

*New Class Chosen for Their Leadership and Success in Optometry*

From small practices to large practices. From a broad array of services to the specialized. From “tried and true” to the completely unexpected. Despite their differences, 10 remarkable US eye care practices have much in common. They have forged new pathways to success in the face of industry changes and increased competition, finding unique ways to provide exceptional, inspirational patient care.

CooperVision, Inc. recognizes these industry leaders as its 2017 *Best Practices*. The new class of 10 honorees was chosen after a nationwide search for eye care practices that advance the profession through innovation, industry leadership, and patient experience.

This year's honorees are:

- **Amarillo Vision Specialists - Amarillo, Texas**

Soon after beginning her career, Shauna Thornhill, OD, was drawn back to work with the underserved East Amarillo, Texas community in which she grew up. When the opportunity arose in 2010, Dr. Thornhill established her independent practice, [Amarillo Vision Specialists](#), within a Wal-Mart located in the heart of that community, and has since opened a second location. In addition to the above-and-beyond level of care she and her associates provide to patients every day, Dr. Thornhill dedicates her time and resources to make an even greater impact. Each year, the practice organizes a “Free Eye Exam/Toy Drive Day,” at which area residents can receive an eye exam in exchange for a donation to Toys for Tots. Dr. Thornhill also volunteers with the Laura W. Bush Institute of Women's Health, Leadership Amarillo, and Energieyes, and the practice regularly sponsors local sports teams and community programs.

- **Blount County Eye Center - Maryville, Tenn.**

Since its founding in 1965, [Blount County Eye Center](#) has grown to become Blount County's most comprehensive eye care provider, offering the region's largest eyewear selection. Led by Will Tantum, OD, the practice does not advertise; instead, the staff markets the practice by immersing themselves in the community while serving others. In 2014, Blount County Eye Center created a “wear and share” program called Eye Love Guatemala, for which the practice committed to donating a new set of frames to a partner clinic in Guatemala for every pair of frames sold in office. The program was so

successful that it has since expanded to include Eye Love Blount County and Eye Love Haiti (which follow the same concept as the original, with different beneficiaries), and most recently Eye Love First Responders, a special community event that raised funds for the family of a fallen police officer. People see the way Blount County Eye Center supports the community, and they support the practice with their business in return.

- **Caruso Eye Care - Lake Worth, FL.**

[Caruso Eye Care](#) was established in 2005 by Britney Caruso, OD, and is now located inside Target Optical. Dr. Caruso is the sole optometrist at the practice and prides herself on the ability to achieve success with difficult contact lens fittings. In the last year, she has also received her Fellowship in Metabolic and Nutritional Medicine, and is certified with the American Board of Anti-Aging Health Practitioners. She is one of only three optometrists in the nation to have received this prestigious honor, which gives her the ability to provide patient care on a new level, with a holistic and preventative approach to care. Caruso Eye Care strives to “wow” patients so that they are driven to refer friends and family. The practice is also active on social media to engage with patients and prospective patients.

- **Castle Pines Eye Care - Castle Pines, Co.**

At [Castle Pines Eye Care](#), owner Jason Ortman, OD, believes that embracing technology is paramount to running a successful practice. After he purchased the practice 10 years ago, patient charts and accounts were converted to EMR/EHR, thus streamlining office functions and providing a superior patient experience. Since then, the doctors and staff have automated several processes including refraction, OCT and fundus photography transfer, the patient recall system, patient reminders via text and email, and patient satisfaction surveys and reviews. In 2016, Castle Pines Eye Care added live patient scheduling via its website, providing convenience to patients and freeing up staff time to focus on other tasks. The practice also utilizes several programs to provide personalized marketing messages to patients, introduction of new technologies and treatments, and engagement through social media. Additionally, nearly all paper forms have been eliminated in the office with the use of digital signature pads and through EMR integration with outside lab and contact lens distributors.

- **Complete Eye Care of Medina - Medina, Minn.**

Founded in 2008 by Gina Wesley, OD, the doctors and staff at [Complete Eye Care of Medina](#) make decisions by asking themselves two questions: Are we helping this patient or staff member with their ocular health or ocular performance? And are we treating our patients and staff with the utmost service and respect? Whether they are adding new technology or adapting processes, if the answer is yes, they know they are operating in accordance with their goals. The team is also constantly working

to attend to their “critical non-essentials”—i.e., the small details in a patient’s experience that are not detrimental to the outcome of the visit, but help surpass expectations. These include thorough communication and personal touches throughout patients’ experiences at the office.

▪ **Havasu Eye Center - Lake Havasu, Ariz.**

Stuart Adams, OD, began practicing optometry in 1989, and then quickly bought into two rural community practices, Blythe Vision Care and Parker Vision Care. He then opened [Havasu Eye Center](#) in 1990 in Lake Havasu, Ariz. Because there are so few eye care providers in these areas, Havasu Eye Center must provide truly comprehensive eye care to its patients. Beyond eye exams, glasses, contact lenses and specialty contact lenses, ocular disease management, and surgical co-management, the doctors also manage extremely complicated retinal detachments, narrow angle glaucoma, corneal transplants, ocular trauma, and other conditions that are rarely handled solely by optometrists. In 2012, Dr. Adams added Stephanie Woo, OD, to the practice, who is one of the top specialty contact lens fitters in the state of Arizona. In less than five years, she has grown the specialty contact lens portion of the practice to more than 1,000 patients. Havasu Eye Center works with an eye surgeon in Phoenix who flies in to perform surgeries for patients twice per month. This unique situation requires Dr. Adams and Dr. Woo to perform all pre-operative and post-operative care for these surgeries. In small towns where everyone knows each other, Dr. Adams and Dr. Woo are known and appreciated for the exceptional level of care they provide to their patients.

▪ **Lawrenceville Family Eyecare - Lawrenceville, Ga.**

In 2012, Mehdi Kazem, OD, founded [Lawrenceville Family Eyecare](#) and believes that making small changes to the practice every day—and not being afraid to occasionally make big ones—are the secrets to success. Dr. Kazem loves to travel, and anywhere in the world he visits, he makes sure to stop in to a local eye care practice to learn and bring back valuable information to his own team. When patients visit Lawrenceville Family Eyecare, all their senses are treated to a welcoming environment—from the aromas of coffee and vanilla cookies to relaxing music playing softly, from a beautiful peacock color theme to a smiling, friendly staff. Patients are thoroughly examined utilizing the most advanced technology, and receive innovative and compassionate care. When lenses and frames are ordered through the dispensary, patients have the option of receiving their eyewear the next day by their concierge service. A licensed optician will deliver and adjust their glasses at the patient’s home or workplace.

▪ **Little Eyes - Carmel, Ind.**

When a colleague’s 4-year-old son dreamed of “his own optometry office, with little chairs, little equipment, and little glasses,” and suggested it be called “Little Eyes,” Katherine Schuetz, OD, took

note. Three years later, in 2013, Dr. Schuetz made that dream a reality, opening [Little Eyes](#), a practice specializing in primary care pediatric optometry. The practice is unusual in that it does not offer visual therapy, but focuses on the importance of annual well visits. Little Eyes carries unique frame styles and exclusive designers that attract families from all over the state. Dr. Schuetz prescribes only 1-day contact lenses (when possible due to parameters and other limitations), and promotes the importance of fresh contacts each day. The practice offers a “first time fit” program, which is a thorough class educating both parents and patients on the best practices of contact lens wear. In just three years, Dr. Schuetz has grown a novel start-up concept into a thriving practice with patients and parents who love not only the medical care she provides, but the way she cares for the children.

- **Premier Eyecare - Knoxville, Tenn.**

[Premier Eyecare](#) was established in 2002 by Brent Fry, OD, who has since grown the practice to include six full-time employees. The practice provides comprehensive eye care for patients from primary care eye examinations to disease management, from pre-and post-surgical care to occupational vision consulting. Dr. Fry's passion is contact lenses, particularly the hard-to-fit lenses such as hybrid, rigid gas-permeable, and scleral lenses, as well as orthokeratology. He has great success fitting irregular corneas including keratoconus, post-RK, and other corneal irregularities. The Southern culture is geared toward being neighborly, and Premier Eyecare takes that to heart. Being friendly to patients—not just cordial—is a crucial component in providing them the best possible care. The practice is heavily involved in the local community and gives back in various ways. To meet the demands of the growing practice, Premier Eyecare is in the process of building a new office, which will double its footprint and enhance the patient experience.

- **Specialty Eyecare Group - Kirkland, Wash.**

David Kading, OD, and Kristi Kading, OD, founded [Specialty Eyecare Group](#) in 2007 to provide personalized and innovative eye care that enriches people's lives so that they can succeed to their greatest potential. The practice offers patients the best of both worlds—a family eye care clinic that provides comprehensive eye care to people of all ages, with doctors who also specialize for those who need a higher level of care. The practice's four doctors specialize in posterior and anterior segment disease, pediatric eye care, vision therapy services, dry eye, and custom contact lenses. With this broad range of expertise, the doctors at Specialty Eyecare Group can refer in-house for almost any eye condition that does not require surgery. In addition to seeing patients, the doctors perform research and educate students, other doctors, and the public about how to deliver excellence in health care and vision care. The practice is always on the forefront of technology and innovation. A few years ago, the doctors decided that the best way to correct patients' vision with contact lenses was with 1-day lenses. While it is estimated that only 30% of wearers nationwide are fit with that

modality, Specialty Eyecare Group currently has 92.6% of its contact lens patients in 1-day lenses.

“We are so proud to introduce and congratulate our new *Best Practices* honorees,” said Michele Andrews, OD, Senior Director of Professional and Academic Affairs, North America, CooperVision. “Through this program, we have had the privilege of getting to know some of the nation’s most wonderful eye doctors, who have all found success in various ways. We look forward to partnering with them to share their experiences throughout the industry.”

All US optometry practices currently fitting contact lenses were eligible for consideration in Fall 2016. Candidates were evaluated and honorees were selected by a panel of judges including past *Best Practices* honorees, industry experts, and CooperVision leaders. A full list of judges is available at www.eyecarebestpractices.com/program. Evaluation was based on insights and experiences shared about the practices’ innovation, patient experience, and business culture.

“Through the applications and the initial notification process, we have already come to hear some inspiring stories from these honorees, who all dared to dream of establishing their own practices to help people. Regardless of the unique dynamics of each of these practices, the services they provide are changing lives,” said Dr. Andrews. “In today’s business landscape, every practice faces challenges, yet these 10 practices have seized opportunity and forged unique pathways to growth. That is perhaps the greatest takeaway from *Best Practices*—that there is no one way to achieve success, and there is so much to learn from each other.”

In the months to come, the 2017 *Best Practices* will be broadly recognized and presented with opportunities to help educate and elevate the profession through the telling of their stories across the United States. In addition, honorees are invited to attend an educational meeting at CooperVision’s research and development facilities in Pleasanton, Calif.

CooperVision will open 2018 *Best Practices* submissions in the fall. The *Best Practices* program is an annual event, and part of CooperVision’s commitment to showcasing the dedication of eye care practitioners to their patients and communities. To stay up to date on this program and learn more about this year’s honorees, visit www.eyecarebestpractices.com and follow the initiative on [Facebook](#) and on [Twitter](#).