



Kashin Brings Passion to Opticianry

By Paddy Kamen

After 35 Years He Still Loves it; Politics and All

When 18-year-old Lorne Kashin wasn't sure what he was going to do with the rest of his life, he found a lab job through a friend in the optical industry and quickly became "hooked" on the business. The Ryerson College opticianry program was his next step, studying one night a week for two years. Kashin was no stranger to retail, as his father, Allan Kashin, was a pharmacist who owned a chain of drugstores in Toronto. "My father and I recognized the retail potential in the north Toronto area of Thornhill and so with his help I opened The Eyeglass Factory in 1977. My dad's skills, particularly when it came to merchandising and advertising were just amazing."

Like any independent retail business person, Kashin has seen a lot of changes in the last 35 years. "There have been many ups and downs but I've always distinguished myself by giving the best service and problem solving for my customers."

His customers aren't the only ones who gained from Kashin's gift for solving problems. When he became president of the Ontario Optician's Association (OOA) in 2001, and then president of the Optician's Association of Canada in 2004, the entire opticianry profession was poised to reap big rewards from his dynamic combination of dedication and skill.

Working Well With Others

Cathi Mietkiewicz, president of the College of Opticians of Ontario, came into her job around the same time that Kashin was elected to his.

"We met very early on and acknowledged that our two organizations did not historically like each other very much," explains Mietkiewicz. "We said, 'Do you think we have to continue to be adversaries, or can we get along?' Lorne and I started off on the right foot and have had good working relationship ever since, with respect for the fact that we have different mandates."

Kashin says his excellent working relationship with Mietkiewicz has been instrumental in creating new awareness about the concerns of the profession with politicians and civil servants at the Ministry of Health. "The Minister of Health came and spoke at our last Inside Optics conference and trade show in April and he mentioned and applauded the fact that our association and professional college are working well together. To give citizens the best health care we have to nurture and maintain these positive relationships within the profession."

Kashin announced his retirement from the presidency of the OOA, after six years of service, at last April's Inside Optics. He was succeeded by Ali Baddredine. Kashin is still president of the national association, with another year to go in his current term.

As the executive director of the OOA, Laura Mason worked closely with Kashin.

"Lorne was selfless when it came to association work. He was the first president to really solidify and strengthen positive relationships between the college, the national association and the OOA. He was the first president to go out and campaign members of the legislature. During his term our membership and revenues increased. He was very positive and really contributed to our growth and to keeping in touch with our members. He was just great to work with."

Determination and Willingness to Learn

Kashin has learned the importance of keeping opticianry issues in front of political decisions makers on an ongoing basis. "You have to have your face and voice at Queen's Park every day. You have to go to MPP meetings and

fundraisers and let them know about your concerns. That's the only way to move our agenda forward," he explains.

Mary Field, chief administrative officer and national affairs coordinator for the OAC, says Kashin brought the same winning attitude to the national scene that worked so well in Ontario.

"Lorne put his heart and soul into promoting Ontario opticians and brought that same level of energy and interest when he became president of the OAC," Field observes. "He acknowledged that he was a novice when it came to running a national organization, but he's a collaborative person so gets up to speed quickly. He's also the kind of person who likes people and wants to cause accord rather than generate discord. That's a tough line to follow when one is involved in heated politics and he has succeeded admirably."

Field also points out that Kashin can be justly proud of the OOA's annual Inside Optics conference. "He turned that into a really successful event. They get a lot of opticians out and provide quality, stimulating education. He knows that an association is nothing if it doesn't take the pulse of its members and talk to them and listen and make plans around the ambitions and goals of the members."

Mietkiewicz agrees. "Inside Optics is just one example of the way Lorne has raised the profile of the profession and the pride he takes in being an optician. He raises everyone's pride in their profession and in that alone he has been a tremendous asset to all opticians. "

Organizing and political work doesn't happen without a lot of time and effort. Mietkiewicz points out that Kashin is often working on association business late into the evening when most people are getting ready for bed. Kashin acknowledges that when he was president of the OOA, he was often squeezing association work into small gaps in the day between clients, and that it impacted his family life. Married for almost thirty years to Diane, Kashin is a hands on dad to his three children: Jeremy, Ben and Dory, all now in their twenties. Now that he has retired as president of the OOA (although he remains a director) and is *only* the president of the national body, he is disciplining himself to devote more consistent time to his business and more time to de-stress with his family.

"Old habits are hard to break," he explains. "I'm trying to focus on my business and now I only work on association business a few hours a week, as opposed to living it every day. But I have a feeling for it and want to be involved as much as I can."

Encouraging others to become involved in association work is an ongoing passion for Kashin. "Some people don't realize that we have to stick together as a group, show a united front and support our associations. This is no time for whining and complaining. By working together, we can increase our scope of practice and keep the profession vital."

Lightness of Being

But hard work for Kashin and his colleagues is always infused with laughter. It's clear they've had many good times together. Mietkiewicz expresses it well: "There was always a lot of laughter even when talking about serious things and getting serious work done. I know Lorne has put in a lot of time and taken a lot of time away from his practice, as have many others, and you can't do that consistently and well without getting some enjoyment out of it. We spent a lot of time together and we had so much fun."

Meeting opticians coast to coast has been a joy for Kashin. "We do have a lot of laughs and work really well together, with our volunteers putting in an effort as if they were getting paid, and our staff working with the same dedication as the volunteers. We've had a lot of fun socializing and we've formed great friendships. My heart is truly in this profession and I love it."

