

# OPERATION INNOVATION

BUSINESS SAVVY  
ODS LEAD THE WAY



Optometric  
Business  
Innovators  
2013 PRESENTED BY REVIEW OF OPTOMETRIC BUSINESS  
AND VISION MONDAY

## Practice Management Stories: The Secrets of Their Success

Running a business in this ever-changing environment is not an easy task and today's optometrists are no exception to the rule. Faced with problems to solve on an almost daily basis, the OD of 2013 needs to be a Renaissance man/woman—part business manager, IT professional, digital media guru and marketing expert, all rolled into one.

Whether it's improving the eyecare experience through new technology or implementing electronic health records, from the exam room to the back-office, these forward-thinking ODs are always on the hunt for the next new thing which will set their practices apart. They are

the focus of our third annual Optometric Business Innovators report, a special collaborative project between *Vision Monday* and *Review of Optometric Business*.

With input from our readers, the editorial staffs of *Review of Optometric Business* and *Vision Monday*, and suggestions from our Professional Advisory panel, we once again selected some of the best and brightest talents in the profession. We got this multi-talented group of men and women to tell us the secrets of their success in Marketing, Digital Media, Business Management, Optical Dispensing, Contact Lens Dispensing and The Patient Experience. We also identified a

specific group of Influencers who have imparted knowledge and experience from their own practices to larger groups, organizations and projects which influence many optometrists.

We hope the profiles of our Optometric Business Innovators will inspire you to expand and improve your own practices as the business of eyecare continues to evolve. ■

—*The Editors of VM and*

*Review of Optometric Business:*

*Marge Axelrad, Deirdre Carroll, Mary Kane,  
Andrew Karp, Roger Mummert, John Sailer,  
Margery Weinstein, Catherine Wolinski*

## The Selection Process for the 2013 Innovators

NEW YORK—*Vision Monday* and *Review of Optometric Business* solicited input from their readers via **VMail** and direct email, for nominations of innovative ODs. Readers submitted nominations of practitioners they felt were noteworthy innovators in the following areas: Marketing, Digital

Media, Business Management, Optical Dispensing, The Patient Experience, Influencers and Contact Lens Dispensing.

*Vision Monday* and *Review of Optometric Business*, also worked with a Professional Advisory Panel, composed of various experts in the areas

of practice management and optometric consulting.

All nominations were considered by the editorial teams of *VM* and *ROB* to help determine the final selections of Optometric Business Innovators for 2013. ■

**“We believe if it’s good for the patient it’s good for the practice.”**



## **JAN BIANCHI FREDERICKSON, OD** **OWNER**

FAMILY EYE CARE WEST - VISION SOURCE  
WWW.VISIONSOURCE-FAMILYEYECAREWEST.COM  
GREENSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

A graduate of the Pennsylvania College of Optometry (PCO), Jan Bianchi Frederickson, OD has been in private practice for over 26 years. In 1995, she purchased an existing practice and was named Young OD of the Year in 1996 for the state of Pennsylvania. In 2000, Frederickson received the George Gottschalk Jr. Memorial Award in recognition of her outstanding service from the Pennsylvania Optometric Association.

Today, she runs Family Eye Care West, located about 30 miles southeast of Pittsburgh. A Vision Source member for the last 14 years, Frederickson said in addition to the buying power and industry visibility, the Vision Source connection is more about the camaraderie and support she receives from other member doctors.

Like many of today’s ODs, Frederickson is always adapting and changing with the times. “The recovery has come at a cost to the independent office. With fewer people having coverage and insurances decreasing their coverage, it has become more important than ever to focus on the patient. We have gone to a medical model to help provide the most innovative and

comprehensive care for the patient. The benefit is that we can find potential problems earlier and start preventive treatments. This model will not only save money in the long run, but more importantly, could save the patient’s vision.”

On the technology and digital media fronts, Frederickson said, “We ‘keep up’ with the times by offering internet and mobile services; encourage ‘Likes’ on our Facebook page, and utilize patient e-mail and text notifications, online appointment requests and contact lens ordering.”

But the biggest challenge the practice has faced was implementing electronic health records (EHRs). “The change has been dramatic but ultimately, I believe the technology and the use of computers will make us more efficient.”

**“Give your patients an experience they will want to tell their friends and family about. It’s all about the experience!”**



## **BRENT GANDOLFI, OD** **CO-OWNER**

MY EYE XPERT  
WWW.VISIONSOURCE-  
MYEYEXPERTGURNEE.COM  
GURNEE, ILLINOIS

When Brad Gandolfi, OD opened My Eye Xpert with partner Jeffrey Swafford, OD, it was the start of the recession and the two optometrists have never really known any other environment. “We don’t believe external factors should be used to modify out-

comes, so the recession and recovery have not been taken into account. We are a metric based practice; we track and attack where needed,” Gandolfi said of the Vision Source practice which opened in 2006.

The biggest change the practice has implemented was moving all their advertising money into internet marketing. Their current Facebook contest was designed to have patients talk about My Eye Xpert and the services provided there. Gandolfi said, “Our patients created a short video explaining why they choose us. The videos were then posted on YouTube and then to our Facebook page. The next contest we are implementing, we will be using our X logo and creating vinyl stickers to have patients stick them within the community. Then, they will take a picture of it and send it to us and the patient with the best creative spot where the vinyl was placed will win \$1,000.”

For Gandolfi, a Vision Source Brand Champion in 2012, the key to success is thinking outside the box. “Our mission statement is ‘building the best relationships through exceptional care and cutting edge technology.’ Patients choose us for the experience they get when they walk through our door, and how we set ourselves apart. We like to think of our office as a ‘purple cow.’ (A reference to the Seth Godin book *Purple Cow: Transform Your Business by Being Remarkable* on finding success by being a standout.) From the practice’s massage chair waiting room, to the fish tank and the grand piano that employees play, My Eye Xpert certainly stands out,” he said.

“No matter what we do, we always ask ourselves, are we building the best relationships with our patients and with each other? Are we offering exceptional care, all while being the purplest cows we can be? If you are different you stand out. So be a real purple cow, go beyond the norm and give your patients an experience they will want to tell their friends and family about.

Because in the end, “It’s all about the experience.”

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## MARY ANNE C. MURPHY, OD

OWNER

FRONT RANGE EYE ASSOCIATES

WWW.FR-EA.COM

BROOMFIELD, COLO.

Creating an office that patients remember with a smile is important to Mary Anne C. Murphy, OD, owner of Front Range Eye Associates.

“Being a member of a fast growing practice, we must constantly be thinking of ways to maintain a memorable patient experience. We use internal marketing tools to ensure that our current patients return and invite them to send their friends and family,” said Murphy. “With the economy recovering, it’s a great opportunity to remind patients to take advantage of insurance benefits they are already paying for by utilizing their eye exam and eyewear benefits. While we haven’t had to reinvent how we do these things, the economy sure reminds us that we should be doing them regularly.”

**“I appreciate that my choices as a business owner can affect the livelihood of my patients, my staff, my family and my future.”**



Along with creating a memorable present, planning for the future is important to Murphy. “Often, when the clinic is full, we neglect to think about future business. While having a slow time in the clinic is never ideal, taking advantage of the economic recovery has allowed us to step back and refocus on how we manage and operate our clinic,” she said.

When thinking about the direction of her prac-

tice, Murphy never loses sight of what is most important to patients—service, service, service. “It continues to astound me that health care providers are slow to accept that we are, in fact, service providers. Health care consumers have a choice where they spend their dollars, just as if they were shopping in a retail establishment,” she said.

“The days of people coming in simply because you are ‘on the list’ are gone. Consumers are selective. If they have a \$10 exam co-pay no matter where they have their exam, why would they choose to go to a place where the front desk ignores them, the technicians are distracted, the doctor is rushed and the opticians are confusing? They might come once but the likelihood they will return is near zero.

“Ultimately, I appreciate that my choices as a business owner can affect the livelihood of not only my patients but my staff, my family and my future. This realization forces me to evaluate each decision altruistically and reminds me that I can make a positive difference,” Murphy said.

## DESCRIPTION

Consumers who want to have their eyes examined or buy a new pair of glasses or contact lenses have more options than ever before. Independent eyecare practices, local, regional and national retail chains, mass merchants and, most recently, virtual on-line dispensaries are all vying for consumers’ attention. In this hotly competitive marketplace, optometrists who have mastered the marketing techniques used by other service-oriented business have a clear advantage. The optometric innovators profiled in this section show how these true optical marketing mavens have put their own spins on these techniques.

**“They don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”**



**CHAD FLEMING, OD, FAAO**

**OWNER**

WICHITA OPTOMETRY  
WWW.EYEDOCTORWICHITA.COM  
WICHITA, KANSAS

As a Midwest practitioner, Chad Fleming, OD did not consider himself part of the “boom and bust” of economic upturn—but his practice and OptometryCEO.com, the OD-connecting website he developed, have led the way in patient growth.

“Digital media has been the catalyst to drive the change needed to take Wichita Optometry, P.A. and OptometryCEO.com to the next level,” said Fleming. “The power of marketing and word of mouth referrals has increased significantly by the successful use of digital media.”

According to Fleming, Wichita Optometry has seen a 3 percent increase in patient gross over the last year as a result of search engine queries, an area the practice continues to develop. The biggest challenge, he said, has been closing the gap between “the non-tech generation and the tech savvy generation.” His secret, he said, is “molding” the two ends of the spectrum.

“We currently run parallel systems of EHR and paper; running both systems requires forward thinking in addressing problems before they arrive. It is always easier to put out fires as they arrive, but to anticipate potential fires and manage accordingly takes innovative thinking and action.”

**“My life and passion are devoted to eyecare and to providing the best care and most convenient experience possible.”**



**NIKKI IRAVANI, OD**

**CEO**

GLOBAL EYEVENTURES, INC. / EYEXAM  
WWW.GLOBALEYEVENTURES.COM  
SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

As a lifetime optical industry member, Nikki Iravani, OD was in a prime seat to recognize the need for change. An optician since age 16, she has since moved on to her current position as the founder and CEO of Global EyeVentures, creator of the EyeXam app.

EyeXam uses cloud-based platforms and social media to connect consumers to local eye doctors in their area. To date, over 1 million patients have used the service to schedule an exam.

“The eyecare industry is lagging in the advancements of technology that are already present in other industries and consumers expect,” said Iravani.

With the EyeXam app, she said, “Patients can book their appointments, stay connected with their eye doctor and redeem offers all using their handheld device. Doctors can also connect with their patients, retain existing patients and draw in new patients by enhancing their Mobile Virtual Profile (MVP).”

The biggest challenge has been practitioners’ resistance to adopting technology to meet consumer demands, Iravani said.

“Eyecare practitioners need to be more willing to embrace and adopt the enhancements of technology and directly appeal to the needs of their patients and

prospective customers,” said Iravani. “Mobile connectivity is an innovation which, when adopted, will allow access to eyecare anytime, anywhere.”

**“Look back and say ‘I’m glad I did it’ rather than ‘I wish I had.’”**



**JEFFREY C. JOHNSON, OD**

**OWNER**

ARTISAN OPTICS  
WWW.ARTISANOPTICS.COM  
BOISE, IDAHO

After owning a private practice for over 20 years, Jeffrey C. Johnson, OD has learned that success takes reassessing every aspect of business and being open to new ways of thinking.

“We are early adapters,” said Johnson. “Our philosophy is to explore new ideas and technologies from wherever they originate to improve patient care, and ultimately, to enhance the overall patient experience.” Being an early adapter, though, is not without its own challenges—according to Johnson, employee resistance is often the most difficult part of transitioning to modern models of business management.

“It takes significantly more training and mentoring to coach a team through change than it does to take the position of, ‘if it isn’t broke, don’t fix it.’ Unfortunately, status quo isn’t going to get us through today’s changing business environment,” he said.

Johnson and his staff have kept Artisan Optics fresh by re-evaluating and streamlining processes, such as utilizing the expanded capabilities of EHR, increasing the use of technology to automate whenever possible and increasing online presence, a transi-

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tion that doesn't come without certain barriers. "It has been a process, but I believe we have a better business model today than in the past."

Johnson stressed resisting the tendency to stick with routines and comfort zones.

"The recent economic challenges have led us all into uncharted territory," he said. "I believe it is our versatility and willingness to explore new technologies and business practices that will ultimately lead to future success and stability."

### **TOMMY L. LIM, OD** **SENIOR PARTNER**

BERRYESSA OPTOMETRY, INC  
WWW.BERRYESSAOPTOMETRY.COM  
SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

As the pioneer of Berryessa Optometry's web presence, Tommy Lim, OD learned quickly that web design, search engine optimization (SEO) and social media management was no easy feat, but was necessary to move his practice forward.

"SEO is so dynamic, and always changing," Lim said. "I learned over time that certain things make a website more effective. No one even looks

**"We provide our patients with the best overall eyecare experience, accomplished as a team effort, at each touch point."**



at your website unless you have search engine optimization."

After learning of the importance of visibility in the digital world, Lim partnered with EyeCarePro to flesh out Berryessa's web design, social media management and other virtual tactics that take time and care.

"ODs can't do everything. You want someone who can do it and do it well. You need a professional, and a professional that understands optometry. EyeCarePro has been extremely effective for me for over five years."

Though Lim let the pros take over, he is still

actively involved in monitoring Berryessa's Facebook page, his own Facebook page and the practice's Yelp profile, on which he regularly responds to patient reviews. "I check it all the time. It's not a casual thing you can just do when you have time—you have to dedicate yourself."

Lim stresses keeping social media presence friendly and fun. Popular posts have included a wedding shower, a team Christmas dinner and a photo of Lim after a graduation ceremony at the Illinois College of Optometry, where he just started a three-year term on the alumni council.

"I try to make it as personal as possible. I incorporate things that happen in the daily life of our practice," he said. "Fact-based posts, like how many rods and cones you have, is not personal. I make it personal. And people really like it—they're happy to see you. They're like old friends."

According to Lim, digital media, though admittedly challenging at times, has brought considerable growth to his practice and he encourages all practices to embrace the age. "These have been record years," he said. "Word of mouth is always going to be king, but [sites like] Yelp and Google are becoming stronger and stronger, and are even bigger in certain areas. Don't think people don't have computers."

## DESCRIPTION

The rapidly developing realm of digital media is creating exciting new ways for optometrists and patients to interact and exchange information.

Blogs, online review services, websites, virtual dispensaries, social media and Twitter all play a role in the ongoing dialogue not only on a doctor-to-patient or patient-to-doctor level, but on a patient-to-patient level and on a doctor-to-doctor level as well. A growing number of optometrists are venturing into this new arena, and many are simply learning by trial and error. But a few practitioners have already developed considerable skills. These "digital docs" have devoted a considerable amount of time and energy to mastering the new media, and have a lot to say about what works and what doesn't. They are sharing their experiences in their own blogs and Tweets, and are gaining reputations as the "go to" experts in the optical online community. The Optical Business Innovators in this section offer valuable insights to anyone who is interested in learning more about how to use digital media effectively and integrate it into their practice's marketing plan.



**“I provide the highest quality patient care utilizing the most up-to-date instrumentation and technology because my patients are worth it.”**



## ERIC BOTTS, OD

CEO

OBC BILLING SPECIALISTS

WWW.CLAIMDOCTOR.NET

MACOMB, ILLINOIS

OWNER

INNOVATIVEYE CLINICS IN WALMART

VISION CENTERS

MACOMB AND GALESBURG, ILLINOIS AND

WEST BURLINGTON, IOWA

By focusing on providing vision care as medical care as well as automating and outsourcing routine practice management tasks, Eric Botts, OD, has both emphasized health and wellness for his patients while improving the efficiency of his practice. “My strategy is to think like a doctor,” he said. “My attitude is that a patient presenting with vision issues is a medical visit until proven otherwise. I still provide healthy or wellness exams, but the majority of my practice is becoming a medical billing model of practice.”

All of his practice’s medical billing along with routine insurance claims have been outsourced to OBC Billing Specialists, a service that Botts started six years ago. “OBC Billing Specialists has increased my claim submission efficiency and increased insurance fee collections because now I have a team of billing specialists working on my claims instead of one person,” he said. “Prior to outsourcing my claims submission, I often lost income on claims that were not accurately submit-

ted or denied and not resubmitted.”

Botts has also outsourced the phone call reminder portion of his patient recall efforts. “Patient recall has a huge positive impact on my practice,” he said. “I utilize both an automated and phone call approach. The automated recall is integrated with my EHR system, therefore it requires a minimal effort from my staff.

He credits the EHR system as a big obstacle at first that ultimately had a major payoff. “Initially it slowed us down, but once we were able to learn the system the benefits were great,” he said.

**“Latest technology, caring doctors, we strive to have up-to-date eyecare information and technology and provide personal care to each patient.”**



## RALPH M. HANDLY, OD

PARTNER/SENIOR OPTOMETRIST

EYE-Q VISION CARE

WWW.EYEQVC.COM

FRESNO, CALIFORNIA

Soon after Richard M. Handly, OD, folded his optometry practice into EYE-Q Vision Care 18 years ago, he was elected president of the board, a position he held for more than 10 years. He had been in private practice in Fresno since 1974 and remains active in the local optometric society. EYE-Q, a four-ophthalmologist practice for 20 some years previously, invited him to make optometry a larger part of the practice.

During his presidency, “EYE-Q developed a strong referral base from local ODs and an efficient patient management process.” All primary eyecare

was done by optometrists, and ophthalmologists were responsible for the specialty care. “Today, this is standard, but then, it was innovative,” he said.

EYE-Q seeks to set itself apart through superior patient service. Three operators handle over 1,000 calls per clinic day. A call center handles prescription refills and other questions. “This efficient method to resolve patient requests frees up providers’ and assistants’ time,” he said.

To overcome the loss of eye contact with patients as electronic health records became more pervasive, each provider was equipped with a mobile device that allows them to face the patient directly while presenting information.

**“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”**



## APRIL JASPER OD, FFAO

OWNER

ADVANCED EYECARE SPECIALISTS/

VISION SOURCE

WWW.ADVANCEDEYECARESPECIALISTS.COM

WEST PALM BEACH, FLA

April Jasper, OD, FFAO, has realized the benefits of balancing a high level of patient service with the need to keep an efficient streamlined operation.

One of Jasper’s greatest business management challenges has been managing staff overhead. “I tried for so long to manage the number by sticking to a number for each staff position in the office, and then I realized that no one was happy with this and turnover was greater than I could afford. I then

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started by paying my staff more than what was considered the ‘standard’ and found that production was greater and they were happier,” said Jasper.

“When production went up and gross revenue went up, the salaries ended up eventually falling more in line with recommendations. It is important to be willing to try new things and follow your heart when the ‘numbers’ don’t make sense.”

At the same time, Jasper doesn’t forget about the need to stay ahead of the competition by offering topnotch training. “To help all of us at the office understand our customer service competitors, we have participated in customer service training at Nordstrom, Ritz Carlton and Disney, and I also provide training based on what I learn from books about customer service experts such as the Mayo Clinic, Baptist Hospital and In and Out Burger,” Jasper explained.

Whatever management decisions she makes, Jasper said is always aware of the need to maintain quality and patient satisfaction. “We have become focused on ways to increase trust in our patients by better customer service, value propositions and improved communication,” she said.

### **PAUL KLEIN, OD, FAAO, ABCO**

**OWNER**

**BROWARD EYECARE**

**WWW.BROWARDEYE.COM**

**FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA**

**P**aul Klein, OD, FAAO, ABCO, is dedicated to continually investing in his practice. “Better trained staff, more comfortable and inviting facilities, and better and more advanced instrumentation” set his practice apart, he said.

In practice for 34 years, he has accumulated a long list of accomplishments in the field of optometry since graduating from the New England College of Optometry in 1979. The founding editor of *Optometry Today* magazine and a former columnist for *Vision Monday*, Klein is an adjunct professor of optometry at the Salus University Pennsylvania College of Optometry.

**“If you don’t like what you’ve devoted your life to doing, it will be difficult to hide that from your staff or patients.”**



He educates his staff with regularly scheduled meetings to cover management concerns, better customer service and the changing knowledge base of optometric care. To create inviting facilities, “a refreshment station in the reception area lets patients know you care about their comfort,” he said. Recent improvements he’s implemented include instituting electronic health records and switching recalls from printed and mailed reminders to electronic communication.

While he’s observed reduced revenues from discretionary areas of eyecare such as eyewear and contact lens purchasing due to the economic downturn, his practice capitalized on expenditures for medically necessary eyecare. “The net result has been a tremendous increase in revenues generated by medical testing and attendant medical follow-up management, which has more than compensated for reductions in eyewear revenues,” said Klein.

Although his staff first objected to requesting both vision care as well as medical insurance cards from patients, “we found many patients had both, enabling us to keep medical testing and management procedures in-house that patients were previously taking to ophthalmology,” he said.

### **BRIDGITTE SHEN LEE, OD**

**PRESIDENT & CO-OWNER**

**VISION OPTIQUE**

**WWW.VISIONOPTIQUE.COM**

**PRESIDENT & OWNER**

**ITRAVELCE**

**WWW.ITRAVELCE.COM**

**HOUSTON, TEXAS**

**“Focus on people and building relationships with staff, patients/customers and industry representatives.”**



**T**he importance of harnessing the power of social media should never be underestimated. Bridgitte Shen Lee, OD, explained, “Five years ago, we encouraged one of our young and bright employees to create Vision Optique’s online presence with Facebook and Twitter. Our patients/customers put us on Yelp as the number one, five-star rated optometrist in Houston, and today, Vision Optique is also active on Google+, Four Square, Pinterest and Instagram.”

While social media may help with virtual connections, Lee feels that building long-term relationships with patients/customers is what sets the practice apart. “We take time to provide individualized care by addressing each patient’s medical conditions, lifestyle needs and fashion preferences,” she said. “We focus on people and building relationships with staff, patients/customers and industry representatives.”

After reaching the \$1 million milestone in 2006, Vision Optique is on track to become a \$1.5 million practice this year. This is accomplished with three doctors using two exam lanes in an 1,800-square-foot office open four and a half days per week. Optometry students work for the practice as full-time opticians.

A speaker on contact lens topics since 2007, Lee helped Alcon launch the first silicone hydrogel toric contact lens in the Chinese markets in November 2011. Other accomplishments include being voted Best Optometrist in Houston by *Houston Press* readers in September 2011 and being put on the cover of *MBA Insights* in the fourth quarter of 2011.

As president of iTravelCE, Lee organized CE programs to China, bringing 20 attendees with Jimmy



Bartlett, OD, and Dana Ondrias, OD, to China in June 2011, and 52 optometrists and their families on a two-week journey through China with Ron Melton, OD, and Randall Thomas, OD, in June 2012.

**“Our office’s mission: Life changing vision through innovative technology, service and style.”**



**EDWIN M. LIU, OD**  
**PRESIDENT**

FOOTHILL OPTOMETRIC GROUP  
WWW.FOG-EYES.COM  
PLEASANTON, CALIFORNIA

**E**dwin M. Liu, OD opened his first office with wife Amy Liu Longacre, OD back in 1983. Now on his fourth location in California, this 4,200 square foot facility employs more than 20 people, including three associate doctors. “It seems that each time we move, we end up having to expand the practice,” Liu said. The style and the appearance of the office is important to Liu who stressed that a clean, uncluttered look is important allowing the inventory of more than 1,000 frames to take center stage.

The dispensary features name brand frames such as Lafont, Morel and McQueen, “catering to a more middle to upper class clientele. We like to feature

unique frames that you can’t get everywhere else.”

When it comes to innovation in eyecare, advancements in technology can be seen throughout the practice. “We pride ourselves in keeping up to date on new instrumentation and testing procedures. From our Marco Epic refracting systems, to the Quantifeye for measuring macular pigment optical density or the TearLab tear osmolarity testing system used to help in the assessment for dry eyes, all contribute to creating the atmosphere of a state-of-the-art vision care facility.

“The technology applies not only to our testing instrumentation but is also a part of how we communicate with our patients. Allowing them to schedule and confirm appointments online is perceived as convenient and forward thinking.”

Liu is always striving to find ways to better serve the patients and connect with new ones. “Using systems like DemandForce has provided invaluable office feedback through online patient surveys, while also enhancing our web presence by contributing to search engine optimization criterion used by Google and other search engines.”

## **D. PENN MOODY, OD**

**FOUNDER/CEO**

MOODY EYES, LLC  
WWW.MOODYEYES.COM  
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

**A**s the founder and CEO of Moody Eyes, D. Penn Moody, OD has realized that he’s a leader more than a decision maker, responsible for developing his own skills as well as those of his staff. “The key awakening point for me was when we

**“Give each patient a unique, exceptional experience and have fun doing it . . . the money will follow.”**



had our five-year retrospective meeting, and I presented 17 key decisions over that span,” he said. “While preparing my material I realized not a single one of the ideas was mine. What I had done was implement them into our business. That’s when I began to understand my primary responsibility is to lead our staff members.”

Developing these leadership skills is an ongoing and intentional endeavor. “I spend time, energy and money developing my personal leadership skills,” he said, because “I believe every organization is limited by the abilities of its leader.”

Cultivating his employees is deliberate as well. “Each of our employees has an area for which they are primarily responsible,” he said. “I have learned to define the results we want, have the staff member design the process they believe is best, and then we will refine it together.”

Another cornerstone of Moody’s practice is being “totally committed to an exceptional experience for every patient,” he said. “This means listening to what they want us to do for them and providing that.”

## DESCRIPTION

Managing an optometric practice profitably requires an entirely different set of skills than being a capable clinician. Yet to develop and maintain a successful practice, a practitioner must be handy with both a flow chart and a Snellen chart. Our Optical Business Innovators know what a tricky balancing act that can be. The challenges they face daily are the same as those faced by other optometrists. However, each of these optometrists has taken a discerning look at the market in which they compete and has taken steps to differentiate and grow their practice.



**“Studio Optix: Eyecare and eyewear to make you see and look great!”**



## MITCH CASSEL, OD

OWNER

STUDIO OPTIX

WWW.STUDIOOPTIX.COM  
NEW YORK, N.Y.

After beginning his optometric career in the early 1980s, Mitch Cassel, OD quickly placed himself among the cream of the crop. Over the past 25 years, the optometrist has proven a knack for dispensing to New York City’s high end clientele in his practice’s famed Rockefeller Center location, where he regularly contributes to the costume and eyecare needs of NBC’s Saturday Night Live cast and has also done so while specializing in a unique celebrity couture.

Cassel is the owner and creative mind behind Custom Color Contacts ([www.customcontacts.com](http://www.customcontacts.com)), a company specializing in soft lens designs for prosthetic, cosmetic and special effects, and has been called upon and credited for eye effects seen on the likes of Tom Cruise, Leonardo DiCaprio, Natalie Portman and Robert DeNiro, “just to name a few,” he said.

The list of stars goes on, but Cassel’s innovations also shine outside the spotlight. His contact lens expertise applies to patients with traumatic eye injuries, discolorations and other cosmetic issues, and his eyewear dispensary boasts over 6,000 frames sourced from unusual designers

around the world to satisfy his diverse, tourist-driven clientele.

What makes the practice even more unique, Cassel said, is that its elegant image—a very important aspect to a dispensary with such a high profile following—does not outweigh its focus on patient care and medical expertise. With three exam rooms, top-tier equipment and a finishing lab that boasts same-day progressive lens dispensing, the location has proven to be a one-stop shop for a patient’s eyecare needs.

“It’s really important to have expediency and service with great staff and product that complement it,” Cassel said. “We’re very medically oriented—we’re not just selling eyewear.”

Cassel also said that while he communicates a certain message to potential clients with purposefully planned window displays and an expertly envired store design, he is open to customers not looking to stop in on a shopping spree.

“From a dispensary perspective, we choose to be recognized as a high-end, fashion forward boutique with the most fun and exciting frames available. This has proven to be very successful, as our patients are a walking advertisement for us.” But from an eyecare perspective, he said, the practice takes pride in its medical model, accepting most insurance plans—VSP, Davis, and EyeMed among them—and is always willing to see a patient in need of emergency care.

Staff meetings focus on maximizing the patient experience, often incorporating roleplay with prepared scripts to address situations. “For example, patients asking for their prescription to go elsewhere,” he said.

A balance of star clients and attentive medical care has kept Studio Optix, and Cassel, in the innovative spectrum. “All of the celebrity work is good, but the better part is changing people’s lives,” Cassel concluded.

**“In the new environment, everything began to sell much more easily once we had room to let the inventory shine.”**



## BRAD DRAKE, OD

OWNER

DRAKE EYE CENTER

WWW.DRAKEEYECENTER.COM  
HARTSELLE, ALABAMA

Drake Eye Center makes an imposing sight as one drives through Hartselle, a town of 14,000 in the center of Alabama. The handsome stone building, rendered in a neo-classical style and set back from the road amid landscaping, includes a tower with large windows, allowing motorists to view colorful, hanging mobiles that turn slowly inside.

“People drive by and see that ‘something special happened in there,’” said Barbara Wright of Barbara Wright Design, who was hired to design the retail space by practice owner Brad Drake, OD, a Decatur native who has practiced in his hometown since 2003.

Three years ago, Drake made a major business decision to leave a tiny office down the road and to construct a new building. When the building was finished and the move complete, the jump to 4,000 square feet from 1,500 square feet (and to a dispensary area of 1,000 square feet from 200 square feet) yielded two immediate reactions, both positive.

“First, we had room to work, and immediately that made the staff happier. They really took pride

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in our new office,” Drake said.

Despite very little change in eyewear inventory, there was a dramatic change in sales. “We didn’t start selling \$1,000 frames, we offered the same price points,” Drake explained. “In the new environment, everything began to sell much more easily once we had room to let the inventory shine.”

The immediate ROI in dispensary sales was the result of “doing it once” (and not adding a bit of space here and there over the years) and “doing it right.” The latter meant hiring a designer with optical retail experience, and in Wright’s case she began with a merchandising plan and applied retail principles of layered lighting and richness in materials. She varied displays to include both frame racks and open shelving where dispensary staff assemble creative displays and use signage to subtly connote price points and to feature brand collections.

Expanding the dispensary space also facilitated more experimentation with higher-end or fashion forward brands, something that differentiates Drake Eye Center in Hartselle. “If you have space for 1,500 frames, you have the flexibility to try out a lot of new styles and adjust with what sells and what doesn’t.”

## JOEL KESTENBAUM, OD

OWNER

OPTIX FAMILY EYECARE CENTER  
WWW.OPTIXEYECARE.COM  
PLAINVIEW, NEW YORK

Three years ago, Joel Kestenbaum, OD, owner of Optix Family Eyecare in Plainview, N.Y., installed The EDGE, an internet-based practice

**“Treat patients the way you’d wanted to be treated in their home—because your office is your home.”**



analysis tool from GPN. Kestenbaum said that he has witnessed a few tech-driven turning points in the success of his practice, which he started cold in 1984—but none bigger than the ability manage his overall practice with real-time information. He continually tracks gains in productivity and profitability, especially in the dispensary.

“I am able to continually monitor what brand is selling, and adjust if a brand or style is not selling, right from my phone or iPad,” he explained. “As soon as I began to look at this level of detail, things started to improve.” Welcome to optical dispensary management in the cloud-based computing age.

In addition to this electronic management, Kestenbaum applies several proven strategies to running his dispensary, which he has built into a highly inviting retail environment in a typically not-large, too-narrow retail space in a suburban mall. First, go deep into a brand. “Patients need to see that you have a lot of product in the brands they want,” he said. When a specific frame proves popular, he will stock it in a half-dozen colors, and in different sizes,

if available. Second, offer luxury brands; they differentiate your practice, and their often heady high price tags provide context that makes other quality brands seem a value. “In the rough economy of the past five years, we’ve actually added high-end frames, and it has helped to define our practice,” he said. “I never wanted to compete in the \$99-complete-with-exam arena.”

Third, there is service. Kestenbaum constantly counsels staff to improve the patient journey through the office and dispensary—treating patients as if they were guests in their home. “This is really a neighborhood practice, and we need to know our community and our patients and be warm with them,” he said.

The staff, which includes his wife and son, keeps sales presentations simple and friendly. They bundle premium lenses and treatments utilize the Visioffice measuring system, and the practice charges enough to cover the occasional return. “We pretty much maintain a never-say-no policy. Returns are just a cost of doing business, but they are infrequent and manufacturers will work with their good customers on discounting replacements,” he said.

Kestenbaum communicates regularly with patients about the premium brands he offers. His list of email addresses exceeds 6,000 names, representing 95 percent of his patients. He utilizes social media in driving patients to his website for news about products, special events, and to keep the practice top of mind. One recent communication was for a Lafont trunk show, a highly successful event that followed earlier trunk shows for Ray-Ban, Prada and Tom Ford.

## DESCRIPTION

Dispensing eyewear is becoming a more dynamic, immersive and even fun experience for patients. New technologies such as digital dispensing systems that take personalized patient measurements and allow patients to capture images of themselves modeling various frames have introduced a greater level of interactivity into the dispensary. Even something simple like letting patients play with an iPad or offering them a fresh cup of coffee while they’re waiting to see the doctor can make a big difference. The Optical Dispensing Innovators profiled here share some of the secrets to their success.





**“Good, better, best, never let it rest,  
til your good is better and your  
better is best.”**



## MARY E. BONAME, OD, MS, FFAO

**OWNER**  
MONTGOMERY EYE CARE  
WWW.MECNJ.COM  
SKILLMAN, NEW JERSEY

The practice that Mary E. Boname, OD, MS, FFAO, has created is what she calls “concierge,” meaning a comparatively small practice that is highly focused on patient care. This means spending time getting to know each of her patients so Boname can fully understand their vision needs.

Boname’s attention to her patients’ needs includes finding out how best to stay in touch with them. “I am surprised that many patients are saying ‘I would really love it if you could send me a reminder postcard for my annual exam, in addition to the e-mail or text,’” Boname said. “Patients report they are inundated with e-mails, and delete many of them without reading them. In some cases, e-mail communication from our office may be going to spam filters. Just a few days after mailing out recall postcards, there was a noticeable increase in phone calls to schedule annual eye exams.”

In addition to regular practice-patient communication, the efficient office Boname maintains is a feature her patients appreciate. “Since March 2007,

I have been using electronic records, and we are nearly all wireless now,” she said. “A few of the more senior staff members are very resistant to computer use, and I had to bring in more high school and college students to do tasks that were overwhelming to my receptionist.”

Boname keeps her staff focused on what matters most. “At Montgomery Eye Care, our mission statement is “To provide an exceptional patient care experience for each patient every time they are here. I emphasize, that we are all members of a team and ‘a chain is only as strong as its weakest link.’”

**“Our employee manual says: 1. Do  
what is best for the customer experi-  
ence; 2. When in doubt, revisit #1.”**



## KEVIN L. GEE, OD, FFAO

**PRESIDENT**  
GEE EYE CARE  
WWW.GEEYE.CARE.COM  
MISSOURI CITY, TEXAS

“Patients are not ‘patients’ any longer, they are consumers and savvy consumers at that,” declared Kevin Gee, OD. To create a positive customer experience at Gee Eye Care, his six-year-old practice located 30 miles from downtown Houston, Texas, Gee he looks to the hospitality industry for ideas.

“Hotels and restaurants are a great source to learn and bring back ideas, but one must imple-

ment,” he said. “For example, the Ritz Carlton has a saying, ‘a warm welcome and a fond farewell.’ When you enter our doors, you receive a ‘welcome’ not a ‘hello’ or ‘hi,’ and from the very beginning we have always escorted the patient out the door by opening the door for them as they depart.”

Gee makes sure his entire staff is involved in the effort. As a lesson in customer service, he once held an office meeting at a local Nordstrom department store. Employees shopped for shoes, then compared notes with a Nordstrom personal shopper who helped them understand how he keeps loyal customers.

Gee adds his personal touch to customer service, often hand delivering glasses or a contact lens order to someone’s office or home himself. He sees patients four nights a week, until as late as 9:30 p.m. “Our patients love that,” he said. “They don’t have to miss work or worry about the kids missing school. We receive countless ‘thanks’ for staying open for them.”

A nationally recognized speaker on topics such as anterior segment disease, business marketing, patient experience, Gee has a special interest in luxury eyewear. He has been recognized by designer Tom Davies for his custom eyewear designs, including a striking pair that is half round, half square.

Gee said he and his team subscribe to a simple saying which is in their employee manual: 1. Do what is best for the customer experience, 2. When in doubt, revisit #1.

## PAMELA A. LOWE, OD, FFAO

**PRESIDENT/DIRECTOR**  
PROFESSIONAL EYE CARE CENTER, INC.  
WWW.PROEYECARECENTER.COM  
NILES, ILLINOIS

Pamela Lowe, OD, FFAO, a graduate with honors from the Illinois College of Optometry, established Professional Eye Care Center, Inc. in 1992. In

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**“What is best for the patient is always what is best for business.”**



2007, the practice had grown to such an extent that it was relocated to a space nearly three times the size of the original locale. A Vision Source office for more than a decade, the practice provides full scope, primary care optometry with an emphasis on prevention and implementing the latest technologies.

“Our practice has stayed vital for the past 21 years because we aren’t afraid to be early adopters and invest in the best technologies that allow us to be very effective primary care optometrists,” said Lowe. “We like to be the first and often the ‘only’ office in town to offer differentiating innovations and services.”

“The economic changes of 2008 affected patient perception and bottom lines across the board in this industry,” she added. “Many of our patients experienced challenges that affected their spending. Fortunately, since our practice adopted a medical model when we computerized in the mid-90s and has always been committed to investing in technology to better diagnose and treat patients, we have been able to survive and thrive as the economy comes back.”

Lowe has also led her office through other chal-

lenges. “The biggest management challenge has been paradigm shifts in our industry. Change is not comfortable for most and it is often difficult to break old habits and introduce new standards. Educating myself and the staff about new innovations and translating them into everyday practice is time consuming, yet it has the reward of giving the patient the best care.

“In an effort to give the best of care to our patients having regular staff meetings is essential. We have ‘mini’ two to five minute staff meetings daily to troubleshoot and discuss the day before us. We also frequently remind ourselves of our mission statement, ‘To provide the highest quality eyecare available in a comfortable, professional setting,’” concluded Lowe.

**“We try to establish a relationship with each patient so that we can be their primary eyecare provider for their entire lifetime.”**



**ANDREA P. THAU, OD, FAAO, FCOVD**

**OWNER**

DR. ANDREA P. THAU AND ASSOCIATES

WWW.DRTHAUANDASSOC.COM

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Many practitioners script the superior patient experience that they want their practice to provide with each and every visit. In the case of Andrea Thau, OD, of Dr. Andrea P. Thau and Associates in New York City, delivering an exceptional experience is often more of an improvisational performance, differing with each patient. “We deal with a lot of special needs patients, and each one is a unique challenge,” she explained.

About 65 percent of Thau’s patients are children, including some very young in age and many with vision challenges that brought them to the office by referral from a teacher or occupational therapist—or from another family where a child was profoundly helped by Thau, who specializes in providing vision therapy.

“We try to establish a relationship with each patient so that we can be their primary eyecare provider for their entire lifetime,” said Thau. That is especially challenging when children present with paralyzing fears of seeing a doctor or sitting in an examination chair. Making a child feel safe and engaged are keys to a successful visit at her practice. “I sometimes say, ‘I’m the Eye Doctor Detective, and I need good clues to be able to help you to see really, really well.’ Then together we use our good clues to come up with the ‘right conclusions,’” she said.

When Thau works with a child to improve their ability to focus or to better concentrate on school work, she pro-actively (with a parent’s consent) shares the process, as well as vision-health tips, with teachers and occupational therapists who may also be working with her young patients. “We see ourselves as being part of the child’s team.”

## DESCRIPTION

At one time, it was acceptable for patients to be greeted by a faceless voice behind a sliding glass door: “Have a seat and fill out these forms!” No longer. Optometrists operate in a highly competitive world, where patients—being smart consumers—have a host of reasons to go elsewhere to save a dollar or enjoy the convenience of purchasing what and when they prefer. This group of optometric innovators has leveraged their experience (and learned from other areas of retailing, commerce and medicine) that outstanding customer service is the key to success. These innovators have imparted to their entire staff the importance of delivering a consistently high level of customer service.



**“A practice owner’s net income will never exceed their business expertise.”**



**JERRY HAYES, OD**  
**FOUNDER/CEO**

HMI RED TRAY NETWORK  
WWW.REDTRAYNETWORK.COM  
VICKSBURG, MISSISSIPPI  
**CO-FOUNDER/CEO**  
PRIMA EYE GROUP  
WWW.PRIMAEGROUP.COM  
ATLANTA, GEORGIA

A 1973 graduate of Southern College of Optometry in Memphis, Hayes has been a leading speaker and writer on the business side of practice for over three decades. During that time he also founded or co-founded several seminal businesses in the industry, among them Hayes Marketing, which he sold in 1997; HMI Buying Group, now the HMI Red Tray Network and still one of the largest OD buying groups in the U.S.; and E-dr.com in 1997, which was the first online ordering portal in optical industry.

He retired from private practice 1986 to devote all his time to consulting and helping other ODs become more successful in private practice. He now devotes his time to running HMI Red Tray Network and Prima Eye Group, which were founded in 1983 and 2011, respectively.

“There are no new concepts,” said Hayes. “All the information an optometrist needs to achieve, including higher net income and greater personal satisfaction in practice already exists. It’s just a matter of find-

ing the information you need and applying those concepts in the right way in your practice.”

He co-founded Prima Eye Group to help do exactly that. “Our job at Prima Eye Group is to help practices fill in the knowledge gap in the areas of team leader, customer service and business expertise. Once we do that, growth will come both financially and personally.”

Of course that path didn’t exactly come without some challenges. “With Prima Eye Group, our challenge is and continues to be helping clinically oriented optometrists realize that the path to higher net income and greater personal satisfaction can be achieved by doing a better job of managing the business side of practice.”

**“I love doing research, but I also need to walk into a room of patients and have the opportunity to observe and have insights.”**



**DONALD R. KORB, OD**  
**SENIOR PARTNER**

KORB & ASSOCIATES  
WWW.KORBASSOCIATES.COM  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

When you tell Donald R. Korb, OD, that he has been an innovator and an influencer to colleagues over his four-decade career, he is quick to point out two things that attest to his humility and intellectual process.

“I have always collaborated with experts in trying to solve problems,” he said. His location in Boston, a center of medical and scientific research, provides a wealth of pathologists, polymer chemists

and experts in infectious diseases with whom he collaborates. “I could not have been Donald Korb without being in Boston,” he added.

The second point Korb eagerly cites: Throughout all of his innovative successes, patents and the co-founding of several companies, he continues to see patients each week, for 30 to 40 hours atop 40 hours of research.

Korb’s wide influence among colleagues stretches back to his development of the CSI contact lens in 1972. This thin, membrane lens was approved for the market in 1978 and is credited as the model for the vast majority of all soft contact lenses that followed. And while the success of the lens was remarkable, allowing for CL extended wear, it was the lack of success in a minority of wearers (due to discomfort) that launched Korb on a 40-year pursuit to understand why.

That discomfort was due largely to dryness, and understanding and treating that condition has taken Korb (along with collaborators) through landmark discoveries, countless lectures and the publication of over 100 peer-reviewed papers describing the root of the problem: Meibomian Gland Dysfunction. His discoveries in this area led to the development of eye drops (including System Balance) with a lipid component that address evaporative dry eye due to gland blockage.

Korb is neither surprised nor frustrated that he has spent 40 years basically working on one problem of the human body. “There has never been a year or two when we haven’t made a great discovery about this fantastic system.”

**STUART J. THOMAS, OD**  
**OWNER**

THOMAS EYE CENTER  
WWW.THOMASEYECENTER.COM  
ATHENS, GA.

**CHAIRMAN**  
VSP GLOBAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Upon graduating from the Southern College of Optometry in 1984, Stuart Thomas, like many

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**“Do the right thing, do it the right way, and do it for the right reason.”**



independent ODs, joined his father in private practice. Gerald Thomas, who opened Thomas Eye Center in Athens, Ga. in 1951 and retired in 2004, has had a big influence on his son. Like his dad, Stuart has provided optometric care for the University of Georgia athletic teams for more than three decades.

“He was one of the first team optometrists for a major athletic association,” Thomas said proudly.

Additionally, both father and son have served as president of both the Georgia Optometric Association and SECO. “Without him, I wouldn’t be where I am today,” said Thomas.

About nine years ago, Thomas’ involvement with SECO brought him to the attention of VSP Global. After serving on the company’s board, he was elected chairman for a two-year term that began in 2012.

One of the key initiatives Thomas has championed since taking office is the inclusion of stand-alone vision plans such as VSP Vision Care in state health care exchanges, which are now being considered under the Affordable Care Act. “It’s been a huge focus of VSP Global, because it will give our members greater access to quality patients,” he

said. He is also enthused about other VSP programs and services such as OTTO, the company’s new measuring and dispensing app; Unity, its line of proprietary free-form lenses; Viztech, the in-house finishing lab located within Marchon, and Eyeconic.com, VSP’s optical e-store.

Thomas credits a support network that includes his wife, Sharon, who is a research optometrist for Alcon, and his practice manager, Ellen Goad, with helping him function at his best in his clinical and administrative roles.

**“Our mission is to create an eye-care experience that is like none other. Service to you [our patients] is our highest priority.”**



**DAVE ZIEGLER, OD, FAAO**  
**SENIOR PARTNER**

ZIEGLER LEFFINGWELL EYE CARE  
WWW.ZLEYECARE.COM  
WEST ALLIS, WISCONSIN

In addition to his duties as the senior partner in a group private practice in a Milwaukee suburb, Dave Ziegler, OD, FAAO has a long list of responsibilities. As a member of the Management Business Academy (MBA) faculty he lectures extensively on

practice management. Ziegler also sits on Essilor’s advisory panel and has served on advisory boards for VisionWeb, AMO and Vistakon. Education, it seems, is in his blood—he’s been an associate clinical professor to the Southern College of Optometry and Pacific University College of Optometry teaching fourth year students at his office.

Ziegler has also found time to fill the roles of team optometrist for professional cycling teams, Milwaukee Wave Professional Soccer Teams, the Milwaukee Bucks and he is currently part of the medical staff of the Milwaukee Brewers.

In an effort to improve day-to-day interactions with patients, Ziegler said, “We continue to look at businesses that are outside of eyecare to find ways to improve the patient experience. We emulate companies like Disney or the Ritz-Carlton.

Ziegler runs an optometric consulting company called Visionary Resources that creates personalized marketing tools for the private practitioner. “It starts with recall cards that have age-specific messages and the patient’s name embedded in the photo utilizing digital variable printing. The doctors handwrite their personalized recommendations to the patient on informative brochures that give the patients a reason to purchase from us.

“We also do personalized eyewear styling using an iPad app called the Eyewear Stylist to create a fun frame buying experience and to differentiate us from online and discount sources. Then we give the patient a personalized portfolio called the Eyewear Educator when they pick up their glasses that addresses them by name and describes the specific frame and lenses that they bought. This adds value to their purchase and increases patient loyalty,” he said.

## DESCRIPTION

A “teacher’s teacher” is perhaps the highest accolade that an educator can receive. And in a sense, we all are educators, serving as mentors to those younger and less experienced, as we once learned vital life lessons from mentors or our own. The following innovators have distinguished themselves either as mentors or as creative problem solvers and business builders. They have gone further, in most cases, than they foresaw at the conclusion of optometry school. They have faced the serious challenges to the survival of their profession.



**“We are highly likely to accomplish our goals if they are well defined, written and time specific.”**



**ROXANNE ACHONG-COAN, OD, FIAO**

**OWNER**  
COAN EYE CARE  
WWW.COANEYECARE.COM  
ORLANDO, FLORIDA

Roxanne Achong-Coan, OD, FIAO has been specializing in contact lenses and ocular disease for the past 14 years and in the words of her OBI nominator, “she is a contact lens rock star.” After completing her residency in cornea and contact lenses at the Pacific University College of Optometry in Oregon, Coan began practicing in Miami shortly afterwards and moved to Orlando in 2001.

She has wide ranging experience with the most advanced contact lenses including silicone hydrogel, multifocal, astigmatism and colored contact lenses. For those with mild to moderate nearsightedness, Achong-Coan is certified in the fitting of Paragon CRT lenses, which reshape the cornea during sleep for the temporary correction of nearsightedness. She is adjunct professor at Pacific University College of Optometry and won the top clinical research poster at the Global Specialty Lens Symposium in 2012 on keratoconus versus normal eyes.

Her business philosophy is “We are highly likely to accomplish our goals if they are well defined, written, and time specific.” She is a firm believer in staying current with the latest technology and is “always looking for the next new thing.”

“Having the latest technology (wavefront refrac-

tor, automated refractors, fundus camera, topography, anterior segment camera and video, anterior and posterior segment OCT) available helps us provide the best vision care and education and is the foundation for a strong specialty lens practice, including scleral lenses and orthokeratology.”

Located in a suburb about a mile from downtown Orlando, Achong-Coan counts many Universal Studios and Disney park employees as patients. Her colleague and husband Mark Coan, OD, specializes in chronic dry eye relief and the monitoring of sight threatening diseases like glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy and macular degeneration. “We’re a good team because we balance one another out. We rely on each other’s expertise and often seek each other out for second opinions,” Achong-Coan said.

**“I feel blessed to have found a career I have a passion for.”**



**ELLIE W. HATTORI, OD**  
**CO-OWNER ALONG WITH HUSBAND**

**RICK N. HATTORI, OD**  
HATTORI VISION OPTOMETRY  
HATTORIVISION.COM  
MONTEREY, CALIF.

Ellie W. Hattori, OD, feels connected to her contact lens patients because she has been in their shoes. Hattori, who only sees contact lens patients while husband Rick N. Hattori, OD, sees other patients, said contact lenses changed her life, and were the reason she became interested in optometry.

“Being a high myope, and wearing thick glasses throughout my childhood and high school, I always felt unattractive. I was very quiet and always looked

down. When I read about contact lenses in 1963, I thought it was a miracle. I saved my money and ordered my first contact lenses without my parents’ consent. My life changed. My confidence soared. I held my head high and loved talking to people,” said Hattori. “I try to instill that same life-changing experience in all my contact lens patients. There is nothing more gratifying to me than helping make a patient’s quality of life better.”

Hattori says weekly staff meetings ensure her whole staff stays focused on changing patients’ lives. “The biggest management challenge is keeping a team together that reflects the philosophy of our practice. Having a comprehensive and current office procedure and policy is crucial,” said Hattori. “Our weekly staff meetings have been one of our greatest tools. Here, we have an opportunity to share kudos and challenges of the week. Giving everyone on the team an opportunity to share their thoughts really strengthens the unity of the team.

“I feel blessed to have found a career I have a passion for. My goal for each patient is to be able to have them feel excited about the service and eye-care they receive from us.”

**“We try to probe for patient needs, listen for wants, and provide the best products that positively impact their lifestyle.”**



**LARRY K. WAN, OD**  
**MANAGING PARTNER**  
FAMILY EYECARE CENTER  
WWW.FAMILYEYECARE.COM  
CAMPBELL, CALIFORNIA

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**L**arry Wan, OD, who has practiced at Family Eyecare Center in Campbell, Calif., since graduating Pacific College of Optometry in 1983, has built a renowned contact lens specialty through continuous education. He has educated himself in new and emerging contact lens technology, having taken part in many clinical studies; he has trained his staff to be sensitive to patient needs and to reach their full potential via the OD Lean program; and he also continually educates his patients on the latest in contact lens materials and designs. “I believe in empowering patients with contact lens knowledge,” he says. “It helps to make my contact lens patients good promoters of my practice. We try to probe for patient needs, listen for wants, and provide the best products that positively impact their lifestyle.”

Wan recommends that ECPs who are looking to build a contact lens specialty take part in clinical studies, and then tell patients about the innovative prod-

ucts they are working with. Further, he believes in having sufficient CL inventory on hand so as to solve the challenging cases that other doctors may give up on. “Having a lot of inventory on hand allows me to troubleshoot difficult cases and improve my efficiency. I can choose the right lens at the right time.”

Success in fitting patients who may have been discouraged from contact lens wear elsewhere, commonly transforms these patients into powerful practice recommenders. Wan places a high number of patients (20 percent) in oxygen-permeable lenses, and he also specializes in corneal reshaping with rigid lenses. Both services are differentiators for his large and growing family practice, which has six ODs and a staff of 25 and is located near tech-savvy Silicon Valley.

Wan noted that his patients—children and parents alike—enjoy hearing about the latest in contact lens technology, especially as it positively impacts eye health and wearing comfort. “I think the exciting thing now is that we have such a

breadth of product available to suit virtually any patient need. This allows me to consistently start a conversation with a patient, ‘Do you know there are contact lenses that work well for you!’”

### **GINA WESLEY, OD, MS, FAAO** **OWNER**

COMPLETE EYE CARE OF MEDINA  
[WWW.COMPLETEEYECAREOFMEDINA.COM](http://WWW.COMPLETEEYECAREOFMEDINA.COM)  
MEDINA, MINNESOTA

**G**ina Wesley, OD, MS, FAAO, owner of Complete Eye Care of Medina, has taken the economic downturn in stride because since being in practice it’s the only reality she has known.

“I think the most impactful effect [of the economy] on my practice is making sure we are offering a range of affordable options in services, as well as products so patients have options,” Wesley said. “The upside is that most patients are very appreciative of having sev-



eral price points from which to choose.”

Wesley, who participates regularly in contact lens studies and offers patients the ability to order contacts directly through her website, prides her practice on offering the best products to patients. “We focus very much on customer service, and making sure we are constantly re-evaluating our strategies, as well as conducting patient surveys and implementing that input to maintain our great level of service,” she said. “We have top-of-the-line technology and offer private pay options for wellness testing, which enhances our overall focus on preventative care.”

**“I strive to provide the service, individual care and superior products that I would value and appreciate as a patient myself.”**



Educating patients on the value of the products and services the practice offers is essential, said Wesley. “The biggest challenge is positioning my practice’s perception in the eyes of patients. Some realize the difference in quality of care, products and services we provide compared to our competitors, but many don’t,” she noted. “We find we are constantly educating our patients about the differences, and really working hard to continually provide superior service and products. This includes performance by the practice before, during and after the exam....essentially the entire experience for a patient.” ■

## DESCRIPTION

Dispensing contact lenses has long been an integral part of a thriving optometric practice. In the age of disposable lenses and online optical retailing, however, many eyecare professionals have turned away from trying to compete with low-cost vendors. Not so for this selection of innovators. They have found ways to distinguish their practices by specializing in contact lens dispensing. They often are the problem solvers, where others have failed, and they change lives positively. They have succeeded by offering their patients specialized, optometric services.