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A Capitol Idea

Dr. Jennifer Ong hopes her run for state office will inspire greater diversity in politics

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SUPPLEMENT TO
REVIEW
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Shout Out



Marjolijn Bijlefeld

Building on the Firsts

The first person to accomplish a goal tends to get the attention. It's warranted; that individual had to break through some barriers, find new paths and carve her own way. And there are lots of firsts that *Women In Optometry* features in

its pages. There are the big stories, like **Dori Carlson, OD**, becoming the first woman president of the American Optometric Association. And there are smaller firsts—like the first woman to open an optometry practice in a rural county—that make much smaller ripples in the big media pond but have a big impact locally.

In this issue's cover story, **Dr. Jennifer Ong** is seeking to become California's first Filipina American state assembly member. But she also wants to build on the work of those who broke new ground before her. She wants to add the voice of another woman—only 28 percent of California assembly members are women—as well as that of a small business owner.

Firsts are great achievements—look at the pages in this issue that feature those who graduated first in their optometry school classes. Being first shows a level of commitment and endurance and drive. But being first is just one milestone. There are hundreds of new optometrists from the class of 2012 ready to make their mark in some important way.

It's fun to celebrate the firsts. And it's good to acknowledge the work that put those people in the position to wear the mantle of being first for a while. But it's equally valuable to see how others have built on that foundation to create something new, better or different. The women ODs who have been the first most likely never intended to be the only ones to reach the goal. Everyone's in the race; where's your next finish line?

Marjolijn Bijlefeld

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Advice from a Woman Who Knows Power

Women of Vision hosted an event during the American Optometric Association meeting featuring **Susan Sher**, executive VP for corporate strategy and public affairs at the University of Chicago Medical Center. Previously, Sher served in the White House as assistant to the president and chief of staff to First Lady Michelle Obama and as associate White House counsel.



(l-r) Louise Sclafani, OD, FAAO, with Susan Sher

Sher discussed the importance of mentoring. She suggested that attendees look for a champion who will provide uncensored advice and broaden their reach to find mentors.

Sher also spoke on the *Six Lessons You Wish Your Mother Told You About Succeeding*.

1. Don't be afraid to make mistakes or take risks. "The best jobs I've ever had were due to me taking great risks, such as trying a new job, moving to a new city or taking on new responsibilities," she said.

2. There's nothing wrong with shameless promotion. "I was taught that hard work is its own reward, and it will be noticed by others. Sadly, that's not always true for women. I think men tend to learn early on to take responsibility for their own careers. Women need to learn that lesson."

3. It is more important to be respected than to be liked. "I worry sometimes that I might ruffle feathers. Women fear a reputation for being difficult if they work for respect," she said, noting the question women should ask themselves is whether they were effective.



Susan Sher greets Women of Vision event attendees.

4. Just ask. "Women consistently undervalue their own knowledge, while men tend to overrate their expertise. Banish the word 'lucky' from your vocabulary," she said, adding that it's a word commonly used by women to attribute their successes to others.

5. Guilt is a worthless emotion. "Guilt wastes energy. Men seem to have less guilt, especially regarding balancing work and family. Whatever you decide is the right for you, it will work. Just go with it," she advised.

6. You should always wear a little bit of lipstick. 

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It's Your Business

Mind the Details, But Keep Presentation Simple

By Kellan Barfield, MBA

Have you ever listened to a CE lecture or educational presentation during which you suddenly realize that the presenter has turned a relatively simple concept into a complex one? This might happen in your own office as you try to find that right balance between providing patients with enough information and not loading on so much detail that they tune you out.

Conduct a listening tour of your own practice and procedures. What instructions are you and your staff providing? If you were being asked to follow all of them, could you? This is a simple exercise. Run through your typical presentation of your final recommendations for contact lens patients. Tally the number of instructions or points to remember you provide. Ask your contact lens technicians to do the same.

These might be important instructions, but is it an overload of information? How can you make the presentation simpler?

A written list of instructions is an excellent way to simplify your oral presentation and still provide all the instructions that you want a patient to know. Then you can narrow your verbal presentation to the key and most important recommendations.

Remember, too, that a recommendation will be much more meaningful to a patient when it is accompanied by a reason why you're prescribing a product, treatment or procedure. For example, when established contact lens patients return for an annual exam, tell them which contact lenses you're prescribing and why, and make a contact lens solution recommendation. You could say, "I want you to use this solution and not switch to any other product. Here's why." Then add just one or two sentences about how that solution will help them. Saying "This solution will provide you with end-of-day comfort" or "This solution works very well with your new contact lenses to keep them clean and moist" are the take-home messages that patients will remember. You can follow up with your other key points, but keep them brief.

That streamlined presentation allows the patient to leave remembering that his or her doctor said two things, for example: use this solution only, and use fresh solution each night by emptying the used solution from the case every morning. Coordinate with your technicians that the same messages are



provided throughout the office. This strategy of keeping your presentations simple will work in other parts of your practice, too. For example, how easy is it for eyeglasses-only or new patients to try contact lenses? Does your receptionist plant the seed that contact lenses are an option? It can be as easy as saying, "Will this be an exam for contact lenses and eyeglasses?" Do the technicians during their pretesting encourage patients to ask the doctor about contact lenses? Are there questions on the history form, such as, "Are there times you'd like to be able to not wear eyeglasses?" Make it easy for patients to say yes to contact lenses.

Keep your eyeglasses recommendations simple by offering a bundled package of features. When patients have to choose ophthalmic lens features à la carte, those additions start to feel costly. When you present the options in preselected combinations and

explain why you're recommending that specific package of lens features for the patient, it's much easier for him or her to say yes.

Patients like simplicity, too. Most patients would prefer coming to your office for pink eye or ocular allergy symptoms over scheduling an appointment in a crowded family physician's office or visiting an emergency room. Make sure they know that your office is an option.

In fact, you can be proactive by asking about ocular allergies, for example, on your health form. Adding the question, *Do you suffer from ocular allergies symptoms, such as watery, red or itchy eyes?* on your history form and having the technician repeat the question, even if the patient answered no on the form, can help you identify patients you can help. Make sure these patients

know that you can prescribe a medication as an alternative to over-the-counter treatments. Even if the patient doesn't suffer from these symptoms, make sure that patient knows you're available to treat members of the family who may have ocular allergies.

When patients see that it's easy to work with your practice—whether that's for scheduling an annual eye exam, an emergency situation, contact lenses, eyeglasses or medical services—they'll see you differently. Your practice is your brand, and it's important for you and your staff to recognize that. Consumers connect with brands; no doubt you've heard people express their strong preference in a Coke-versus-Pepsi decision. When patients make that same kind of connection with your practice brand, you become not just the place for annual eye exams, but also a full-service doctor who provides a valuable array of services and keeps it simple by putting the patient's needs first. Your practice will become the place your patients want to go.

Kellan Barfield, MBA, is Senior Brand Manager, U.S. Lens Care for Alcon.



On www.wovonline.org

"It's Your Business" also appears on the web site of Women of Vision. Check it out at wovonline.org.

provided throughout the office.

This strategy of keeping your presentations simple will work in other parts of

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Congratulations, Class of 2012

These new graduates earned top honors at their schools and universities of optometry

Victoria Wenzel, OD, was named valedictorian of her class at the Illinois College of Optometry. Dr. Wenzel, of Aurora, Ill., plans to work in private practice in the Aurora area.



Dr. Wenzel

Abby Wolf, OD, was the valedictorian at Indiana University School of Optometry. Dr. Wolf, of Fishers, Ind., will practice primary care optometry in Indianapolis.



Dr. Wolf

At the Inter-American University of Puerto Rico School of Optometry, the honor of valedictorian was awarded to **Hue K. Ho, OD**, of Miramar, Fla. Dr. Ho will work as an associate doctor, and she aspires to open her own practice near her family in Florida.



Dr. Ho

Kristen O'Beirne Naszradi, OD, of Canton, Mich., was the top female graduate of the class of 2012 at Michigan College of Optometry, Ferris State University. Dr. Naszradi will practice in two private offices in Grenada, Miss., and plans to relocate to her hometown when her husband graduates from his veterinary medicine program.



Dr. Naszradi

New England College of Optometry's class of 2012 had a tie for top graduate. **Kristen Behrens, OD**, of Uxbridge, Mass., plans to practice in her home state. **Kristin E. Symon, OD**, of Lafayette, Calif., will complete a residency in ocular disease at the University of California, Berkeley, campus, and **Dana Marie Bastarache, OD**, of Shelton, Conn., will fulfill her ocular disease residency at the VA Medical Center in West Roxbury, Mass.



Dr. Behrens



Dr. Symon



Dr. Bastarache

Rosita Ghazanfari, OD, of Oklahoma City, Okla., received the honor of Northeastern State University College of Optometry's top graduate. Following graduation, Dr. Ghazanfari began a cornea and contact lens residency in New York City.



Dr. Ghazanfari



Dr. Jo

Petra Jo, OD, was named valedictorian at Nova Southeastern University College of Optometry. Dr. Jo, who was born and raised in the Czech Republic, will complete a residency program at the Dorn VA Medical Center in Columbia, S.C.

Amanda Kay Huston, OD, of Taylor Mill, Ky., earned the top GPA at The Ohio State University College of Optometry. Following graduation, Dr. Huston began a residency at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center.

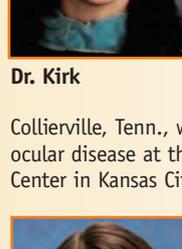


Dr. Huston



Dr. Kirk

Michelle Nguyen Kirk, OD, of Placentia, Calif., graduated at the top of her class from Southern California College of Optometry. Dr. Kirk will practice in a private office in Orange County.



Dr. Dalton

Kendra Dalton, OD, was the valedictorian at Southern College of Optometry. Dr. Dalton, of Collierville, Tenn., will complete a residency in ocular disease at the Kansas City VA Medical Center in Kansas City, Mo.



Dr. Dalton



Dr. Wen

State University of New York State College of Optometry's top graduate was **Joanna Lynne Wen, OD**, of Fairfax, Va. Dr. Wen returned to Virginia after graduation to work in a private practice in Manassas, and she looks forward to participating with VOSH in overseas optometry missions.

Aimée Sylvester McBride, OD, was named valedictorian at University of Alabama at

Continued on page 6

Birmingham School of Optometry. Following graduation, she will join a private practice in Waynesville, N.C., with a focus on primary care optometry, as well as her specialties of low vision and specialty contact lens fitting.



Jaclyn Wray, OD, received the honor of BSK Silver Medalist for her academic

achievement at the University of California, Berkeley, School of

Optometry. Dr. Wray, of Ord, Neb., will practice in Fort Collins, Colo.



Dr. Wray



Dr. Doan

Diana Doan, OD, of Arlington, Texas, was recognized as the top graduate at the University of Houston College of Optometry. Dr. Doan became an associate at a busy, full-scope optometric practice. **WO**

New Graduates Recognized



Dr. Akau



Dr. Liechty



Dr. Wen

Vision Monday's June 2012 issue mentioned three female optometry graduates in its *Best in Class 2012: Overcoming and Overachieving* story. They were **Melanie Akau, OD**, of the University of California, Berkeley, School of Optometry; **Jenna Liechty, OD**, of the Indiana University School of Optometry; and **Joanna Wen, OD**, of the State University of New York State College of Optometry. **WO**

These male students also graduated at the top of their classes.

Thomas Kemmerer, OD, at Illinois College of Optometry

Brian Dornbos, OD, at Michigan College of Optometry, Ferris State University

Dustin Wiles, OD, at University of Missouri - St. Louis, College of Optometry

Louis-Thomas Tremblay, OD, at University of Montreal School of Optometry

David Glabe, OD, at Pacific University College of Optometry

Andre B. Achenbach, OD, and **Ian W. McWherter, OD**, at Pennsylvania College of Optometry at Salus University

Mike Rowe, OD, at School of Optometry and Vision Science, University of Waterloo **WO**

New Multicultural Report Available

Recognizing that growing ethnic minority populations are at higher risk for many eye diseases yet often have less access to and lower awareness of the need for preventive care, Prevent Blindness America and Transitions Optical, Inc. have introduced a new *Focus on Eye Health and Culturally Diverse Populations* report. The report overviews the serious eye health risks faced by African Americans, Asian Americans and Hispanics. It was developed following Prevent Blindness America's *Focus on Eye Health Summit*, held in June in Washington, D.C.

"While prevalence of eye disease is increasing among all populations, a special focus needs to be placed on educating culturally diverse groups, who are disproportionately

affected by many of our nation's most serious eye health issues," says **Hugh R. Parry**, president and CEO of Prevent Blindness America. "Through the multicultural report, we are seeking to bring national attention to these risks, as well as convey an urgent need to ensure that all health messages are culturally appropriate."

U.S. Census data has indicated that more than 70 percent of Asian Americans and Hispanics speak a language other than English at home.

"Language and communication barriers can make it even more challenging for at-risk groups to receive adequate eye care," says **Manuel Solis**, multicultural marketing manager, Transitions Optical. "By simply making available



Download the reports.

bilingual and in-language education, our nation's leaders can help to alleviate health care disparities."

Transitions Healthy Sight for Life Fund® supported the report through an educational grant. Visit the News & Resources section of preventblindness.org/visionproblems to download the report. **WO**

On a Mission

Doctor's commitment to helping globally grows into national role

When **Mary Anne Murphy, OD**, now a successful independent practitioner in Broomfield, Colo., was an optician working at LensCrafters, she had a passion for helping others in need. She routinely donated to the organization's charitable program, then called Gift of Sight and now OneSight.



Dr. Murphy

When she was a student at University of California, Berkeley, School of Optometry, she participated in Student Volunteer Optometric Service to Humanity missions. And when she became a Vision Source doctor and the group made Optometry Giving Sight its charity of choice, she stepped up.

Now, for the past year, she's been the U.S. national chair of Optometry Giving Sight, an organization that seeks to eradicate preventable blindness due to refractive error. It's based on three pillars: training local providers, establishing an infrastructure of vision centers and providing immediate access to vision care. She has been deeply involved for years.

She participates in events such as World Sight Day, scheduled for October 11 of this year. Each year on World Sight Day, her office donates its professional fees, holds a trunk show with proceeds going to the organization and asks patients if they want to round up their sales total to the nearest \$5 increment as a donation. The practice doctors and staff

wear special t-shirts, which are also given to patients who make a donation. "We have a catered lunch and it becomes our fall open house event. A lot of patients preschedule for that day, and we have all three doctors in all day," she says.

In early 2011, Dr. Murphy decided to experience the group's mission firsthand. With the support of Vision Source, she spent three weeks in Tanzania, where she helped train local providers on how to run a vision center. "One pair of eyeglasses can transform a life, but to train a doctor to work in a vision center will help thousands of people with preventable blindness due to refractive error," she says. She led workshops in refraction, clinical diagnosis and treatment and optical lab skills to optometrists who have completed a two-year technical school program. These clinics, set up by Optometry Giving Sight, have basic equipment, such as slit lamps, trial lens sets and optical manufacturing equipment.

Her current role is far removed from the on-location work in Tanzania. She's working to establish relationships with vendors who will support the cause. There are global sponsors, including Alcon and CooperVision, as well as national sponsors, including new partners VISTAKON, TLC and Essilor. She and the other volunteer national chairs and Optometry Giving Sight staff members—in Canada, Ireland, Singapore, Australia, the United Kingdom and Mexico—seek funding. She's not a trained fundraiser, but her passion for the work is apparent. "It was a paradigm shift to go from the mission-type service delivery to sustainability," she says.



At the end of her training session, Dr. Murphy presented the eye care providers with certificates.

But she's an effective advocate.

"It helps that I've been involved in the work Optometry Giving Sight does, and it helps that I'm an OD," she explains. "Today, corporations want to support philanthropic efforts, but they also want to know what the return on the investment is. The work that Optometry Giving Sight does ultimately benefits the culture of eye care and the industry," she says. The fact that she's been to an Optometry Giving Sight-funded clinic helps her be passionate in her appeals.

Dr. Murphy attends all the major eye care shows, scheduling meeting after meeting with potential corporate sponsors. "As the volunteers, we create the relationship and then let the fundraisers take over," she says. That's important to her because she still has her clinic to run. Closing the deal requires more professional training, finesse and follow up than she has the time to provide.

She's not sure how long she'll serve in this role. "As long as I'm an effective fundraiser, I'll keep doing it," she says. "I figure that the more money I can raise, the more I'll be able to do as a volunteer when I retire the chair position." **WO**

Woman with globe: © Zabiandeva | Dreamstime.com

Visit givingsight.org for information on the organization and on the World Sight Day Challenge.

World Sight Day Is October 11, 2012

There are many ways that practices can get involved with the World Sight Day Challenge. Sign up and choose to donate a day of eye exam fees, donate an amount of the proceeds from sales for the day, invite patients to donate throughout the month of October (or all year long), hold a fundraising event or more. Optometry Giving Sight provides kits to help explain the program to patients and staff and a method to track your progress online.

Seeing Eye to Eye is a program Optometry Giving Sight recently revived. Explain to your patients that for every purchase of eyeglasses or contact lenses or a specific service, the practice makes a donation to provide eyewear to a patient in need.

Corporate sponsors in the World Sight Day Company Challenge include TLC Vision Centers, CooperVision, Marchon, Hoya, Alcon, Essilor, ABB Concise, Transitions Optical, Focus Laboratories, allaboutvision.com, SynergEyes, Johnson & Johnson Vision Care (Canada), Westgroupe (Canada), Carl Zeiss Vision (Canada) and the Contact Lens Manufacturers Association. Learn more at givingsight.org. **WO**



The Evolution of the Optical Dispensary

Before **Joanne Reed, OD**, opened the doors to her practice in May 2011, she often found herself thinking about the kinds of patients she might expect in her optical dispensary. "Initially, you guess about who your patients will be," Dr. Reed says. Of course, she had reviewed public documents detailing demographics and surveyed the community to develop a picture of her potential patient base. The World Golf Village in St. Augustine, Fla., is a higher-end neighborhood full of families and retirees. "But you never know for sure until they come in and talk to you."



Dr. Reed

upscale frames as well as utilitarian styles, plenty of options for children and sunwear. Regardless of the brand, the product has to meet Dr. Reed's high standards for quality eyewear. Providing a memorable experience was one of her goals, developed after having worked in practices that focused solely on low-end, volume-based sales. "Without the emphasis on quality, I couldn't give the patients what they need in the best possible way," Dr. Reed says.

Her dispensary has undergone a tremendous evolution in its first year. "It's taken us about a year to get the match," Dr. Reed says. The process included assessing optical sales on a monthly basis with her optician and making multiple changes by discontinuing certain lines and adding new ones to the inventory. She spent the year learning, discovering how to customize the dispensary based on who her patients are and what they want and need. She found, for example, that

there are essentially no 21- to 29-year-old patients since there were not any apartments nearby. Some brands that she thought would sell didn't do as well as she expected. And while patients may not come in asking for a brand by name, they are still

attracted to the styles and recognize the quality of the well-known designer brands.

She also carries frames from less recognized brands. These are often playful and add pops of color to the dispensary. Dr. Reed broke free of her original mold, expanding her options by adding frames that "might excite someone who sees that there's



Dr. Reed recently celebrated one year in practice.

Dr. Reed customized her dispensary for her patient base.



Avoid Insurance Surprises

Dr. Joanne Reed's office welcomes private-pay patients as well as those who have managed vision care plans. She wants every patient to feel that he or she can freely browse the optical and not feel limited to certain frames. That's why Dr. Reed and her optician start by telling patients with a vision plan that they can use their insurance allowance toward any eyeglasses. Patients hear the value of their insurance discount repeated several times, so they understand that their benefit allows them a discount, but not total coverage of the sale. This eliminates the element of surprise when patients are shown their bill. **WO**

something else other than black and brown." Her willingness to try new styles has helped her create her inventory, and she is still seeking another high-end men and women's line to add. Her philosophy is simple. "If it doesn't sell, we switch it out."

Even the displays underwent an evolution. While Dr. Reed felt confident in merchandising the inside of the office, an unexpected challenge came when it was time to decorate the practice's large window display. It's been a trial-and-error

process, and Dr. Reed found that an artistic approach, as opposed to filling the space with a variety of frames, has drawn in more passersby.

The emphasis in the optical dispensary is not all on fashion, though. In Dr. Reed's medically focused practice, she makes her recommendations for ophthalmic lenses in the exam room. "If you position the education medically, patients are more likely to agree as opposed to when you say, 'You can have this if you want, or you can have that,'" Dr. Reed explains. "When patients realize this is my recommendation and it's necessary for their best health, the add-ons aren't seen as frivolous." Dr. Reed routinely recommends Transitions and sunglasses so patients can protect their eyes from UV damage.

She even specifies the features of the ophthalmic lenses she recommends. These premium lenses may cost a little more, but they are worth it for the benefits, which include less glare, fewer distractions for nighttime driving and smudge- and scratch-resistant properties.

Dr. Reed makes sure to repeat her recommendations when she has arrived in the dispensary with the patient. With the optician educated on the patient's specific plan, she can follow through on the sale. Dr. Reed's patients leave the practice with customized optical solutions designed with their visual needs in mind. **WO**



The dispensary includes a variety of high-quality frames.

Pomp and Circumstances

Beyond Her Control *2008 graduate enters a world of economic uncertainty*

Following her 2008 graduation from Illinois College of Optometry (ICO), **Keshia Casimir, OD**, was ready to launch but quickly learned there was no place to land. "Once the recession hit, many of us were scrambling to piece together enough work to pay our bills," she recalls. ICO graduates more than 150 new doctors each year, many of whom want to stay in Chicago, making it a saturated market. Dr. Casimir, who grew up in the city, was lucky enough to have her mother's support. But that also meant she had to move back home. "It's never anyone's plan to live with their parents when they are in their mid to late 20s. Even though my mother was extremely supportive and understood, I felt a sense of guilt and even shame," she says.



Dr. Casimir

But she swallowed her pride and buckled down to find enough work to begin paying back almost \$200,000 in loans. "My only debt was from graduate school, but those numbers are extremely overwhelming," she says. She thought about moving out of Chicago to a place where the competition might not be as fierce, "but when you don't have any savings and have to pay loans, it's a difficult risk to take," she recalls.

She was able to find several practices that could provide her one, two or three days of work a week. "But some weeks, I wouldn't have any work and other weeks, I'd work seven days. Whenever someone said he or she had work for me, I'd go. I'd snatch and grab every opportunity," she says.

The strategy brought in some money, but it was exhausting. "Almost a year later, I found a steady job with an ophthalmologist who offered me three days a week, solid. That was the first time I felt like an OD, not just someone who was hustling for a job," she says. She still accepted other opportunities to work around

that schedule, created a budget and made the sacrifices that allowed her to shed extraneous debt. She was able to complete her car payments and unsecured debt from credit cards. "When I was working five days a week in just two offices, that felt great," she says.

A few months later, she was offered a full-time job as a LensCrafters-affiliated OD in Chicago. "I had worked for LensCrafters on a casual, part-time basis, and when this opportunity came along, it felt like the Holy Grail—benefits and insurance. It was the end of shuffling myself between opposite ends of the city and the start of being able to establish a rapport with patients in just one place," she says. The benefit of having spent a year working in many locations is that she learned a lot—how a well-run practice works as well as policies and habits to avoid. "I can bring those experiences to the table now. I was able to work in medical practices, retail practices and those that mixed the two," she says.

By late 2011, she was able to support herself well enough that she could move out of her mother's house. "I'm only 10 minutes away from

her, but that move was a big sense of accomplishment. I wanted to be able to support myself and move forward," she says.

She can now, and she is chipping away at her student loans while also building a savings portfolio. "I am so happy being an OD, and I wouldn't change my path for anything. I'd gladly offer my services for free if it weren't for the bills I have to pay," she says. "I love knowing that I can help patients see better and experience their lives in a more comfortable way." **WO**

Student Loan Debt

Optometry school graduates from 2009 reported that many of them had significant debt.

Less than \$100,000
19%

\$100,000-\$150,000
36%

\$150,000+
45%

Source: Academy of Eyecare Excellence, *New O.D. Graduate Employment Plans and Perceptions of Practice Setting*, March 2009.

Residency Awards Announced

All six of the residency awards granted by the American Optometric Foundation and VISTAKON® for 2011-2012 went to women ODs. The recipients of the George W. Mertz Contact Lens Residency Awards are **Monica Roy, OD, MPH**, of The Ohio State University College of Optometry, and **Natalie C. Santelli, MAT, OD**, of Oregon Health and Sciences University/Casey Eye Institute. The recipients of the Sheldon Wechsler Contact Lens Residency Awards are **Yin-Yin Aung, OD**, of New England College of Optometry, and **Cherie Nau, OD**, of Davis Duehr Dean Eye Care, Illinois College of Optometry. And the recipients of the Terrance Ingraham Pediatric Optometry Residency Awards are **Elizabeth A. Knighton, OD**, of University of Houston

College of Optometry, and **Lernik Mesropian, OD**, of Southern California College of Optometry. Each will receive \$4,000 toward her graduate education, including a \$750 travel fellowship to attend the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Optometry in Phoenix in October.

In addition, the AOF announced the winners of the 2012 Award of Excellence in Contact Lens Patient Care, made possible through generous funding by VISTAKON®. Thirteen women were among the 19 recipients: **Sunni D. Stewart, OD**, of Indiana University School of Optometry; **Lulu Massri, OD**, of Inter-American University of Puerto Rico School of Optometry; **Andrea T. Sewell, OD**, of Michigan College of Optometry, Ferris State University; **Crystal Meyer, OD**, of New

England College of Optometry; **Rosita Ghazanfari, OD**, of Northeastern State University College of Optometry; **Sara Ann Bierwerth, OD**, of Pennsylvania College of Optometry at Salus University; **Meredith Rhodes, OD**, of Southern College of Optometry; **Olga Pikus, OD**, of State University of New York State College of Optometry; **Mallory Kuchem, OD**, of The Ohio State University College of Optometry; **Patricia Marie Fulmer, OD**, of University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Optometry; **Melissa M. Schmidt, OD**, University of Missouri - St. Louis, College of Optometry; **Claudine Courey, OD**, University of Montreal School of Optometry; and **Katrina Kolozetti, OD**, of School of Optometry and Vision Science, University of Waterloo. **WO**

Optometry Opens Door to **POLITICS**

Primary win sets doctor up for the big race in November

On November 6, as Californians in the state's 20th assembly district head to the polls to vote, there's a chance that they'll elect **Jennifer Ong, OD**, of Hayward, as one of the state's 80 representatives. In June, Dr. Ong was one of the top two vote-getters in an open primary, which means she'll be one of two candidates, both Democrats, in the final running.

Dr. Ong says if it weren't for optometry, she doubts she would have become as involved or intrigued by the political process. "I don't think I would have come to it as naturally from any other profession," she says. She served as student body president when she was at University of California, Berkeley, School of Optometry, has been the president of the Alameda Contra Costa Counties Optometric Society, completed her term as trustee for the California Optometric Association in 2009 and served on the State Government Relations Executive Board of the American

Optometric Association. During times she spent lobbying on optometry's behalf in Washington, D.C., and Sacramento, she learned how powerful organized optometry could be. "In a scope-of-practice dispute, the medical association outspent us 10-to-1, but we passed the law and passed it quickly," she says.

Optometrists, in general, tend to be politically aware because the scope of the profession is legislated. "Our political efforts are always about cooperating with other organizations and trying to educate other health care providers."

The connections she built through organized optometry helped her succeed through the primary. She was the only one of the five candidates

Dr. Ong wants to create a model that other small business owners can use to run for office while maintaining their professional careers.

never to have held public office. But many organizations in the health care community essentially embraced her as their own. In the last two weeks of the primary season, residents in her district with a population of 431,604 received 15 campaign flyers endorsing her. "Eighty percent of those did not come from my campaign," she says. "Those were independent expenditures made on my behalf, for which the law prohibits any collaboration between the group(s) and the candidate."

The fact that she has been a working optometrist in the area for more than two decades has helped her name recognition.

In addition, she founded the Hep B Free campaign for Alameda County, and she's involved with Lighthouse for the Blind and several environmental and social justice groups.

If she wins, she'll add to the number of women elected in California politics.

Of the 120 state legislators, only 28 percent are women—and there are no state assembly members of Filipino descent. If elected, she will be the first Filipina American serving at this level in California, she says. "In the Philippines, politics has a long tradition of being corrupt, so I've been doing a lot of explaining to some Filipino-Americans, including some family members, who think that politics is dirty. I'm working to convince them that it is honorable," she says.

She's had tremendous help from a powerful political consultant in Democratic circles, **Richie Ross**, who is known, she says, "for coming up with out-of-the-box, innovative ideas." For example, the campaign



Keeping the Practice Growing

Dr. Jennifer Ong has been running for office while she's kept her practice going. She calls on two ODs to fill in for her, and the patients take it in stride. "They know that over the years, I've done community work. So they always ask me what I'm up to these days," she says, laughing. They know she has selected high-quality providers to cover for her, so they stay loyal to the practice, even if they can't see her.

Dr. Ong believes it's important to keep working while she's campaigning. "One of my goals is to develop a model that others can use, especially those from under-represented communities, which include women and small business owners. When I ask others to please step up because we need more diversity in the assembly, I want to be able to show them they really can do it—because I did." **WO**



Dr. Ong and volunteers delivered 100,000 native grasses to key voters.



hand-delivered a potted blue-eyed grass, a native flowering perennial, to 100,000 selected residents in the district. That was a huge undertaking for three weeks as volunteers drove around, delivering the plants. Dr. Ong recalls that she and her mother went out together on the Sunday afternoon of Mother's Day to make deliveries. "We loaded up a van and maneuvered around those steep and narrow streets in Hayward," she says. Volunteers would deliver between 500 and 2,000 plants a day, but Dr. Ong says she was often invited in to talk or have a drink of water. "It's the nicest experience to be invited in and led through a house to find the identified voter drying her hands on a kitchen towel so that we can talk for a few minutes."

Dr. Ong also discovered that her mother is a powerful campaigner who helps residents connect with the candidate. Both of Dr. Ong's parents are retired union workers; her mother sold hot dogs at the Oakland Coliseum, and her father was a produce man at a Lucky's grocery store. She and her three siblings went to public schools. During the primary season, the campaign sent 35,000 potholders customized with Dr. Ong's name. The package contained a letter from her mother, in which she talked about bringing leftover hot dogs home from the games and the work her husband did in the produce department. The note ends with a heartfelt request for the reader's vote. "My daughter won't disappoint you, just like she's never disappointed us." That's quite an endorsement. 



Potholders were sent, accompanied by a note from Dr. Ong's mother, shown below outside of the Oakland Coliseum where she sold hot dogs.



Optometrists in Politics

U.S. Congress

U.S. Senator John Boozman, OD, (R-Arkansas)

State Legislators

Alabama Rep. James McClendon, Jr., OD
 Kansas Senator Pete Brungardt, OD
 Kansas Rep. J. David Crum, OD
 Missouri Speaker of the House Rep. Steven D. Tilley, OD
 New Hampshire Rep. Steven Cunningham, OD
 South Carolina Rep. Deborah A. Long, OD
 Virginia Del. Roxann L. Robinson, OD

California Rep. Edward P. Hernandez, OD
 Georgia Rep. James Beverly, OD
 Louisiana Senator David R. Heitmeier, OD
 Missouri Rep. Terrence M. Swinger, OD
 Montana Senator Robert L. Hawks, OD
 Rhode Island Rep. Arthur J. Corvese, OD

On the Ballots

Steve Nguyen, OD, for Texas HD 115—
stevefortexas.com

Jennifer Ong, OD, for 20th California—
drjenniferong.org

REPUBLICANS

DEMOCRATS

"My mom sold hot dogs at the [Oakland] Coliseum. My dad was a produce man at Lucky's. Their union contracts gave us health care. Our public schools educated us, and California's universities opened the world of opportunity. I am running for State Assembly to help others have what California gave me and my family."

—Dr. Ong's political web site

Source: American Optometric Association

ACCESS

Is the First Step in Success

Doctor works in three rural offices, making her services more available

Laura Longnecker, OD, grew up in a small town, and she felt the lure of small-town living. "I knew I was going to end up in a rural area," she says. But as she began to discover the dearth of optometrists in the counties near where she lived, she realized how much her expertise would be needed.

Before Dr. Longnecker graduated from the University of Missouri, St. Louis, College of Optometry, in May 2011, she already had secured a spot



Dr. Longnecker

she started a new independent practice.

Yet she still experienced the excitement and challenges of a new business. The store's previous doctor had left the year before, so she essentially had to build a patient base from scratch. She started in the obvious place—the store itself. She introduced herself to the store staff and shoppers by walking in her white coat. She explained her range of services, and she has let the Vision Center associates know that she will accommodate patients who want to buy eyeglasses or contact lenses and need a new prescription if they chose to come to her. That helps particularly when the store runs promotions that bring new customers to the optical, who could potentially become her patients, too.

That kind of initiative gets a person noticed. Store

to start a practice inside the Jerseyville, Ill., Walmart store. "Walmart was the perfect fit because there are not many commercial businesses in the small, neighboring counties so everyone ends up at Walmart sometime during the week," Dr. Longnecker explains. "It was a way to cater to the small towns I wanted to target." It was also a great financial match because she didn't have to put out the money she would have if

management asked if she wanted to serve a store in Jacksonville, about 50 miles away. "They had a great patient base there, but they were down to only one doctor once a week," Dr. Longnecker says. She began to cover Fridays in that store, and the other part-time doctor eventually left. In April, management offered her a space in another store in Godfrey, about 20 miles away, because the doctor there was moving out of the state. Dr. Longnecker gave up one day in her Jerseyville office to provide care in Godfrey. Her current schedule includes spending Mondays in Godfrey; Tuesdays, Thursdays and every other Saturday in Jerseyville; and Fridays and the alternating Saturdays in Jacksonville. When she's not in the store, these Vision Centers do not have doctor coverage.

Dr. Longnecker allows for a long appointment slot for her patient exams, and she says her days are usually combined with 50 percent walk-in patients and 50 percent appointments. The flexible schedule allows her to sit and talk with patients, and on a day when she has a light patient load, it's not uncommon for a patient to spend an hour sharing stories. The pace is slower than it may be in the city, but Dr. Longnecker likes it that way.

"When patients are not in a hurry, I get to know more about their lifestyle so I can provide better eye care," she says.

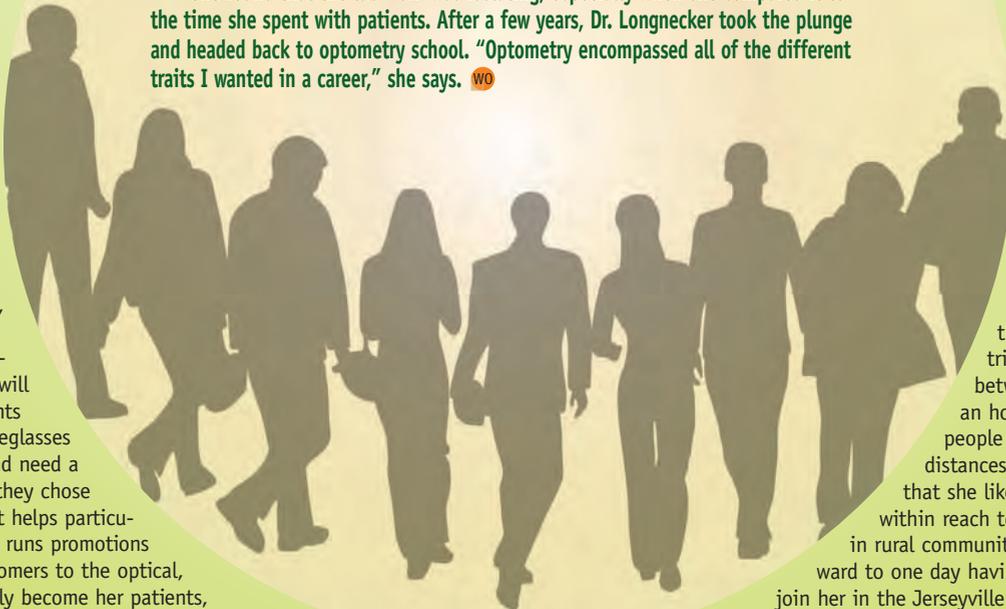
Her Jacksonville office showed her a new perspective on helping the community with its diverse patient base. It's nearby a state school for the deaf, and it has a high population of Hispanic immigrants and individuals from Central Africa. The town that Dr. Longnecker calls home is centrally located between her three offices, and the trips to work take between 45 minutes to an hour. In rural areas, people often travel those distances. Dr. Longnecker says that she likes being squarely within reach to so many patients in rural communities. She looks forward to one day having another doctor join her in the Jerseyville or Jacksonville offices so she can offer even more coverage to

patients. **WO**

A Passion for People

Dr. Laura Longnecker always knew she wanted a career in a medical field with an opportunity to help and meet many people along the way. While optometry piqued her interest, she hesitated at the commitment required for a medical graduate program. She studied medical technology and became a phlebotomist, working in the lab and drawing patients' blood.

She found that the lab work was isolating, especially when she compared it to the time she spent with patients. After a few years, Dr. Longnecker took the plunge and headed back to optometry school. "Optometry encompassed all of the different traits I wanted in a career," she says. **WO**



10 Weeks from Idea to Opening Day

Sometimes the stars align just so. That's what must have happened for **Julie Hart, OD**, who got the idea during Thanksgiving weekend in 2007 to open her own office in West Plains, Mo. On Valentine's Day, 2008, just 10 weeks later, she opened the doors to Hart Family Eyecare.

That was one rapid progression of events. She was tired of driving to different locations as a fill-in doctor, some as far as an hour or more away, so she and her husband, **Ross**, a pharmacist, thought it would be nice if she could have her own office, following the example of her grandfather and great grandfather, both of whom had been independent optometrists. Her father-in-law soon connected the couple with a friend of his who owned a building he wanted to rent. A few days before Christmas, Dr. Hart sat with a local banker who asked her how much she wanted to borrow. "I wasn't sure how much I could make," she recalls, "so he told me, 'Figure out what you can pay each month, and we'll work it out from there.'" She settled on a \$100,000 loan—and it was approved on New Year's Day.

The work was fast and furious—and completed in six weeks. Because it was winter, she had no trouble finding a construction crew that wanted to work. She bought used equipment where she could, and she brought a photo of a stunning window display cabinet to a local carpenter who replicated it. "Honestly, I didn't do too much research into what I purchased. If a colleague said it worked in his or her office, I figured it would work for me," she says, laughing. "The one area where I went all-out, though, was in the

dispensary. Even though this is rural Missouri, with the closest big town 100 miles away, I wanted to provide a higher-end dispensary." She carries products from Marchon and Tura, primarily, and her per-patient revenue continues to climb.

"At first, we were excited to see a handful of patients every few days," she

Room for Growth

The additional space in the new location comes in very handy, particularly on Fridays when nearly 2-year-old **Libby** comes into the office with her mother, **Dr. Julie Hart**. Patients who don't realize she's there just the one day a week tend to look for her when they arrive. During other work days, **Libby** is cared for by **Ross Hart's** mother or she's in daycare. But when she's in the office, she has a room of her own—which doesn't hold quite her attraction as much as the frame boards do. Dr. Hart envisions that **Libby's** room could one day serve as an office for an associate OD. **WO**

says. Then she began accepting more vision insurance, including VSP, "and the flood-gates opened. I'm the only independent optometrist in the area who accepts the insurance that covers the employees in five or six of the local factories," she says. During her time as a fill-in doctor in corporate settings, she realized how much patients relied on the list of participating doctors, at least initially in making a decision about where to get their eye care. Now that she's on the lists, patients who met her at one of the other locations where she worked are glad to come to her new office. Her staff does a good job of helping these managed vision patients see that their allowances can be used toward the purchase of any product. "There are some patients who say they only want what their insurance covers, but many more are interested in the better, newer products," she says.

The practice grew so fast that in 2010, she purchased a building for a new location, just one door down from the three-unit building where she was formerly. Her new stand-alone building is part of a mix of medical offices near the local hospital. At 2,700 square feet, it has twice the space of her first location. She's been able to add a second exam lane (purchasing all new equipment this time around), and there's room for a third, if she decides to add it. She brought her custom-made window display unit with her, but now

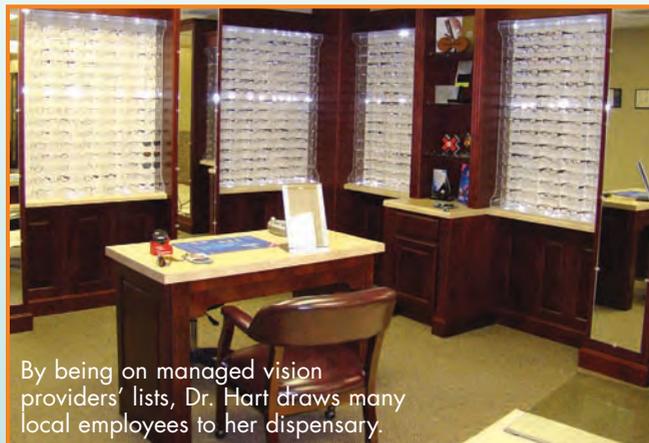


Dr. Hart brings daughter, **Libby**, into the office a few hours a week.

that she has more money—her initial loan is two-thirds paid off—and a vibrant patient base of 7,500 patients, she can afford to add new equipment and staff. "I didn't know this small community would be able to support me so well," she says. The town itself has a population of about 11,000. Although she opened only four years ago, her appointment book fills up weeks in advance. Even so, she likes to be

able to accommodate walk-in patients or emergency patients as needed.

Now that she has four staff members and advanced diagnostic equipment, she's tackling



By being on managed vision providers' lists, Dr. Hart draws many local employees to her dispensary.

the question of how to make the practice run efficiently. "I want to be able to be more efficient but still maintain that level of personal contact," she says. She knows that's what has built her practice to this point. She recently asked one of her patients who drives nearly two hours to see her—passing three other ODs along the way—what makes her so loyal. The patient reminded her that when she first came to her in one of the corporate locations, she was wearing monovision contact lenses. Dr. Hart switched her to high-Dk multifocal contact lenses. "You fixed my eyes," the woman said. **WO**



Dr. Hart's practice has experienced fast growth.

Women in the NEWS



Dr. VanHoy

Mary VanHoy, OD, FCOVD, FCSO, was recently elected and installed as the president of the College of Syntonic Optometry at the 80th Annual Conference on Vision and Light.

Dr. Becker & Dr. Kempf

Elizabeth M. Becker, OD, of Oxford, became the secretary/treasurer of the Michigan Optometric Association (MOA). Krystal Kempf, OD, of St. Johns, was one of three recipients of the MOA's Keyperson of Year award.



Dr. Becker



Dr. Kempf



Dr. Franklin



Dr. Cook

Dr. Franklin & Dr. Cook

Shannon C. Franklin, OD, of Crozet, became president of the Virginia Optometric Association, and Christine W. Cook, OD, of Virginia Beach, stepped into the role of secretary/treasurer.



Vision Monday Spotlights

Vision Monday shines a spotlight on several women ODs in its 2012 Most Influential Women in Optical feature. A) Marjorie Knotts, OD, of Indianapolis, Ind., and B) Mary Anne Murphy, OD, of Broomfield, Colo., were recognized for their work in the Executive Suite section. VM's greatest Mentors included C) Millicent Knight, OD, of Evanston, Ill.; Kara Pasner, OD, of Brooklyn, N.Y.; and D) Vinita Alle Henry, OD, of St. Louis, Mo. Three women ODs were applauded for their contribution to the industry as a Rising Star: E) Karen March, OD, of Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.; F) Priti Patel, OD, of Los Angeles, Calif.; and G) Rachael Wruble, OD, of Gastonia, N.C.



to the industry as a Rising Star: E) Karen March, OD, of Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.; F) Priti Patel, OD, of Los Angeles, Calif.; and G) Rachael Wruble, OD, of Gastonia, N.C.

You Are What You Eat

Doctor counsels patients on nutrition and eye health

During the past 26 years, Sonja Hagemann, OD, has developed a reputation in Calgary, Alberta, for her complementary approach to eye care. Recently, the *Vancouver Sun* recognized her for her commitment to preventive eye care by applying current research on nutrition and eye health. As an optometrist, she feels it is her job to stay up to date to share this information with her patients.



Dr. Hagemann

Dr. Hagemann finds that her patients are grateful for specific nutritional advice. For example, she has found the standard lid care regime was not enough to resolve chronic blepharitis in the long term. It wasn't until she started prescribing therapeutic doses of oral omega-3 and gamma-linolenic acid (GLA) that her cases of chronic blepharitis would resolve. "Once patients are on the proper dosages of the right supplements for the right amount of time, the anti-inflammatory effect kicks in, and they can stop the hot compresses and lid massages," she says. They are even happier when they learn that these same supplements are reported to provide other benefits, such as lowering lipids, decreasing the risk of heart disease and Alzheimer's and helping with dry skin. Dr. Hagemann cautions that not everyone can take these supplements, so be aware of contraindications, such as being on blood thinners.

Patients appreciate an evidence-based nutritional treatment plan for sight-threatening conditions such as age-related macular degeneration (AMD). "My patients are very interested to learn that the progression of AMD can be influenced by lifestyle changes, such as nutritional support, which may improve retinal health on a biochemical level. They are excited and feel empowered to learn there is a lot they can do to manage the progress of their condition," she says. "As soon as we find early macular pigment density changes, my patients are asking 'What can I do now?'" Dr. Hagemann explains. "That is where I have the opening to say, 'How often do you eat dark leafy greens? How active are you? How often do you eat fish high in omega-3s? How much sugar are you eating? What is your diet like, and how can we turn it into an anti-inflammatory diet?'" she asks. Specific supplements are prescribed, but a whole-lifestyle approach is also needed. She emphasizes eating foods that are high in lutein and zeaxanthin, such as kale, collard greens, Swiss chard, spinach, goji berries, fish and whole grains.

Even though she writes a specific vitamin Rx,





she has found that patients return with three or four supplement bottles—none of which are exactly what she prescribed. She now dispenses a professional line of nutritional supplements from her office to make it easier for patients to follow her advice.

Many patients know about the Age-Related Eye Disease Study (AREDS). However, the formula studied was designed not for prevention but only to slow the progression of AMD. Preventing eye disease is another whole topic. Too often, she hears patients lament that they had never heard this advice before. "People are hungry for current information. If we are not providing it, where are they getting it? As a profession, we have an opportunity to build our practices and impact a lot of lives with good, evidence-based nutritional advice."

Dr. Hagemann is creating a new blog allowing her to further this goal of improving patient education. She also offers educational seminars and works with naturopathic and allopathic doctors when indicated.

Dr. Hagemann credits the Ocular Nutrition Society (ocular-nutrition-society.org) for helping her keep updated on ocular nutrition research. This organization has a new fellowship program with the American Academy of Optometry (AAO) called the F-ONS. It will also host a one-day symposium with the Optometric Retina Society, *Healthy Retina Through Nutrition*, on

Oct. 23, 2012, just prior to the AAO meeting in Phoenix. 

Sleep Apnea Complicates Treatment

Things are not always what they seem. Dr. Sonja Hagemann says she has encountered patients who suffer from sleep apnea. These patients were referred to undergo a sleep assessment. The hypoxia that occurs with sleep apnea is believed to impact the eye as well as other organs, such as the heart and brain, and, in turn, may contribute to a multitude of conditions including glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy. Dr. Hagemann explains, "Once these patients were put on CPAP machines, their medical interventions were optimized," she says. "Having the sleep study done made all the difference." 



Six ODs Honored as Optometric Business Innovators

Six women ODs were included in the second annual Optometric Business Innovators report, a collaborative project between *Vision Monday* and *Review of Optometric Business*.

A) **Bonnie Chen, OD**, of Concord, N.C.; B) **Maureen Fahey, OD**, of Kennewick, Wash.; and C) **Elaine Happ, OD**, of Monticello, Minn., received recognition in the *Optical Dispensing* category. D) **Ann Hoscheit, OD**, FFAO, FAARM, of Gastonia, N.C., and E) **Susy Yu, OD, MBA, FFAO**, of Pasadena, Calif., were named *Influencers*. F) **Madeline L. Romeu, OD, FFAO**, of West New York, N.J., was included as an *Innovator in Contact Lens Dispensing*.



Dr. Messner

Stephanie Messner, OD, has been appointed vice president and dean for academic affairs at Illinois College of Optometry.

Kansas Optometric Assoc. Achievements

Several women ODs were honored for their achievements at the Kansas Optometric Association's (KOA) annual meeting. A) **Karen Aldridge, OD**, was named the 2012 Optometrist of the Year. Recognized for her work in political progress, B) **Jeannette L. Holland, OD**, of Oskaloosa, was one of two recipients of the William A. Carriger, Sr., Legislative Service Award. C) **Dawn Williams, OD**, of Garden City, was named the new director at large for the 2012-2013 KOA Board of Directors. Also at the meeting, the KOA announced its 2012-2013 Leadership class, which included D) **Emily Becker, OD**, of Wichita; E) **Ashley Blasi, OD**, of Wichita; F) **Jennifer Carr, OD**, of Derby;



G) **Leslie Gallagher, OD**, of Holton; H) **Kristina Post, OD**, of Wichita; and I) **Ashley Reddell, OD**, of Leavenworth.

Couple Puts Family in Family Eye Care



Photo by Beth Probyn

Dr. Teresa Theobald and Dr. Martin Theobald each work four days a week so they can spend time with their sons.

When **Teresa Theobald, OD**, and her husband, **Martin Theobald, OD**, returned to his hometown of Duluth, Minn., after their 1995 graduation from University of Houston College of Optometry, they didn't think the town could support two more optometrists. "Due to the saturation of eye care providers in Duluth, we thought we would have to move to the Twin Cities" about 150 miles away, says Dr. Teresa Theobald. Just as they were preparing to make the move, she received a call from an ophthalmology group in town, offering her a job. Her husband found work with the Fond du Lac Chippewa tribe, a self-sufficient tribal community about 15 miles away. So they settled in.



Dr. Theobald

In March 1997, Dr. Teresa Theobald received a call that would change everything. An OD from an independent practice in town called her, saying he was either going to close or sell his practice. Was she interested? In fact, she was. The OD couple saw the advantages of having a practice that could support the two doctors. She began working there part time and took over ownership of the practice, now called Theobald Family Eye Care, in 1998. The doctors split their time between working in their own practice and at their employed jobs until Theobald Family Eye Care grew to support them fully. And it did grow. Today, the practice has two, full-scope medical practice locations in Duluth. Because Dr. Theobald's introduction in Duluth eye care was through ophthalmology, the practice earns many referrals from local MDs. Dr. Theobald has a healthy referral network with many local optometrists as well, due to the advanced diagnostic equipment available in the offices.

Even as the practice grows, the doctors have worked to maintain a balance between their work, family and professional interests. The couple has two sons—**James**, 11, and **Kevin**, 8. When the boys were small, each of the doctors decreased the work schedule to four days in the office, including one evening until 7 p.m. "That way, the boys were with at least one of us four days a week and in day care just three. We expected that when they started school, we'd return to five days a week, but we like this schedule," she says. The family is awaiting completion of their new home construction, and Dr. Teresa Theobald is about halfway through her term as president of the Minnesota Optometric Association—both of which endeavors have been easier by their four-day-a-week schedule. **WO**



Dr. Theobald was part of the Minnesota delegation of optometrists and students who lobbied on Capitol Hill in April.



(l-r): **Greg Kraupa, OD**; **Minnesota Gov. Mark Dayton**; **Dr. Theobald**; and **Jeffrey Mackner, OD**. **Dr. Kraupa and Dr. Mackner are past presidents of the Minnesota Optometric Association (MOA), and Dr. Theobald is the current president.**

All Politics Is Local

Dr. **Teresa Theobald** became the president of the NE Optometric Society, one of eight local societies in Minnesota, at her very first meeting. "The current president welcomed us and asked, 'Which one of you is going to be president?' I have a difficult time saying no to a good cause," she says laughing. Indeed, she said yes to serving in that role for 10 years. (The policy manual she wrote for the societies now limits presidents to two consecutive two-year terms.) "The society presidency was my introduction to organized optometry, and from there, it's a natural ascension to committee level work in the state association." In 2004, she was honored by the Minnesota Optometric Association (MOA) as Young Optometrist of the Year. She served on various committees and was elected as an MOA trustee in 2006.

As the current MOA president, her goal is to increase membership both by drawing in new members and re-engaging former members. "I have made a point of keeping the general membership educated on important issues. I request them to voice their opinions. That engagement keeps them involved and part of the optometry family in Minnesota." She has added a nonvoting, emeritus position to the board filled by a former MOA president at least 10 years past his or her term. "Having that OD there provides wonderful historical perspective," she says. "The ODs who fought for therapeutic laws have a depth of knowledge that should be tapped into. **Mark Hennen, OD**, serves in the emeritus position this year, and he has been an invaluable source."

Dr. Theobald's involvement has received some national recognition, too. She received the PAC Representative Award from the American Optometric Association in 2011. "I was able to increase donations to the PAC considerably," she says. "I'm not afraid to ask for things when I know they will help the profession. If every optometrist did just one thing for our profession each year, just imagine what optometry could accomplish." **WO**

Success Starts with You

Motivated OD leans on her colleagues, and vice versa, to promote learning and practice growth

Melissa Helfrich, OD, of Fairview Heights, Ill., is on the lookout for successful practices all the time. "I have contacted and introduced myself to many doctors who have reputations for amazing practices," she says. Frequently, she'll



Dr. Helfrich

ask the doctor if she can pay a visit to see the practice in action. "No one has ever told me no, and everyone has been so welcoming," she says of her travels to North Carolina, Louisiana and Georgia. "I just can't explain how valuable it is," she says. While there's only so much traveling Dr. Helfrich can do with a practice and family back in Illinois, she was inspired to start a peer focus group so she could connect with other doctors, creating an opportunity for doctors to learn from each other. It started about five years ago with monthly conference calls, which became so enjoyable that the doctors decided that they should do it more often.

Dr. Helfrich serves as the facilitator for a group that practices in a variety of settings. "I love to share marketing and practice management ideas with other doctors," she says, as well as discuss popular topics such as contact lens strategies, hiring associate doctors, staff incentives and financial benchmarking. The group meets monthly for a conference call and in person a few times throughout the year.

Dr. Helfrich has found these meetings so beneficial that she started two additional peer focus groups that are specific to her LensCrafters-affiliated practice. These groups, one comprised of doctors in the St. Louis area and another with wide geographic diversity, help her hone in on the specifics that are unique to their setting.

She appreciates the camaraderie in all of the groups, and the members of her original focus group have recently worked together to start a company called Inspiring Practices. The company was founded after the group had contemplated ways to provide the best patient experience. "Patients are waiting 8-10 minutes to see the doctor, and while there are some reception area video systems out there, we wanted to create something fun and engaging," Dr. Helfrich says. Inspiring Practices develops customized media for practices, streaming video clips that provide education, inspirational messages, doctor biographies, office news

Start Your Own Peer Focus Group

Dr. Melissa Helfrich encourages her optometric colleagues to start their own peer focus group with doctors locally or across the country. Here's her advice.

Encourage your colleagues. Doctors may not know what to expect or if a peer focus group will be valuable, so encourage them to give it a try. "With one of our first meetings, we planned to be together for an hour and we ended up talking for four hours," she says. "Be willing to put in the time talking to doctors about the benefits, which, most importantly, include learning from each other." Dr. Helfrich recommends a group of 10 or fewer doctors.

Build a relationship. Get to know the doctors, their specialties, strengths, opportunities and challenges they see in their practice. This will help you generate topics for discussion, and your group will be more willing to share information once everyone has formed a trusting relationship. This is especially important if you are interested in financial benchmarking in your group so you can see how your practice compares and where you need to improve.

For advice or questions on starting a peer focus group, email Dr. Helfrich at melissahelfrich@hotmail.com. **WO**

See the World Clearly



Dr. Helfrich's reception area showcases her mission memorably.



INSPIRING PRACTICES



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Beyond Best Practices...Inspiring Practices.

Dr. Helfrich and colleagues started Inspiring Practices to deliver engaging media content to offices.

and more. One message that has looped recently in Dr. Helfrich's office is "Why should you buy your contact lenses from us?"

Inspiring Practices has taken off, and the company was present at the American Optometric Association meeting this summer. "It's an evolution," Dr. Helfrich says. "It started as a peer group idea, and now it's impacting doctors across the country." Learn more at inspiringpractices.com. **WO**

Pink Ink

In Search of Value

Sarah Manongdo-Joya, OD

Since I graduated seven years ago from Illinois College of Optometry, I've been searching for the greatest values to incorporate into all three facets of my life, as a full-time practicing OD, as a mother and wife and more recently as a "Plummie" for PlumDistrict.com, Daily Deals for Moms by Moms. The latter is a daily deal site in which a business offers a deep discount through the sale of online vouchers. The web site and negotiator earn some proceeds from these voucher sales.

As a Plummie, I've negotiated successfully with play-schoools, spas, photographers, mobile massage services, caterers, salons, online bakeries, party services, personal trainers, cleaning services, personal stylists and more. Here are the highly effective strategies and skills I've learned by sniffing out the best deals for mothers.

Time management. Adding the online site work meant budgeting for an extra 20 or more hours a week in addition to the full-time job as an OD at America's Best Contacts & Eyeglasses and the round-the-clock work of being a mom and wife. The benefits are worthwhile, however: discretionary funds, additional savings for my son and access to awesome discounts that I negotiated. Prioritizing is key.

Efficiency. I've learned how to approach a business and craft a profitable deal efficiently through personal contact and follow-up emails and phone calls. I carry this skill over to the exam room during my delivery of optometric care and optical sales recommendations—even on those busy days when I might see 30-40 patients.

Develop long-term relationships. My interactions with business owners and with patients are key to maintaining repeat business. The more I present myself as "your consultant" and "your eye doctor," the more financial and professional success I enjoy. I love when businesses and patients alike ask for me by name.

Create goals. Both Plum and America's Best have monthly sales goals. Helping to meet those goals has taught me how to create financial goals of my own, such as a college savings fund for my son.

Write creatively and concisely. Although an ad copy team creates the sales ad for the deal, I write and submit a sales pitch and summary. That process has helped me write better business correspondence

to patients, pharmacies, other doctors and management, and I now document patient findings in my chart more succinctly.

Negotiate successfully. Understanding other businesses' profit margins and risk has taught me how to negotiate successfully. This skill carries over to interactions with difficult or disgruntled patients or patients who worry more about cost than care. I have yet to master this skill with my toddler, though...

Think like a CEO. My Plum job is based on commissions, so it's in my best interest to expand and grow my small business. It has inspired me to be more hands on and involved in helping my optical management and staff generate more sales. Even though I am salaried, I do receive a bonus when the store succeeds in making its monthly quota.

Think like a parent. I select businesses to approach based on whether I would want to buy the deal. Moms have incredible buying power and make most of the big purchase decisions in families. In the optometry office, I make sure to speak to the mom of the minor patient (or the wife of a reluctant patient) to finalize product and care recommendations.

Manage risk. With time and practice, I have learned how to price a deal offer correctly, anticipate sales and crunch the numbers to align the deal with the business owner's profit margin without incurring too much risk. I do the same when analyzing solutions for a problem patient: refer a patient out for specialty care, offer a second opinion option with another colleague or suggest a refund.

Reward yourself and your team. I have learned how to reward myself (and my staff) to thank them for their hard work and boost morale. I can purchase my own deals, such as cupcake deliveries, chair massages or catered food, or give them as surprise gifts for staff, friends and family. 

Sarah Manongdo-Joya, OD, of Chicago, was featured in an earlier story in WO about her budget-conscious wedding. Her web site, sarahjoya.com, links to her various businesses and includes her numerous TV interviews, including the Cyber Surf segment on 190 North, a lifestyle and entertainment show on a Chicago ABC affiliate.



Dr. Manongdo-Joya

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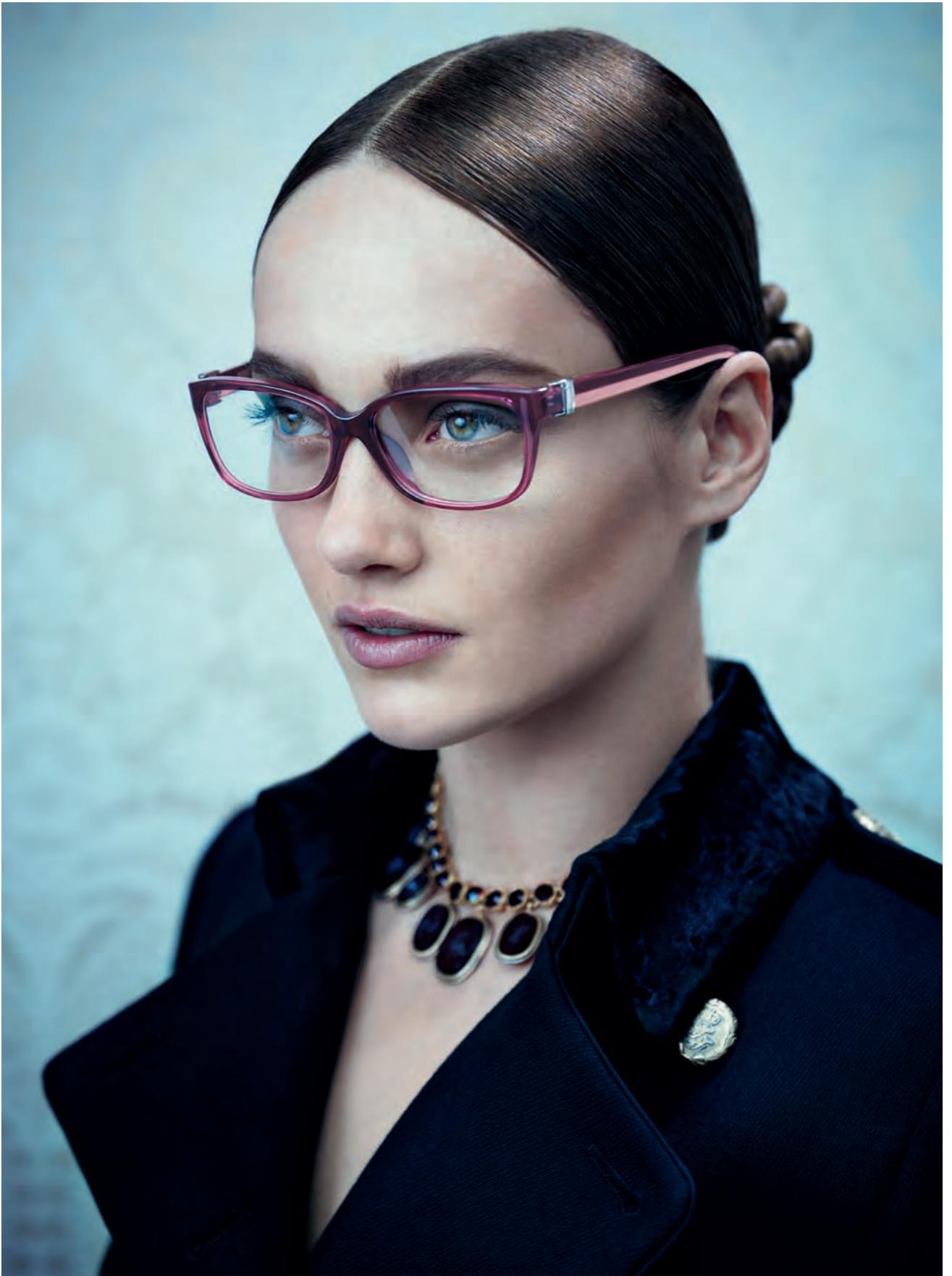
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