentor with the Sacramento Black Chamber of Commerce Young Leadership Collaborative that helps future business leaders develop the skills to succeed.

**SHE SAYS...** “Don’t get stuck telling yourself negative stories. Have the courage to blow through the roadblocks we set up for ourselves.”

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## Melissa Barnett, OD, FAAO, FSLs, FBCLA

**PRINCIPAL OPTOMETRIST**  
University of California Davis  
Eye Center  
Sacramento, California

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Melissa Barnett, OD, is passionate about fitting scleral lenses because of the impact they can have on patients who are nearly without other options. She has great perspectives on the young, healthy population and the difficult to fit from her work at the specialty clinic at the Davis Eye Center.”



Melissa Barnett, OD, has been practicing optometry for 18 years and is a leading authority on scleral lenses. Her career started in private practice ophthalmology, which she said “was a wonderful learning experience.” After four years, an opportunity became available at the University of California Davis Eye Center, where she currently practices.

At the Davis Eye Center she performs comprehensive primary care and medical eye exams, fits contact lenses including specialty lenses, provides preoperative and postoperative care for refractive surgery patients,

and teaches optics and contact lenses to ophthalmology residents.

In addition to sitting on numerous boards, including the American Optometric Association and the California Optometric Association, she is a past president of the Scleral Lens Education Society. Barnett and Dr. Lynette Johns authored and edited the book “Contemporary Scleral Lenses: Theory and Application” with perspectives and contributions from international experts.

The secret to her success? “Discover your specialty in the profession, something that you love, and become passionate about it. Understand that it is important to continue to keep learning and work hard over many years.”

**SHE SAYS...** “My ‘why’ is to enhance others to become their best selves through the power of connection. Being constantly mindful and aware of this affects my decisions—from the little ones I make on a daily basis to the big ones that shape my future. But more than anything, my why helps me to appreciate my life and express gratitude.”

## Nelly Bonniol

**VICE PRESIDENT  
PROVIDER RELATIONS**  
EyeMed-Luxottica  
Cincinnati, Ohio

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Nelly embodies a true mentor and coach. She empowers those around her to push through obstacles to make the right thing happen.”



Nelly Bonniol is the senior executive in charge of provider relations and operations for EyeMed-Luxottica, overseeing provider communications and clinical standards of care for over 40,000 EyeMed providers. In this role, she provides leadership for strategic projects and initiatives designed to enhance products and services that drive provider and member satisfaction. She negotiates and manages contracts with strategic partners and identifies new ways to expand networks and develop value propositions for providers and members.

Prior to entering optical, Bonniol, a native of France, handled commercial operations for a French aviation company, negotiating large contracts. Seeking a career change, she joined EyeMed-Luxottica in 2014, hoping to play a meaningful role, she said, in making vision care accessible and affordable. “This has been a very exciting and rewarding transition, both professionally and personally.”

As a manager, Bonniol believes her job is to set people up for success and to provide them an environment to thrive and grow. This means spending time, she noted, getting to know team members individually, valuing their expertise, helping them stretch, and empowering them to make decisions and achieve great things. As a working mother of five

children and former competitive swimmer, Bonniol believes in the importance of discipline, goal setting and pace in life.

**SHE SAYS...** “I firmly believe this is true about everything in life: you need to understand the race you are in and you have to constantly manage your pace.”

## Phaedra Chernoff

**CORPORATE KEY ACCOUNTS  
MANAGER**  
L’Amy America  
Norwalk, Connecticut

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She brings a wealth of knowledge, professionalism and experience to our company. Her invaluable dedication to hard work and enthusiasm is contagious.”



A Long Beach, Long Island native, Phaedra Chernoff attended SUNY-Albany, got her BA in Communications and just out of college, did a brief stint at an advertising agency. She then went to work for Viva International founder Harvey Ross who had built a successful eyewear business selling to ECPs and optical retailers. He thought there was much potential in the sunglass business for the brands in the company’s portfolio. Recalls Chernoff, “I took a bag and just started making phone calls, and hit

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the ground running. Eventually, Viva established a sun division and our business grew.” Chernoff became national retail accounts manager there for seven years.

She joined the Chernoff family at New Millennium Eyewear in 1997. “I worked in many capacities, inside and outside roles, and my husband Chris taught me so much about the product path, factories, supply chain and more.” She was there for over 17 years, moving up to VP of sales.

After a sales stint at Safilo USA, Chernoff joined L’Amy America as corporate key account manager in September 2017, where she has been focused on expanding the group’s business.

**SHE SAYS...** “Always be true to who you are while always doing your homework, always hustling and

always staying hungry. Remember that you have no limits, so try new things, keep it positive and always have fun.”

## Stephanie J. Lucas

**EXECUTIVE VP,  
MEMBER SOLUTIONS**  
Healthy Eyes Advantage  
Boca Raton, Florida

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Stephanie is exemplary of inspirational leadership and has the ability to bring out the best of our employees.”

With more than 25 years’ experience in the vision industry, Stephanie Lucas says joining Healthy Eyes Advantage (formed in 2017 following a merger of four separate buying groups, including



the former Block Business Group—one of her prior employers—was a “homecoming.” As executive VP of Member Solutions, she leads HEA’s sales, marketing and member services initiatives to attract, grow and retain the company’s membership base, ensuring that HEA’s tailored supports for independent ECPs are properly communicated and leveraged.

Accomplishments to date include HEA’s successful rebranding, with the network now a recognized leader

among IECP membership groups; the development of HEA’s value proposition as “the next-generation marketplace for IECPs;” and introduction of a new membership model with a variety of plan options to “service the intermediary,” streamline operations and aid in resource navigation to meet members’ unique needs ranging from education and tools, to billing support, payment solutions, and combined purchasing power for cost savings.

Lucas urges women developing their careers to “Immerse yourself and leverage the collaborative nature of our industry” and “take advantage of the many resources available to industry newcomers and veterans alike: professional organizations, media, events and individuals who are welcoming and eager.”

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**SHE SAYS...** “My passion throughout my career has been optimizing the customer experience and creating value by going the extra mile—there are no traffic jams there. My goal for myself and for HEA is to make it a little more crowded.”

## Susan Rose Ohneck

### REGIONAL VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES

Marchon Eyewear  
Melville, New York

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Along with Sue’s current responsibilities she also led the team launching our Kaleyoscope frame board management program, our Elite Account Program and our new Sun Rx program. She has built these through nurturing a strong team ‘can do’ attitude.”



As regional vice president of sales, Sue Rose Ohneck is responsible for Marchon’s sales, profitability, market growth and strategic direction in seven states and Canada. Among her accomplishments, she successfully integrated procedures in Canada resulting in increased sales and profitability.

She also created and implemented an Elite Accounts Program generating over \$20 million in sales in three years. She and her team helped design a company-wide program that optimizes cus-

tomers’ inventories by streamlining operational efficiencies and leveraging analytics to drive sales.

Ohneck grew up in the optical industry, she noted, having a father who was an optometrist. Early in her career, she worked as a licensed optician and as an optical sales representative for various frame companies before joining Marchon 28 years ago. Over the years, she has honed a management style based on being flexible and pragmatic in decision-making, and always being transparent and honest.

Her leadership philosophy, she said, is based on “learning about the people you lead, recognizing their strengths, finding opportunities to support them in their strengths, and expressing gratitude for their traits and what they accomplished.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Learn your own strengths and how to communicate what you have to offer. Read and learn from past successful women, not only in the optical industry but also in other industries.”

## Nancy Roellke

### DIRECTOR PRACTICE EXPERIENCE

VSP Optics  
Rancho Cordova, California

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Nancy’s vast knowledge in the optical industry and remarkable character make her an asset in mentoring and the development of others.”

Recently named director of practice experience at VSP Optics, Nancy Roellke leads a team responsible for providing VSP network doctors with the tools and support needed to deliver a differenti-



ated patient experience. Her group is focused on developing new tools and redesigning existing tools to further enhance patient care. In her previous position, Roellke collaborated with international R&D partners to bring advanced technology lens designs to market. Her team launched Unity Via progressive lenses, Unity Via OfficePro computer lenses and Unity Relieve lenses for digital eye strain.

Roellke’s 30-year career in the industry began in optical retail, where she earned ABO certification. She then moved into sales, marketing and product management roles with SOLA Optical and Zeiss. She joined VSP Optics in 2015.

Developing her leadership style over the years, Roellke noted, “It’s important to surround yourself with bright people who challenge you and challenge conventional wisdom.” Her guidelines for managing are to: Always ask staff members to identify solutions not simply problems; offer guidance while providing the latitude to learn; express confidence in people’s abilities; and thank them for their accomplishments.

**SHE SAYS...** “Take inventory of your skills and interests, then find a path that’s meaningful to you. Know your value and ask for what you want. Work hard; remember to respect people at every level, both inside and outside of your organization. You never know where your path might take you.”

## Tamara Sanders

### SENIOR DIRECTOR OF SALES, INDEPENDENT DISTRIBUTION DIVISION

Essilor of America  
Dallas, Texas

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Tamara is the consummate team leader/role model with the best interests of her team, the company, and her customers at heart. She maintains a positive attitude in the face of business adversity and has an ability to make negotiations and business tasks nearly stress-free.”



Tamara Sanders’ journey with Essilor began 12 years ago with a Texas A&M University MBA internship in the company’s marketing organization, joining full-time in 2007 to work in consumer advertising. She led the initial pilot launch for Think About Your Eyes (TAYE), then moved into leadership roles in both channel and product marketing, and served on the marketing committee for the TAYE Industry Coalition.

Sanders then took on her current role, bridging marketing expertise with commercial experience by partnering with Essilor’s Managed Vision Care customers who operate their own labs. There she has driven strong sales growth in 2018 and the first half of 2019, activates new product introduc-

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tions for Essilor's Wholesale lab division, and also oversees Essilor's online resource which houses product technical details for labs. By leading the inventory management process for new product launches, Sanders has increased transparency and enhanced partnerships with lab customers.

An active member of the OWA, Tamara serves as vice chair of its Website Design Committee. She is also a leader within the Essilor Women's Network and participates in its Dallas-area community outreach program. She names Maureen Cavanagh, VP of retail at Essilor and OWA board member, as one of her strongest advocates who instilled the value and power of networking and building relationships.

**SHE SAYS...** "My personal leadership

philosophy is "Be N.I.C.E.: Always be thinking of the Next steps to guide your team, be Inclusive to foster ownership in the process, be Collaborative to ensure alignment across key stakeholders, and lead by Example."

## Carrie Wilson, ABOM

### SENIOR FIELD QUALITY ASSURANCE MANAGER, OPTICAL DIVISION

Walmart Inc.  
Bentonville, Arkansas and  
Dalton, Georgia

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** "Carrie designed and implemented training plans that have a direct impact on more than 3,000 Walmart Vision Centers and Sam's Club Opticals.

She also developed and presented communications that have reached thousands of associates in multimedia formats."

Carrie Wilson is going into her 21st year in the optical industry, and during this time she has worked in many diverse roles, from dispensing to manufacturing and from private practice to corporate optical. She's a member of the Optical Women's Association and The Vision Council and its Lens Technical Committee, and is a former board member of the Contact Lens Society of America. She's also a founding member and former board member of the Society to Advance Opticianry.

At Walmart, she is responsible for ensuring the quality output of 3,200 locations, three manufacturing facilities and the vendor partners. "In essence, I



work as a liaison between the stores, labs and corporate so they can create and dispense quality eyewear," she said. Wilson helped develop science-based training programs for Walmart that reach approximately 10,000 associates.

**SHE SAYS...** "My role is to serve those who I lead. My goal is to inspire, develop and encourage them to reach their full potential and to make their lives better... Do not underestimate yourself. You are probably stronger and more knowledgeable than you realize."

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

## Kirsten Anderson

**SENIOR DIRECTOR,  
ECOMMERCE SALES & STRATEGY**  
Luxottica Wholesale N.A.  
New York, New York

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Kirsten has played a strategic role in growing Luxottica’s wholesale business online. She has developed deep partnerships with customers and, as part of the larger team, pushed to invest in the consumer experience and the digital marketing approach for customers. Her role requires a delicate balance, which she is well suited to.”



Kirsten Anderson brings a unique mix of skill sets to her role at Luxottica Wholesale. She is an engineer by training, but moved into management consulting after college and spent eight years at Accenture (with about half of this time working in retail and consumer goods businesses). She joined Luxottica in 2015 in an internal strategy role and, in 2016, transitioned to director of e-commerce.

Currently, Anderson manages P&L reporting for all pure-play e-commerce wholesale accounts, leads the online strategy and execution across North America wholesale (pure-play, clicks and mortar and omnichannel), including distribution policies, MAP policy (minimum advertised price) and segmentation strategy. She also oversees shared services

to support online merchandising for wholesale accounts and research related to online consumer behavior and shopping trends for Luxottica brands.

**SHE SAYS...** “When you take on big challenges, you will sometimes come up short—but keep doing your best and never throw in the towel. The idea of failing is scary, but I have learned from experience that strong leadership will value your willingness to take risks and resilience to push through setbacks.”

## Elena Z. Biffi, OD, MSc, FAAO

**ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR**  
New England College of Optometry  
Primary Care Department  
**ATTENDING OPTOMETRIST**  
South Boston Community  
Health Center/NECO Center for  
Eye Care

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Dr. Elena Biffi is an innovator. She developed an App called OCTaVIA. This App is extremely helpful for the optometry or ophthalmology student, residents as well as practitioners in the interpretation optic nerve head and macular OCT’s.”

A first-generation immigrant to the U.S., Dr. Biffi said she “always knew” she wanted to become a teacher in the field of clinical eyecare. “I devoted all my energy since immigrating to the U.S. at age 17 toward become a doctor of optometry,” she said—and it paid off. She graduated summa cum laude from the University of Massachusetts, then earned her Doctor of Optometry and



Master in Visual Sciences degrees from the New England College of Optometry (NECO) in 2010. She began practicing after completing an ocular diseases residency with SUNY College of Optometry, and today she divides her time between clinical care and her teaching and research responsibilities at NECO.

Hoping to share her expertise in OCT imaging, Dr. Biffi has developed a first-of-its kind OCT Visual Atlas app, which she calls OCTaVIA. The app is an annotated atlas of retinal disorders with corresponding OCT findings, as well as links to literature for diagnosis and management of these conditions. Dr. Biffi designed the app to be easy to use at all levels of training, and she also conducted a study that demonstrated higher satisfaction rates and better test performances among students who used the OCTaVIA app.

**SHE SAYS...** “I am a big believer in looking outside the box, and I am convinced that women have an incredible potential to come up with new and innovative solutions to advance vision care further and further every day.”

## Addie Bogart

**WESTERN U.S. SALES REP**  
Feb31st, nine eyewear and  
Article One; CEO, The After Party

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Addie is an independent eyewear evangelist and keystone of West Coast optical.”



Addie Bogart began her career as an optician in Southern California, spending over 20 years there and in Washington State. She then became a frame rep, returning to California to work for Ogi Eyewear for three years. Following that, she stepped into her current position as a multi-line rep for Feb31st, nine eyewear, and Article One, with a 12-state territory.

In her other role as CEO of The After Party eyewear show, Bogart feels her greatest accomplishment is growing the event while staying true to its original purpose: providing a relaxed environment with direct, immediate solutions— independent frame lines and continuing education—to ECPs seeking something different from the competition down the street or online. Following overwhelming interest from buyers, frame lines and reps to expand, Addie and her business partners have produced five successful events to date that promote independent eyewear, labs and lenses throughout the West Coast. Among her mentors, Bogart credits her brother Shaun and Dr. James Rachford, and highlights Melodie Annis for “pushing me out from behind the dispensing desk” to pursue becoming a

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rep. She also acknowledges Lou Fullagar, founder of the Luxury Eyewear Forum, and its resources, without which she said “I simply would not be where I am in my career.”

**SHE SAYS...** “I urge opticians who want to become reps not to be daunted by perceptions of income instability or because they lack experience. As evidenced by my cousin Crystal’s recent hiring as a rep for an independent line, following a 10-day trial-by-fire business road trip. It’s not easy, but with self-discipline, drive and good support at home, you can do it.”

## Trudi Charest

### CO-FOUNDER

Marketing4ECPs  
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Female or not, Trudi is the most influential person I know in our industry, highlighting her 30+ year reputation as a respected innovator, problem solver, thought-leader, trainer and all-around networker.”



As co-founder of Marketing4ECPs, a digital marketing agency focused in eyecare that services all of North America, Trudi Charest thrives on helping clients from all industry sectors grow their businesses through the power of digital marketing. There, she is responsible for

business strategy and development, as well as partner acquisitions and proposals. Charest is also the creator of EyeInnovate, the first dedicated marketing and growth conference in the industry.

Having grown up in the industry, Charest’s experience—from optician, to manager, to corporate trainer for a large optical chain—combines keenly with her ability to identify service gaps and create opportunities to fill them with innovative products. After over a decade in retail, she joined Bausch + Lomb in Vision Care sales and won Rookie of the Year and Rep of the Year awards.

She spent time in clinical consulting with Optos before starting her own business, then joined the EyeRecommend buying group as VP of Marketing, Training & Events, launching Marketing4ECPs in 2015. Charest is a sought-after international speaker, and her other successful ventures include an online job site and training portal for ECPs.

A key mentor was Marina Vittelli, her first supervisor at Shoppers Optical, who inspired her to lead by example. Within her own team, Charest “gives people the reins,” providing tools, training, and feedback to enable stretch performance. She is a member of the OWA, where she values the myriad networking opportunities.

**SHE SAYS...** I advise women developing careers in optical to “Do more. The most successful women in this industry didn’t step into it, they worked for it.”

## Theresa Colonna, OD

ASSOCIATE OPTOMETRIST AND

### LEAD TRAINER OF OPTOMETRIC TECHNICIANS

Westminster Eyecare Associates  
Providence, Rhode Island

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Dr. Colonna played a critical part in building the staff training program (at Westminster Eyecare Associates) over the years, as well as implementing their online virtual staff training program.

She was featured twice in the WO Voices podcast series from *Women In Optometry* in January 2019 for her work on the staff training program, which has taken their practice to the highest level possible.”



As lead trainer of optometric technicians at Westminster Eyecare Associates, Dr. Colonna knows what it means to take the initiative. The role came about, Dr. Colonna said, because “I saw a need at our practice for a more detailed and standardized training program. I worked with the owners, managers, doctors and technicians to help develop a virtual training program that has increased efficiency and quality of staff training.” Under her guidance, Westminster Eyecare Associates has developed a robust and cohesive training program.

When it comes to training, Dr. Colonna emphasizes both leading by example and taking a compassionate and understanding approach to her training.

She said, “It is essential to educate and teach not just how to perform the techniques, but make sure they understand the why behind it, Positive reinforcement is always helpful. People don’t respond well when you only tell them what they are doing wrong. Lead with the things they do right, then emphasize that there are always ways we can all improve.”

**SHE SAYS...** “It think it’s important to lead by example. You can’t expect others to perform to their highest ability if you aren’t.”

## Coco Dotson and Breezy Dotson

### FOUNDERS

Coco and Breezy Eyewear  
New York, New York

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Coco and Breezy devote their time to inspiring and empowering individuals while developing their brand image through their eyewear company, DJ events, modeling and serving as ambassadors and spokeswomen, promoting eye health and wellness along with their frames.”



Coco Dotson and Breezy Dotson may have been selected as two of 2019’s Most Influential Women in Optical, but their reach goes far beyond our indus-

try. The twin sisters manage multiple ventures as in-demand deejays, models, and brand ambassadors, in addition to founding the line of ophthalmic frames and sunwear that bears their names, which they run along with their co-founder Duane Baker. They put their unique stamp on each, with over 100K Instagram followers eagerly engaging with their inspirational, pro-women messaging.

Coco and Breezy started their company after high school, handcrafting DIY frames and self-educating through trial and error about eyewear design and production. After selling only in fashion retailers for seven years, they partnered with Eastern States Eyewear in late 2017 to grow their presence in optical retail locations.

Their responsibilities range from in-

house eyewear design (ideation, sketching, CAD drawing) to factory sourcing, managing production and ready-to-market. The sisters are committed to marketing that builds inclusivity and spurs engagement, emphasizing that their eyewear designs are unisex—“product for a person, not a gender”—and brings greater diversity to optical POP.

They consider the ability of their collateral materials to start conversations and build community a major accomplishment. Coco and Breezy were also one of the first influencers to partner with Transitions Light Intelligent lenses to introduce the brand to Millennials, authentically incorporating the brand into their personal style and highlighting the intersection of vision protection and correction while co-promoting their own frames with Transitions lenses.

They identify Sharifa Murdock, co-founder of the Liberty Fairs Trade Shows company, as a key figure in the early part of their journey who gave them their first trade show booth and encouraged them to take the leap into retail in 2012. Their philosophy: “It is important to support each other, especially in a male-dominated industry. Reach out to other women in the field and share stories and advice. Women in tech circles have been a significant source of support for us.”

As disruptors in the evolving optical industry, they pride themselves on creating their own rules, and use social media to connect with and share advice with followers seeking guidance on starting their own businesses, including aspiring eyewear designers.

**THEY SAY...** “Building a community with authenticity, transparency, diversity and inclusion is central to our role as leaders. We believe it is important to be great listeners and solicit feedback. We try to give everyone the stage to share their ideas; we pump up our team every day, and focus on positivity.”

## Julia Gogoshia

### FOUNDER/OWNER

Gogoshia Optique  
Echo Park, Los Angeles, California

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Julia continues to support peers, former employees, and other designers as she takes risks, allowing herself failures as well as successes.”

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Julia Gogosha wears many hats: marketing, client and vendor relations, product collaboration and capsule design, commercial, celebrity and editorial frame styling, bookkeeping, inventory management, buying, fitting, product education, teaching selling techniques, and leading a team. She considers her biggest accomplishment “building something bigger than myself”—watching opticians flourish, giving clients memorable experiences, fostering team connections—and being able to step away, knowing her business is in capable hands.

Gogosha’s prior optical career spans opticianry, buying, and representing luxury frame lines. Her expertise was cultivated working with hundreds of stores, managing inventory, conveying brand stories, honing sales skills and strengthening product knowledge across the country. She noted that Los Angeles was a difficult market for creative eyewear at the time, so in 2008, she decided to open a shop celebrating the collections she loved and was willing to take a risk on introducing.

“Leading is new for me,” she said. “It’s paramount to keep goals and expectations clear. Nurturing curiosity, recognizing growth, correcting mistakes quietly, praising loudly, follow-up and follow-through” are her daily leadership practices. Of her growth, Julia said, “I’ve worked with many industry legends. It’s a trip to look to my mentors and know they see me as their peer.”

**SHE SAYS...** “Do what scares you. Champion who and what you believe in. Tenacity, consistency, conviction, grace, collaboration, focus and progress are daily practices that made me, and can apply to anyone regardless of gender. I don’t consider myself a successful woman, but a successful person. My strength is in doing things from my own perspective: not trying to level up to a man, but to excel as a woman.”

## Jacqueline (Jackie) Janiec

**DIRECTOR OF MARKETING**  
Zyloware  
Port Chester, New York

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Jacqueline aligns our brands with social influencers and creates custom social media posts for retail to draw in customers. Her creativity is endless. She is a motivator, leader and inspirational.”



While she excels in many aspects of her job as director of marketing for Zyloware, Jackie Janiec’s proudest innovation, she said, is the creation of National Eyewear Day. This initiative, she explained, was created to spread awareness of proper eyecare and eye health and to celebrate “helping people see a beautiful day, every day.”

Each year on June 6, the birthday of company founder Joseph Shyer, Zyloware promotes new tips, tools and philanthropic initiatives to spotlight the importance of vision care, said Janiec. “This year, we hosted an event at Zyloware’s corporate office and helped over 66 underserved members of our local community receive a free eye exam and glasses.”

Janiec’s optical career began 19 years ago when her goal to work in fashion led her to Landis eyewear. Joining Zyloware in 2006, she moved from administration to creative services to marketing, where she leads a team handling public relations, social media and vendor/customer relationships. “I have had amazing opportunities in my career that I attribute to my can-do attitude and I know that outlook will lead me to more fulfilling experiences in the future.”

**SHE SAYS...** “As a Brené Brown fan, I embrace her words of wisdom: “A leader is someone who takes responsibility for finding the potential in people and processes, and who has the courage to develop that potential.”

## Maria Sampalis, OD

**CORPORATE OPTOMETRY**  
Sampalis Eye Care  
Cranston, Rhode Island

**CHOSEN BECAUSE...** “Maria has a large presence on social media with 25k followers on Facebook, 20k on LinkedIn and 5k on Instagram. She contributes to many magazines and conferences and has two websites to help ODs. Maria has changed things in the industry for corporate optometry.”



As the founder of Corporate Optometry, a group that has grown to 25,000 members in the optical community, Dr. Maria Sampalis has provided a platform that has offered ODs solutions in corporate optometry. Sampalis has been a trendsetter in the optical industry—she developed the websites [corporateoptometry.com](http://corporateoptometry.com) and [corporateoptometrycareers.com](http://corporateoptometrycareers.com). Her newest venture, CODA-Corporate OD Alliance ([corporateods.com](http://corporateods.com)) is a nationwide group organization focused on empowering the corporate OD.

There was a great need for these websites and Facebook groups in the industry and Sampalis has been a go-to resource for many young ODs who wanted to start their own businesses. She believes “Optometry is optometry wherever you decide to practice.”

In 2016, Sampalis was named Rhode Island’s Young OD of the Year. She is a member of the Rhode Island Board of Health, and the Massachusetts executive board of optometry. Sampalis is also an optometry board member for Healthy Eyes Advantage, and is the editor for *Pentavision Magazine Corporate Optometry Today*.

“I have had great support over the years from my husband and family. I would not have been able to accomplish as much as I have without them,” she said.

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

SHE SAYS... “Just because something hasn’t been done or has been difficult than others don’t limit yourself. You are able to do what you want to do. Ignore the noise and aim for the stars. Remember, you control your own destiny.”

## Leilani Sonoda

**PRINCIPAL SCIENTIST,  
GLOBAL SPHERE AND LIGHT  
MANAGEMENT PLATFORM  
RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT**  
Johnson & Johnson Vision  
Jacksonville, Florida

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Acuvue Oasys with Transitions would not exist without her technical expertise, leadership and dedication.”

Sonoda is a scientist focused on light management contact lenses. She has been one of the constants on the project to develop Acuvue Oasys with Transitions for more than 10 years. As technical lead and project manager for light management technologies she has partnered with Transitions Optical’s R&D team and led her team at Johnson and Johnson Vision through the innovation and regulatory processes to allow this product to see the light of day.

“I worked closely with Transitions to overcome two significant challenges: optimize the photochromic material for a contact lens and internally develop manufacturing requirements needed for a new state-of-the-art manufacturing line to produce the



product at scale,” she explained.

Sonoda’s career path started with a one-year internship with Johnson & Johnson Vision (previously known as Vistakon) in 2003 working on intellectual property and early development of photochromic curing technology. She graduated in 2004 with a BS in chemistry from the University of North Florida and received the American Chemical Society Award.

After working at the Mayo Clinic

for three years, she took a new position at Johnson & Johnson Vision R&D with a focus on photochromic technology, new raw material characterization, and contact lens formulation development. Sonoda received the Johnson & Johnson Vision Vice President of Research & Development Award in 2014.

SHE SAYS... “My personal philosophy is to lead people by establishing trust among everyone on the team, leading by example, encouraging collaboration in overcoming challenges, and acknowledging each one’s efforts as it plays into the progress of the team and the organization.” ■