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Optical Women's Association Announces 2021 Award Honorees

DALLAS, TX – March 3, 2021 – The Optical Women's Association (OWA) has announced its 2021 OWA Award Honorees.

Gai Gherardi, co-founder and co-designer of I.a.Eyeworks, will receive the Pleiades award to recognize her exceptional action in advancing the leadership role of women in the optical industry.

Deborah Myres, owner of Visual Inspirations, will receive the Pyxis award to honor her as a member of the OWA who actively participates in the organization and contributes to its continuing growth.

“Each year, the OWA recognizes women who exemplify what it means to truly be a passionate, effective leader in the optical industry. This year, we are proud to honor Gai Gherardi, a visionary and trailblazer who re-imagined what an eyewear company could be, and Debbie Myres, whose commitment, enthusiasm, and hard work resulted in OWA programs enjoyed by hundreds of OWA members,” said Robyn Crimmins, OWA President.

The timing and venue for the presentation of the awards will be scheduled for later this year. The OWA will provide the details soon.

About the honorees:

Gai Gherardi is the co-founder and co-designer of I.a.Eyeworks, which she and Barbara McReynolds began in 1979 as a single storefront in Los Angeles. Best friends since their high school days, Gherardi and McReynolds transformed their early training as opticians into a vision of I.a.Eyeworks as a vehicle to challenge the prevailing norms of eyewear with proposals for new, provocative revelations of the face. More than four decades and hundreds of frame designs later, I.a.Eyeworks encompasses two namesake retail stores in Los Angeles and a wholesale division that channels its influential designs to a global network of independent opticians and retailers.

In addition to groundbreaking eyewear designs, I.a.Eyeworks has made an indelible stamp on the look and language of what an eyewear company can be. From creating streamlined architectural spaces to designing the cases that protect the frames, Gherardi and McReynolds leave no creative detail untouched. An abiding love for artists led to an ongoing series of in-store exhibitions, event programming, and commissioned works. Since 1981, the brand's signature portrait ad campaign has featured an eclectic mix of more than 200 high-profile celebrities in an ever-evolving series of stunning black-and-white images, anchored by the legendary tagline, “A face is like a work of art. It deserves a great frame.”

Having lectured internationally on I.a.Eyeworks' unique approach to design and brand development, Gherardi has also served frequently on arts/design juries and is a longstanding board member of Art Matters, an arts granting foundation. Besides her role on the executive committee of the Eyewear Designers of the Council of Fashion Designers of America (edCFDA), Gherardi is a member of the optical industry's first Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force sponsored by The Vision Council.

Deborah Myres has been in the optical industry for over 30 years, working for both Tura and Marchon in sales and management positions. In 2005, she joined Pacific Northern, a luxury display company, and developed a new line of optical displays for them. Following a brief "retirement," Debbie began her own company in 2018. Her vision was to create affordable luxury eyewear cases in beautiful fashion colors designed for eyewear aficionados—and Visual Inspirations was born.

Debbie has been a member of the Optical Women's Association since 2009, also serving on the board as a co-chair of the Mentoring Committee, newly renamed the Connection and Enrichment Committee. When she first became co-chair of the committee, the *One-Minute Mentor* (now called the *One-Minute Inspiration*) series was already in place, but Debbie was instrumental in starting the Tuesday Talks project, a webinar program that has since morphed into a dynamic podcast program known as *OWA Talks*. She helped launch *OWA Reads* in 2020 and has also assisted with the many other programs under this committee, including *Food for Thought*. Debbie is currently most excited about the *OWA Advisory Groups*, a new program developed by several committee members for the purpose of connecting and educating OWA members through various business disciplines. She remains active in this committee, knowing that so much would not be possible without the hard work of many.

Debbie's interests include a fascination with unique eyewear and sunwear, and she has amassed a collection of both, thus the need for eyewear cases! She is enthusiastic about connecting with people in many different areas of business and loves spending time with family and friends, especially her three grandkids. She enjoys traveling, cooking, reading, and, while quarantining, has become an avid walker! Optimistic for 2021, she hopes to play golf again soon.

Visit www.opticalwomen.com for more information.

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About the Optical Women's Association: Founded in 1997 as a non-profit, the Optical Women's Association is committed to supporting and promoting the professional development of women involved in all facets of the optical industry.

As the vision of the OWA evolves and expands, it maintains the focus of the OWA's founding principles and core mission: to enhance and promote the leadership role of women in the optical industry through networking, education and peer support.