

Harry Rosen - we salute you for your efforts on our behalf.



As the proverbial saying goes... news travels fast via the optometric grape vine. Most members will therefore know by now that Harry , our CEO, is to retire from the Association after serving us well for over 12 years. What members may not know is that he immersed himself in the Association from the beginning and literally devoted his life to the Association, more often than not at the expense of his own health and family. Holidays were a foreign concept and the words "after hours" did not apply as he endeavoured to see that the Association lived up to it's members expectations.

His term started with a bang - The dawn of a new democracy, transformation politics, the introduction of managed care principals, FDA approval of Lasik, commercial optometry and the introduction of diagnostic legislation were just the beginning.

He adopted the Tom Peters strategy of "you cannot drive into the future using a rear view mirror" and set out to change the image of the Association with the theme "A year of change - from Good to Great". Both the staff and directorate were always encouraged to live up to this expectation.

Harry brought his expertise to the Association from a pharmaceutical background of marketing and often asked : "what is the difference between a squirrel and a rat?" The

Association as the gateway to eye-care in South Africa and actively networked with all our stakeholders. To this end he ran numerous workshops for community representatives, directors and staff to develop advocates and ambassadors for the Association. Focus groups, national tours and medical aid forums to inform our membership and all stakeholders were constantly run.

If anyone wanted to know what was happening in the world of optometry the answer was to contact Harry Rosen. Wholesalers, Associations, international contacts and members were constantly in touch. Harry soon needed to take on the role of fireman putting out fires as situations flamed up and has a helmet and fire engine that were presented to him for his "bravery" in this regard. It must be said that he often used his keen sense of humour and sharp wit to diffuse situations, while maintaining an impartial, fair, diplomatic stance and in such situations. Many optometrists will attest to the fact that Harry was asked to intervene in situations of staff theft, conflict resolution, personal situations and the like.

Life as a CEO cannot be easy when the equation includes optometrist in it. The Association, during his term of office, faced many interesting challenges as optometry still tries to evolve from shoptometry to doctometry in a fledgling democracy. Take one optometrist with a commercial bias and another who believes that to be wrong and try to get them to "see eye to eye", then extrapolate the equation to include the whole membership, with additional conflicting views and you begin to understand why a CEO has grey hair. However, he accepted criticism (not easily though) and endeavoured to work on the positive issues that could deliver results. Has the Association succeeded in its endeavours? Maybe not all of them, but it certainly was not without absolute dedication and commitment on Harry's part to attempt to resolve issues.

Under Harry's leadership, many initiatives were developed that include advocacy, the optometric ambassador, a patron, the transformation committee, the Vision in Sight Trust and Bonang clinics. He actively assisted at the World Council of Optometry, The African Council of Optometry, The Ocularist's society and the University of the North while he gave ethics lectures to the students at the University of Johannesburg. The multitude of meetings organised by the various portfolios meant that he had to be at the office many evenings during the week and even weekends and yet he did so without complaining. We could not even keep him away from the office when seriously ill after a serious case of septicaemia nearly cost him his life. No, Harry served tirelessly for our members and achieved a great deal on our behalf for which we all ought to be grateful. Harry made life-long friends in our industry and became one of us. He is highly regarded both in South Africa and internationally for his endeavours.

The time has come for him to move on and as with everything, allow new blood and fresh ideas to take over and build on the legacy he leaves behind in a quest to take the Association great to even greater. We all wish him well in the new venture, that is optometry related, and trust that he will enjoy the new challenge.

Thanks Harry.

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