



Dawn Friedkin, President

Classic Optical, Youngstown, OH

“ Dawn is a true leader in her field – she has set a shining example of how to lead with integrity and compassion from the management of her team, to her relationships with partners like us, to her work to serve others in need around the world. There is no one more deserving of this recognition. At Warby Parker, we strive to treat others with empathy and purpose. Dawn lives this philosophy everyday, which has made working together such a pleasure over the years. ”

– Neil Blumenthal, co-founder and co-CEO of Warby Parker

BACKGROUND: Dawn Friedkin’s career in optical dates back to 1977, traying up frames and lenses during summer breaks from school. She did that throughout most of high school but then college, law school and a job in government and public policy took her away from the lab. She returned to the lab business about 20 years after her first lab job to help out at Classic Optical after a change in the lab management software system caused an IT “disaster.”

“It was that strange twist of fate that brought me home and it has been a wild ride with a fantastic team ever since,” Friedkin said, adding the lab has grown from 50 associates producing about 300 jobs per day to 250 employees processing more than 5,000 each day. Last year, after a record 2017 in which the lab produced 1 million pairs of eyeglasses, Classic Optical not only exceeded 1 million pairs but also embarked on a building addition and facility reengineering to increase capacity. “When it’s complete, we will have a facility that can manufacture 10,000 pairs of prescription glasses a day,” she said.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: In addition to her 12-year-old son, Friedkin cites her best achievements as providing employment to more than 250 to support their families in the community in which she grew up, plus the lab’s commitment to providing eyeglasses to those in need. “We’ve provided eyeglasses at no cost to more than 75,000 school children a year in 16 states and more than 2,500 schools, including my own elementary school,” Friedkin said.

TEACHABLE MISTAKE: After losing a government contract that accounted for 25% of the lab’s business, Friedkin said she learned the importance of diversification. “I realized we couldn’t take the business we had for granted. We always had to be prepared for change and disruption and had to focus on ensuring we bring added value to

customers,” she said. “This attitude made me open to different types of work that we had not traditionally done and also motivated me to create new opportunities for Classic.”

BEST INVESTMENTS: Classic Optical has made significant investments in technology and automation, including the purchase of nine MEI Bisphera machines, but to Friedkin, it would be worth nothing without investing in people. “From senior leadership to our employees working on the production line, we focus on engagement through continuous training, mentorship and professional growth.”

ADVICE: “Know yourself and hire talent to complement your strengths and compensate for your challenges,” Friedkin said. “Never stop learning and don’t be afraid to learn something new or to make mistakes, but don’t make the same mistake twice.”

