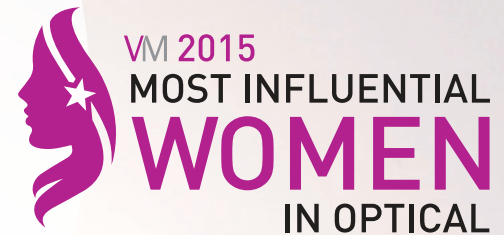


#HerStory



NEW YORK—Coming up with a theme for this Special Report year after year is no easy task. Some of us on the editorial team have been profiling optical's Influential Women since VM's Special Report began way back in 2003. The challenge is always the same: finding a theme that is fresh and dynamic, like the Influential Women themselves.

After thinking of—and rejecting—several possibilities, we hit upon this year's theme #HerStory, and it felt right. Because as writers, we all love telling a good story and this year's crop of honorees provided many opportunities to do just that.

So once again this year, we play the storyteller, painting vibrant portraits of women in today's optical landscape—giving you an idea of what it's like in the worlds of vision care, retailing, manufacturing, distribution, dispensing and designing.

This year's Influential Women were chosen

from a large pool of nominees named by *VM* readers and in the following pages we profile their accomplishments in these roles:

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

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

As you read through these profiles, we hope you'll enjoy their “stories” and come to know why they are being singled out for this honor. They join a distinguished group of nearly 500 Influential Women whom we've profiled since 2003.

Join the conversation about these Influential Women and other industry standouts you may know using the hashtag #HerStory. Please visit www.VisionMonday.com to review an alphabetical listing of past years' honorees and to read prior years' Special Reports. ■

—The Editors



EXECUTIVE SUITE

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



Liduvina Martinez-Gonzalez is passionate about delivering quality health care and eyecare services to the New York City community. With over 27 years of experience in health care management, including 24 years at SUNY's College of Optometry, she has devoted her career to public health. Today, she is the school's first woman VP of Clinical Administration and the first non-optometrist executive director of the University Eye Center. Her advancement in a variety of administrative roles at the college has provided a broad understanding of the organization and its many components, preparing her for these challenging roles.

The University Eye Center has over 70,000 patient visits annually with a clinical staff of about 60 full-time and part-time optometrists, 11 opticians and 75 support personnel, and serves as a teaching facility for optometrists. Martinez-Gonzalez has introduced professional development programs for the staff and revamped the EMR and practice management systems. These efforts have increased revenue, employee engagement and patient satisfaction.

To be successful in your career and in life, Martinez-Gonzalez believes that you need to invest in your passion and in the people you work with. "Our most valuable asset is our staff," she noted.

SHE SAYS... "Don't let what you *can't* do get in the way of what you *can* do; I think about this when faced with a challenge which may seem daunting."

Donna J. Mikulecky

**VICE PRESIDENT,
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Vision Source
Kingwood, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Her role as vice president of professional development includes

leading, mentoring and overseeing over 170 doctor administrators who lead local regions within the Vision Source network, and she is a role model to both women and men in the company and across the membership."



A CPA in health care for over 25 years, Donna Mikulecky joined Vision Source in August of 2014. As vice president of professional development, she provides 170 administrators with the resources to effectively do their jobs and deliver value to members. "In the 10 months I have been with Vision Source, some of my major accomplishments have been the creation of a more robust onboarding and orientation program for our administrators, success factors/goals for our administrators and dashboards and metrics to help them evaluate their success," she said.

Her advice to other women in the optical field, "Do what you can to help other women succeed. Don't be afraid to ask a question. I often thought I had to know everything, but it is in asking questions you learn a lot more and create more opportunities."

She believes that optometry will have to evolve to meet consumer demands, many resulting from women. "Women will continue to demand customer-centric, affordable, convenient and easily accessible options for eyecare services and products."

SHE SAYS... "I've always been motivated to do the best I can at whatever I am doing. Now that I have two children, I tell them to always be and give their best at everything they do, so I try to lead by example."

Sherry Lanier Pugh

VICE PRESIDENT

Optical Prescription Lab (OPL)
Optical Supply Co-op (OSC)
Pelham, Alabama

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "She stays on top of technology with digital processing so ECPs can have the best lens possible with quick turnaround time to ensure that they retain their customers."



Sherry Lanier Pugh started in the lab business at age 14 when her mother started Optical Prescription Lab (OPL) in 1977. Although somewhat reluctant at first, she learned the business as she gradually took on more responsibility.

By her own description, Pugh is "extremely detail oriented, an excellent troubleshooter, and does not easily accept no for an answer." Those qualities have enabled her to play a key role in growing the business into one of the most successful independent labs earning Optical Prescription Lab's many awards, including *Vision Monday's* Top 20 Labs 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012.

Currently, she oversees the daily operations at OPL and Optical Supply Co-op (OSC) a buying group for labs that she created in 1997. She manages accounts receivable and payable for OPL and OSC, is the purchasing and ultimate decision maker for OPL, and negotiates pricing and special offerings for OSC. Pugh takes pride in providing employment and a career for 21 people who support families, many of whom have insufficient education to secure a career with an opportunity for advancement.

SHE SAYS... "Show up and be persistent; face time is invaluable. Always be on time. Attempt to go above and beyond your customer's expectations. Always deliver on your promises. There is no traffic in the extra mile."

Tonya Reynoldson, OD

**CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD, TENNESSEE
ASSOCIATION OF OPTOMETRIC PHYSICIANS**

Vision Source/ River Valley Eye Clinic
Waverly, Tennessee

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EXECUTIVE SUITE

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

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Tonya has made a significant impact on optometry in Tennessee and is an excellent candidate for further office in regional and national associations.”



While most people would say that their biggest accomplishment is success in their business, Tonya Reynoldson, OD, believes that her biggest accomplishment is “having an open mind to learn each day from my staff, patients and peers.”

Reynoldson, a mother of three, has been in practice for 14 years. After finishing a residency in ocular disease and working as center director for cataract referral in Jackson, Tenn. for two years, she opened a practice from scratch, and nine months later, she purchased an existing practice. Now, along with her business partner, Michelle Harrison, they have four practices between them.

When it comes to the optical field, Reynoldson believes that it is always personal. Whether it's seeing a patient after hours or giving up personal time to work with vision therapy patients, she takes great strides to reach out.

“I think we do these things because it's personal, and we all hold a personal stake in each of our communities and patients' lives,” she said.

Juggling work and family might be Reynoldson's biggest challenge, but her biggest strength is dreaming big. To other women in the field, she advises them to never quit. She noted that the percentage of women in optometry has grown past “our male counterparts.”

“Last year, when I became president of our state association, I was the second female to be president in our state. The first female was 20 years ago...women are becoming leaders and innovators in our profession.”

SHE SAYS... “You give love, you get love.”

Debbie Schmitz

PRESIDENT

LensWorks Optical Labs
Plymouth, Minnesota

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Labs all over the world have implemented a lot of processes and procedures with Debbie's fingerprints all over them. Her influence is widespread.”



It only takes a moment of talking with Debbie Schmitz to realize she's a people person. “My favorite thing is talking with customers, troubleshooting problems and recommending solutions for their patients,” she said. “Opticians really struggle sometimes, and they need a sounding board. I love being able to help them. As an independent lab owner, I can sell them what's going to work best for them, and offer a personal touch.”

Schmitz's expert advice is based on nearly three decades of experience in the lab business. She began her career as a data entry operator at Twin City Optical in Minnesota, where she learned how to stock, surface and finish lenses. In 2006, she and her partners Lyle Olson and Brian Workman, founded LensWorks Optical Labs. Today, the lab has 17 employees and serves customers throughout Wisconsin, Minnesota and South Dakota.

A hands-on manager, Schmitz is involved with all aspects of the lab, including manufacturing, sales and marketing, product management, customer service and inventory control. She has taken on the role of the lab's system manager, including their DVI system, remote ordering systems and digital surfacing processes. She has the knowledge and the desire to optimize all processes involving the lab, which includes helping DVI design and test new software.

SHE SAYS... “My inspiration comes from my pas-

sion for business, customer service and ever changing technology.”

Lisa Stann

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT & CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

SVS Vision
Mt. Clemens, Michigan

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “She is a born leader and a detailed-minded executive who allows people the room to operate and function on their own while maintaining specific guidelines for their actions.”



With a career of 20 years with SVS Vision, Lisa Stann has helped guide the company through challenging times and periods of growth, sometimes simultaneously. Starting as an optician, she steadily worked through the ranks to district manager, director of retail operations, VP of retail operations, and now, EVP/COO. After she helped grow the company during the bankruptcy of both GM and Chrysler, SVS has seen double-digit sales growth over the past five years, opening more than 10 offices with plans to open 10 more this year alone.

Taking a customer-centric approach to everything, Stann always knew she wanted to help people, so it was a no-brainer when the opportunity to work as an optician came about. “I've enjoyed assisting patients with their eyecare needs and educating them on the importance of their eye health,” she said. “To this day, the desire and passion to serve our patients is what drives me.”

She also assisted in restructuring the executive team to align each functional area with the same retail focus that was instrumental in the rebranding of the company and the launch of its new EyeDef Lenses.”

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RISING STARS

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

Jill Burrowes

DIRECTOR OF KEY ACCOUNTS

Europa International
Buffalo Grove, Illinois

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Jill's ability to inspire other professionals to strive for success is invaluable. She has an analytical, results-driven approach to business, and her outgoing personality makes working with her an absolute joy."



"Though I didn't realize it would be the start of a long-term career, my first job in the industry came at 17 years old, when I was hired at what is still one of the most successful optometric practices in San Antonio," explained Jill Burrowes. "My mother, Loretta Lemoine, has enjoyed a fruitful career in this industry since I was in junior high school, so I'm proud to be a second generation optical professional."

"Over the years I've been fortunate enough to learn from the best in our industry," said Burrowes. "I learned what makes a successful optometric practice continue to thrive from my first employer, Dr. Paul Darrow, and as a gas perm contact lens rep, Richard Dorer taught me essential sales techniques I still use. The knowledge eventually led me to Europa, where independent thought is encouraged and successes are celebrated. Every day I'm grateful for the support of our executive team."

Burrowes has been the director of key accounts at Europa since 2012. "As a fascinating hybrid of health care, engineering and fashion, this business provides exciting opportunities for people of varying backgrounds. It rewards those with integrity and a willingness to serve their customers well, and affords countless opportunities for giving back generously."

SHE SAYS... "Do it with passion or not at all!"

Courtney Dryer, OD

4 EYES OPTOMETRY, A VISION SOURCE MEMBER

Charlotte, North Carolina

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "She opened her own practice shortly after graduating, founded Indieeyes Consulting, writes for NewGradOptometry.com and encourages entrepreneurship for new OD grads."



Courtney Dryer, OD, has been on a fast track since graduating from optometry school in 2011. Following a short stint working as an associate doctor, she opened her own private practice in 2013 called 4 Eyes Optometry, a Vision Source member. She also co-founded and is a partner in the consulting group called Indieeyes Consulting. Its purpose, said Dryer, is to

"empower the independent optometrist to open a practice economically, succeed in today's marketplace and maximize retail sales."

Dryer believes that being independent in all aspects of her optometric practice is strategically important. "My practice is built around using independent eyewear, labs, and contact lens companies that support independent practitioners," she said. "I think it's imperative that independent ODs spend their money with companies who support us."

In addition to her consulting business, Courtney writes for the website, NewGradOptometry.com, which provides a platform to educate new graduates on resources they need to be successful in practice and in life. Her advice to new ODs: "With creativity, resourcefulness and innovation, it is possible to graduate optometry school with student loans and still open the practice of your dreams."

SHE SAYS... "I am passionate about independent

business and hope to help encourage other optometrists to pursue their own independent practice goals."

Brooke Edwards

GENERAL MANAGER

Brokea Inc dba Pearle Vision
Maple Grove, Minnesota

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "She is GM of the top-grossing Pearle Vision franchise, motivating a team of 30 professionals and constantly upgrading the patient experience."



As general manager of the #1 grossing Pearle Vision store in North America for four years in a row, Brooke Edwards knows it takes a team to drive success and accomplish great things.

She works closely with her managers to develop employees' knowledge and sales skills, and to help them achieve their personal career goals. Always ready to listen, she encourages feedback, noting: "My employees are invested in what we do because they have a say in it."

Edwards entered the optical world at the age of 15 when her mother, a successful frame representative, got her a job as a Pearle Vision receptionist. She developed a love for the business because "every day was different and I was always learning." After college, she worked at a PR agency handling an eyewear account, and then joined the sales team at Soderberg Ophthalmic Laboratory, eventually becoming marketing manager. In 2011, she assumed her current position.

A career in optical "has limitless possibilities and it's ever changing," said Edwards. She is grateful for having great bosses as mentors, noting that they allowed her to grow and encouraged her to take chances.

SHE SAYS... "What inspires me is seeing my staff

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MENTORS

WOMEN WHO ARE TEAM BUILDERS AND DEVELOPERS OF TALENT

many are strong at the broken places” inspires Coulter as it speaks to overcoming setbacks. For women entering the field, she advises them to not only know yourself and be confident, but be open to taking risks.

SHE SAYS... “Developing resilience and learning how to overcome setbacks is critical to long-term success. Not only will you eventually succeed, but others will look at you and not give up.”

Jennifer DaQuano

MANAGER

NuVue Optical in Vision Source Studio 20/20’s (Two Locations)
Charlotte, North Carolina

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Jennifer is the cultural leader and visionary behind NuVue

Optical’s rise to become Charlotte’s destination for unique and exclusive eyewear.”



Jennifer DaQuano’s co-workers share similar glowing accolades when describing her talents as a team builder and professional development leader. She is called the Optical Guru, who inspires them all to provide every client with the best possible eyewear selection experience. As manager of NuVue Optical located within Vision Source Studio 20/20’s two Charlotte locations, her primary focus is on building the expertise and confidence of her staff. “My greatest accomplishments are the successes of my team when they move a client from viewing eyewear as an insurance-coverage-only purchase to an investment in seeing, looking and feeling great,” said DaQuano.

Her 20+ years of experience in a variety of optical settings, including lab and retail sales, having honed her skills as an eyewear consultant and manager. Before joining NuVue Optical in 2006, she worked in optometry and ophthalmology practices, as well as corporate and private businesses. Her diverse background helped build the communication techniques and knowledge of eyewear design and technologies that she shares today in staff training sessions.

Her passion for the eyewear business is reflected in her philosophy: “Stop trying to sell eyewear and instead, engage clients like friends you are helping to select eyeglasses that make them smile and feel confident about their appearance.”

SHE SAYS... “I truly feel the only time I’m not working is when I’m helping someone select eyewear. It’s amazingly fun!”

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