

# EMPOWER

An OWL Magazine



spring 2024

2004-2024

## 20 YEARS OF OWL

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*Compiled by Gaynor Fries*





## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Nivine Woods

# Let's Make Some Waves in 2024

**W**ow, what an incredible time to be part of the OWL family! I am absolutely thrilled to be stepping into the President's role at this pivotal time in OWL's journey and am filled with enthusiasm and excitement for the opportunities that lie ahead of us.

### A tribute to OWL's past

As we hit our big 2-0 milestone this year, I cannot help but think of the trailblazing women who founded this organization. I am committed to honoring the legacy and contributions of these remarkable individuals by continuing to advance OWL's vital mission to promote and increase diversity in leadership. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude for the dedication and tireless efforts of our members, volunteers, and sponsors that helped us reach this milestone.

Coincidentally, this year also marks my own 20th year in the eyecare world, a field that has been my true passion. And on a more personal note, it is my son Rowan's 20th birthday (who was born exactly three weeks to the day after I started my first eyecare job at Alcon – another story for another post). But talk about a triple celebration!

### A vision for OWL's future

As we continue to steer OWL toward new horizons of inclusivity and progress across eyecare, I look forward to realizing that bold vision of "bridging the O's". In 2024, we are spearheading some fabulous initiatives in Optometry plus two signature events that will amplify our

reach and impact with that important audience.

In line with our "World" vision, I am passionate about establishing a meaningful footprint beyond our borders, particularly in Europe. We are eager to leverage OWL as a platform to amplify the diverse voices in eyecare in Europe and to champion their achievements and professional growth.

Most importantly, I am committed to building upon OWL's incredible legacy of impact and positive change within the industry that we all love. It is an amazing journey of innovation, dedication and collaboration, and I am eager to work alongside each of you, leveraging our collective expertise and passion to propel our OWL to new heights of success and influence. I truly envision a future where OWL serves as a beacon of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging, fostering an environment where individuals from all backgrounds are empowered to thrive and lead.

In closing, let's make some serious waves in 2024 and beyond! Your dedication, enthusiasm, and unwavering support are fueling our journey towards a brighter and more inclusive future. Let's make this year the most unforgettable one yet! ●

Cheers to OWL and cheers to you!

Nivine Woods

# 2024 LEADERSHIP — SUMMIT —



# SAVE THE DATE

Plan to join us on

**SEPTEMBER  
26-27, 2024**



**Save the Date for OWL's third annual Leadership Summit.**

We look forward to a Summit packed with leadership development, learning, camaraderie and an organized give-back session.

Find out more on  
[owlsite.org](http://owlsite.org)

**Champion Members are advocates and champions of the OWL Mission, Vision, and Values; they are leaders in their organizations; they actively recruit new OWL members; and they contribute significantly in OWL by attendance, and leadership at Board or Committee levels.**

Learn more | [www.owlsite.org](http://www.owlsite.org)

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2004-2024

# How Has OWL Made an Impact for You?



20 Years of OWL →

## Eliana Rivera Burke

GLOBAL HEAD OF CLIENT ENGAGEMENT  
GREENLIGHT CLINICAL

OWL is the most welcoming and engaging network that I have ever participated in. Truly from the start, a welcome, a “we are so happy you are here”, a how can we help and more. I have enjoyed the interactions and I know I will continue to do so for many more years to come. Happy Anniversary OWL! Cheers.

## Joe Boyd

PRESIDENT & COO  
EXECUTIVE BIOTECH ADVISORS

OWL has helped me in a lot of ways in my career. It's given me the opportunity to network and engage with other leaders and better understand some of the challenges that they face in their own careers and how they've been able to adapt and overcome. It's helped me develop and create some mentors who have been very instrumental in working through different challenges and it's also given me that opportunity to give back by both being a mentor to individuals coming through OWL as well as think about the types of programs and events that other leaders at different points in their career would be interested in learning about.

## Maaza Martin

SENIOR DIRECTOR, MARKETING  
TARSUS PHARMACEUTICALS, INC.

OWL has become a home for me in eye care. It's a place where I come to be nourished and inspired, recognized and supported. Being an OWL Fellow helped me develop a long-standing

relationship with my mentor and my co-fellows to help navigate my career and learn ways to handle the pressures of work and life as a mom and wife. I volunteer with OWL because I am so passionate about its mission to Advance Diversity in Leadership and it takes all of us to make this a reality. I love that the eye care community has embraced OWL, as seen by the large number of people who attend our events and industry partners leaving the OWL event time open in their busy conference schedules. The impact of OWL depends entirely on the willingness and effort of the eye care community to continue working towards our mission. Together we can make a brighter, more diverse, and better future!

## Tu Tran

OPHTHALMOLOGY RESIDENT  
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

I was very lucky and privileged to be an OWL Fellow 2021-2022 and was matched with my mentor, Dr Marjan Farid. She is a titan of cornea! I'm incredibly lucky to get to be her cornea fellow 2024-25 and I hope to become an academic cornea specialist focused on global ophthalmology. The OWL Fellowship gave me the opportunity to connect with Dr Farid, learn from her, and begin my journey to being the best cornea surgeon I can be under her wing. We all stand on the shoulders of giants and I'm so glad to have the opportunity to stand on Dr Farid's shoulders - as well as other incredible people from OWL, like Mrs. Gaynor Fries.

OWL has enabled me to meet many inspiring people from industry. It's such a great organization that brings together

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# 20 YEARS OF OWL

## OWL Celebrates Two Decades of Uniting Ophthalmology's Key Players for Innovation and Patient Care

Since its inception, OWL has stood as a beacon of collaboration and leadership in ophthalmology, bringing together practice administrators, industry leaders, consultants, media professionals, physicians, and more. Over the past two decades, OWL has had the privilege of being led by esteemed individuals who have served as presidents. In celebration of our milestone anniversary, we reached out to OWL's past presidents to gather their thoughts on our journey. With their contributions and the dedication of our members, OWL continues to foster unparalleled networking opportunities and drive advancements in patient care. With a vision to promote diverse leadership and a mission spanning the entire eyecare spectrum, OWL remains the indisputable cornerstone of innovation and collaboration in ophthalmology.

### OWL Presidents

- 2004-2006  
Tamara Church
- 2007  
Jaci M. Lindstrom
- 2008  
Jane Aguirre
- 2009  
Yari Mitchell
- 2010-2011  
Pamela Gleeson
- 2012-2013  
Jan Beiting
- 2014-2015  
Marsha Link, PhD
- 2016-2017  
Heather Ready
- 2018  
Georgette Pascale
- 2019-2020  
Beth A. Marsh
- 2021  
Abigail Markward
- 2022-2023  
Erin Schallhorn Powers
- 2024  
Nivine Woods



### 2004-06 Tamara Church

**CURRENT ROLE:**  
Mental Health Therapist

**CURRENT ORGANIZATION:**  
South Carolina Youth Advocate Program



### 2007 Jaci M. Lindstrom

**CURRENT ROLE:**  
Immediate Past Mayor

**CURRENT ORGANIZATION:**  
City of Minnetonka Beach

**WHAT DO YOU SEE AS YOUR MAIN ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING YOUR PRESIDENCY (HIGHLIGHT 2-3 THINGS YOU'RE MOST PROUD OF)?**

I knew from working in industry that women were often isolated. We weren't supposed to socialize with "the competition" and, as a result, could end up without a strong professional network. When Tamara raised the idea of a networking organization to help women build relationships "across the aisle," it immediately resonated with me. I am most proud of the work I did to put OWL on a solid financial footing, right from the start. Fundraising was my primary role and I was able to ensure that we had the corporate support needed to carry out the activities we planned, and to build some reserves for the future of the organization. As founders, we were all about making OWL succeed. We each had different skill sets and we

worked very collaboratively. It wasn't about ego—we just stepped up and did whatever was needed at the time.

**WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES/DREAMS FOR OWL'S FUTURE?**

I hope that OWL continues to grow and expand and embrace diversity in all its forms. We started as an organization for women's empowerment and equity within ophthalmology. Today, OWL has grown beyond that to encompass racial and ethnic diversity, support of LGBTQ+ colleagues, and outreach and programs outside the U.S. There is always room to do better, so I hope OWL continues to work to be even more inclusive. ●



### 2008 Jane Aguirre

**CURRENT ROLE:**  
2023 retired (and refreshed) from American Academy of Ophthalmology

**CURRENT ORGANIZATION:**  
N/A

**WHAT DO YOU SEE AS YOUR MAIN ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING YOUR PRESIDENCY (HIGHLIGHT 2-3 THINGS YOU'RE MOST PROUD OF)?**

In the early years, we were most interested in spreading the word about the newly-formed OWL, offer solid member benefits, and grow the membership. The primary focus was on the OWL events held at the Academy and ASCRS - they had to be attractive to compete with the many other evening events. I believe we succeeded at both. Membership grew and events were packed.

**WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES/DREAMS FOR OWL'S FUTURE?**

I hope OWL continues to evolve with the profession and truly become an international organization. ●



### 2009 Yari Mitchell

**CURRENT ROLE:**  
President

**CURRENT ORGANIZATION:**  
Y Factor Consulting

**WHAT DO YOU SEE AS YOUR MAIN ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING YOUR PRESIDENCY (HIGHLIGHT 2-3 THINGS YOU'RE MOST PROUD OF)?**

My term as President was very early on when the organization was learning to stand on its own two feet and proudly take its position as a thriving networking organization for Ophthalmology. I saw my role as President as both community builder and architect. During my term as President, I helped to bring structure and support through hiring the very first full-time executive director for OWL. We also pushed boundaries by hosting different types of events with keynote speakers on topics relevant to building leadership, personal brand development and self-empowerment to provide meaningful opportunities for member connection and growth.

**WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES/DREAMS FOR OWL'S FUTURE?**

My hope for OWL is to see it continue to grow both internationally to foster global connections as well as provide leadership training for the next generation of leaders. As an industry we are connected by our shared passion for vision. I see OWL's role as a catalyst for global connections allowing this community to harness that passion into action. ●





2010-11

**Pamela Gleeson**

**CURRENT ROLE**  
*Chief Financial Officer*

**CURRENT ORGANIZATION**  
*De La Salle Institute*

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS YOUR MAIN ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING YOUR PRESIDENCY (HIGHLIGHT 2-3 THINGS YOU'RE MOST PROUD OF)?

Rather than personal accomplishments as president, I'll say what I enjoyed most about my involvement with OWL was being part of an organization with smart, dynamic women supporting one another.

WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES/DREAMS FOR OWL'S FUTURE?

My career path took me outside of ophthalmology, so I am not up-to-date on the latest developments for OWL. I hope that it continues to be supportive of the growth and success of women in the ophthalmic field. ●



2012-13

**Jan Beiting**

**CURRENT ROLE**  
*Principal*

**CURRENT ORGANIZATION**  
*Wordsmith Consulting*

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS YOUR MAIN ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING YOUR PRESIDENCY (HIGHLIGHT 2-3 THINGS YOU'RE MOST PROUD OF)?

I am so proud to have been a founder of OWL. We launched OWL when I was on maternity leave with my first child—and I think it's pretty neat that both of those "babies" are all grown up now. I

was able to help OWL become a full-fledged professional organization with staff. I was an officer and board director when we hired an association management company to help the board implement programs and manage membership. As president, I managed our first dedicated Executive Director, and I'm pleased to say that one of my last acts as a board director was referring Gaynor Fries to the organization in what was initially a part-time role. She is now an amazing Executive Director and I consider that my most lasting legacy!

A major direction during my presidency of OWL was outreach to women physicians. I believed then—and continue to believe—that we succeed best when industry and clinicians work together toward our common goals. As part of this outreach, I spearheaded the "Pathway to the Podium" initiative, working with Women in Ophthalmology (WIO) to educate residents, fellows and young physicians about the steps needed to become a speaker and researcher.

WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES/DREAMS FOR OWL'S FUTURE?

As OWL continues to grow and prosper, I hope that the organization never loses sight of the networking piece of our origin story. Ophthalmology is very much a "people business." It is the power of connections that leads to individual success and ultimately drives our field forward. To the extent that OWL can continue to foster those connections for people who are underrepresented in ophthalmology, it will always fill an important niche. ●



2014-15

**Marsha D. Link, PhD**

**CURRENT ROLE**  
*President*

**CURRENT ORGANIZATION**  
*Link Consulting*

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS YOUR MAIN ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING YOUR PRESIDENCY (HIGHLIGHT 2-3 THINGS YOU'RE MOST PROUD OF)?

During the years I was OWL's President, these are three important accomplishments. The first was the development of an effective and more diverse OWL board to include top leaders in industry, clinicians, and males. This board strength resulted in a productive retreat, where OWL's mission and values were created and the name was changed from Ophthalmic Women Leaders to Ophthalmic World Leaders. Additionally, the seed was planted for initiating a leadership conference, which is now a reality.

The second was the expansion of OWL's presence at meetings outside the US. During major meetings, I was frequently approached by women from other countries asking for help to establish an OWL chapter in their countries. Because of limited resources, OWL was unable to support expansion; however, networking events were started at ESCRS and were well-received.

The third area involved increasing the quality and attendance at OWL's signature events at meetings. Educational and inspirational speakers apropos to OWL's mission were invited to speak.

WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES/DREAMS FOR OWL'S FUTURE?

My hopes for OWL are threefold: Continue to increase diversity, equity and inclusion among all stakeholders in the ophthalmology/optometric spaces.

Be strategic in deciding where and how to use OWL's resources.

Remain the beacon that builds bridges to increase appreciation of all professionals who devote their careers to vision care. ●



2016-17

**Heather Ready**

**CURRENT ROLE**  
*Senior Director,  
Global Market Intelligence*

**CURRENT ORGANIZATION**  
*STAAR Surgical*

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS YOUR MAIN ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING YOUR PRESIDENCY (HIGHLIGHT 2-3 THINGS YOU'RE MOST PROUD OF)?

I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to lead OWL during its transition from its original focus to a diverse and inclusive organization. Following a series of strategic board retreats and sessions, the team planned the organization that you see today. We set the course to restructure the organization, explore regional chapters, deliver leadership summit events, and expand outreach to events at ESCRS and in Optometry. It has taken time to bring these all to reality but today they demonstrate OWL's commitment to advancing diversity in leadership.

WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES/DREAMS FOR OWL'S FUTURE?

OWL will continue to grow and succeed by delivering mentorship, networking and partnership opportunities along with meaningful leadership skill development to its members and their organizations. The challenge is to stay true to its mission to bring together a diverse group of individuals from across eye-care. OWL has created a "safe space" for members to learn new skills and expand their ability to grow professionally. My hope is that we will always extend an open hand to those new to eye-care and invite them to join with us to advance our profession. ●



2018

**Georgette Pascale**

**CURRENT ROLE**  
*Serial entrepreneur*

**CURRENT ORGANIZATION**  
*G.*

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS YOUR MAIN ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING YOUR PRESIDENCY (HIGHLIGHT 2-3 THINGS YOU'RE MOST PROUD OF)?

We were still transitioning from 'women' to 'world' and it was so invigorating, and challenging, to bring new ideas and messages to light. It meant we were really launching into something so much larger and expansive. I was honored to have a small part in it! I was able to lend my unique energy at a time in any industry when humor and authenticity weren't always accepted. OWL always, always, always accepted (and encouraged) me to be myself fully and continually listened to my varied ideas. Feeling a part of something bigger was always so special! I am so proud to have brought new people to the board and become members. It was truly the most diverse board I've ever been a part of!

WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES/DREAMS FOR OWL'S FUTURE?

That it continues to disrupt, inspire and grow; yet I know it will! ●



# How Has OWL Made an Impact for You?

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brilliant minds to advance ophthalmic care. This is the mentality I strive to have as I approach my own patients and capacity building/education in East Africa and Southeast Asia, where I hope to do most of my collaborative global ophthalmology work.

**Patricia Buehler, MD**

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER & FOUNDER, OSHERU &

**Cynthia Matossian, MD**

FOUNDER, MATOSSIAN EYE ASSOCIATES

Dr. Matossian and Dr. Buehler were connected through OWL's Wise Wings program, aimed to assist new members in becoming confident and active participants in the OWL community. As part of the program, an experienced OWL member (Dr. Matossian) was invited to become a "Wise Owl" where they take a new member under their wing. Dr. Matossian and Dr. Buehler were introduced and met virtually prior to ASCRS and then met in person for the first time there.

Dr. Buehler says that being a part of the Wise Wings program provided her with an opportunity to quickly expand her network of colleagues and having Dr. Matossian introduce her to key opinion leaders in ophthalmology, and having them guide her company, Osheru, with product design and a pilot study, was invaluable. Dr. Buehler said, "Making connections is key, and this program really accelerates that. OWL couldn't have matched me with a better person. It has been a great privilege to get to know Dr. Matossian, who is such a positive influence on women in ophthalmology. Even after this program, we'll continue to stay friends."

Dr. Matossian stated that this program has created a new lifelong relationship. "Interestingly, both of us are not at the beginning of our careers, but we have run successful practices and have become entrepreneurs on the side." Dr. Matossian is also an entrepreneur who founded GPOphtho, a purchasing group to make it easier for ophthalmologists to run their practices. ●



## 2019-20

**Beth A. Marsh**

**CURRENT ROLE**

*Vice President, US Sales & Marketing - Ophthalmology*

**CURRENT ORGANIZATION**

*Apellis Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS YOUR MAIN ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING YOUR PRESIDENCY (HIGHLIGHT 2-3 THINGS YOU'RE MOST PROUD OF)?

Continuing the expansion of membership and member engagement, almost 1000 strong through new chapters and corporate memberships. Allowing us to amplify a message of advocacy for more diversity in our industry.

Initiation of the OWL Fellows Program – a new twist on mentorship, establishing yearly classes and matched fellows with the amazing established and successful OWL members who willingly and enthusiastically give their time to the fellows. Plus the added bonus of a new 'class community' for each fellow.

Launching the Ophthalmic Business and Leadership Trends Survey to elucidate the current opinions and business practices of professionals across the ophthalmic industry.

Leading OWL through COVID-19 through keeping our members connected with the Doctors, Industry & COVID-19 – Caring and Collaboration Series which brought together 100s of clinicians and industry to share how the rapidly changing situation with the pandemic impacted the ophthalmic world and what we truly needed from each other during those challenging times.

WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES/DREAMS FOR OWL'S FUTURE?

That OWL continues to be THE organization where members check

their individual business card at the door and come together as a community through professional and personal development to promote and develop diverse leadership. ●



## 2021

**Abigail Markward**

**CURRENT ROLE**

*Executive Director – ASCRS Foundation*

**CURRENT ORGANIZATION**

*American Society of Cataract & Refractive Surgery*

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS YOUR MAIN ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING YOUR PRESIDENCY (HIGHLIGHT 2-3 THINGS YOU'RE MOST PROUD OF)?

Refocused programming into digital format during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and took an industry leadership position to focus content on diversity, inclusion and belonging while maintaining focus in leadership skills and training.

Although rescheduled to early 2022, part of a collaborative team that developed and executed the first OWL Leadership Summit.

Strengthened and relaunched OWL social media platforms to increase awareness and engagement of OWL events, programs and our mission / vision.

New OWL logo development and launch.

WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES/DREAMS FOR OWL'S FUTURE?

My hope for the future of OWL is to support the bridging of the O's between ophthalmology and optometry while maintaining our industry leading position of providing exceptional networking and educational opportunities for all ophthalmic professionals. ●



## 2022-2023

**Erin Schallhorn Powers**

**CURRENT ROLE**

*Vice President, US Sales & Marketing*

**CURRENT ORGANIZATION**

*Johnson & Johnson Surgical Vision*

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS YOUR MAIN ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING YOUR PRESIDENCY (HIGHLIGHT 2-3 THINGS YOU'RE MOST PROUD OF)?

Gosh, this is a hard one. Stewarding such an impactful and meaningful organization in and of itself was a major honor – but I'd have to say a few things stand out:

Getting our European and Optometry Committees up and running was phenomenal. To bring OWL to these incredible groups of eyecare professionals was exceptionally rewarding. And it was simply amazing to watch how quickly our initiatives grew – demonstrating that we are truly meeting an unmet need.

For me, establishing an annual feedback/review session for our Executive Director, Gaynor Fries, was very significant. Gaynor is such an asset to OWL, and making sure that we are giving her growth opportunities and providing her meaningful feedback, both ways, to ensure her professional development and satisfaction was critical for our organization.

WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES/DREAMS FOR OWL'S FUTURE?

I hope we continue to be the safe space for everyone – the OWL environment is still incredibly important in my life. OWL events are inclusive and nonhierarchical. We leave our 'corporate brand' at the door, and our focus is on how to help people become the best version of themselves. I credit OWL for much of the success and overall FUN I have in eye-

care – members (I say members – but they are really friends!) both support and push me to achieve my best. And I hope that we always retain this intangible, yet highly impactful, value.

I hope we continue to become truly global, in countries and continents that would benefit from our mission – and throughout all occupations that touch eyecare. Together, we will do GREAT things for patients, professionals, and innovation worldwide. ●



## 2024

**Nivine Woods**

**CURRENT ROLE**

*EVP & Chief Marketing Officer*

**CURRENT ORGANIZATION**

*EyeCare Partners*

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS YOUR MAIN ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING YOUR PRESIDENCY (HIGHLIGHT 2-3 THINGS YOU'RE MOST PROUD OF)?

I'd like to think the best is yet to come... I am proud of expansion of our efforts in Optometry (lovingly called Bridging the O's!) which allowed us to engage with a wider key audience. Secondly, I'm excited that we developed new partnerships and collaborations with the LGBTQ+ communities with programs like "Eyes on Inclusion" that have strengthened our mission and allowed us to reach new heights in our advocacy for diversity.

WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES/DREAMS FOR OWL'S FUTURE?

I'm thrilled about the strides we have made in promoting inclusion and belonging in our ophthalmic world and I'm especially proud of all the leadership roles that OWL helped create for individuals from diverse backgrounds like myself. I envision OWL becoming

a leading force in promoting diversity in eyecare in every corner of the planet! I see us expanding our reach to new geographies and demographics, and striving to make our programs and initiatives become even more effective in empowering individuals from all walks of life to pursue bigger leadership roles. Additionally, I dream of establishing sustainable funding sources from our partners that will ensure long-term success and sustainability of OWL's mission. ●



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While content is produced independently by OWL, our programs are supported by industry partners. Their support means that OWL is able to provide an expanding menu of programs in the spirit of its mission, vision, and values of advancing diversity in leadership. We thank our financial supporters for their leadership and for the critical role they play in our organization.

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