

One Step Forward

BY DR LEN KOULTON, CAO PAST-PRESIDENT



Betty Lou and Dr. Len Koulton give a toast. "It's time to celebrate, and it's time to say good bye." *Thanks for the memories.*

I am very pleased to report on the milestones, achievements and commitments of CAO over the past two years. In spite of the economic turbulence of an unprecedented global financial disruption we continue to move forward, beyond our 100 year history. Not only has optometry survived, but we are transformed and poised as the model for eye care efficiency for the next 100 years. I believe the future of primary eye care in Canada is in our hands!

Life is a bountiful of choices. There is no single answer to our recent success; rather our success has proven the wisdom of our strategies and ever improving internal and external relationships with government, other health care professionals and the public.

Three years ago CAO Council invented a three year, five point strategic plan to help protect and advance the profession. We were intent in our dedication and perseverance in delivering on these commitments as our GPS to guide our actions and allocation of resources, which has proven to be valid and relative even in today's ever changing economic and political times. Our strategic plan concentrated on improved govern-

ment, inter-professional and public relations, elevating the standard of care, and investing in our infrastructure to support our goals. I would like to extend a sincere thank you and congratulations to our many committees working in parallel and in synergy with each other to implement and help accomplish most of our goals. Some of our most notable highlights and achievements during the past two years have been:

Turning the corner on achieving recognition, trust and status for optometry. Canadian Optometry in 2009 has arrived – I believe we are now truly accepted as an integral player in the eye health care of Canadians. Driven by our commitment to doing what's best for our patients, we can now go forward to the next level of integration, specialization and leadership in vision care.

An 80.2 % successful implementation of the strategic plan, regularly monitored on an award-winning grid template. Some priority highlights included improved government relations resulting in: achieving legislative approval for the restricted sale of cosmetic contact lenses; helping achieve enabling TPA legislation right across Canada; and increased government payment coverage for eye examinations, including emergency care in many provinces.

Successfully implementing a new NPEC public relations campaign – *Your optometrist knows your eye inside and out* – which reinforces our brand of preventive eye health care.

Introducing the Children's Vision Initiative eye care program to six provinces and following up on our belief in the policy that every child should have a comprehensive eye examination prior to entering school.

Sharing in the celebration of the successful expansion at the School of Optometry, University of Waterloo and the renovation at the School of Optometry, University of Montreal.

Improving inter- and intra-professional relationships and collaborations with CNIB, CDC, FME, COS, NCVH, AOA as well as a conscientious effort

to improve student relations – offering free membership, Facebook communication and initiating the White Coat Ceremony for our Canadian optometry schools – a strengthening of our pipeline.

Emphasizing and supporting the clear, constant and complimentary Communication is the Key theme as an important component for our success as the thread that binds our thoughts and actions. I believe that an informed membership makes us a stronger more unified association, and an informed public will help create that awareness which will elevate our status and recognition of who we are and what we do.

Effective and efficient governance. Improved in-office structural and operational activities have been implemented within budget – investing in the tools to support and the platforms to build our future growth and sustainability. We also adopted a new CAO Councillor Code of Conduct to help guide the professionalism of our actions.

Investing in two major historic vision care studies – 1). Canadian Uncorrected Refractive Error Study (CURES), and 2). The Recommended Frequency of Eye Examinations for the Canadian Population; as well as participating in the Government sponsored NCVH study – to determine the vision care status of Canadians.

Introducing a new member benefit Centennial frame program as another source of non dues revenue.

Participating in Centennial celebrations in Manitoba and Ontario as provinces begin to celebrate the 100th anniversary of their official legislative status in Canada.

Achieving the official legislative suffix designation, CCOA – Certified Canadian Optometric Assistant for our devoted optometric assistants

In closing, it is a pleasure to recognize and extend a sincere thank you and congratulations to CAO Council, our leaders (presidents, vice presidents, executive directors, committee chairs), my Regina Eye Centre colleagues, Executive Director Glenn and the CAO Staff for your professionalism, the great team effort, for all of your respect, support, dedication and friendship during the past two years. As you read through the reports on our many and varied committees I sincerely hope that many more colleagues will become inspired to get involved to help continue to advance the

profession. I believe we have been successful because we focus on solutions, because that's how life works. We strategize and execute. We engage in change. We embrace new technologies. We have a history of talent, and being socially responsible. We build alliances, collaborations and social networks. We have a sound but flexible business model. We continue to be financially stable and build a competitive advantage through strategies, execution, sustainability and succession. But, are we there yet? No. There's plenty of heavy lifting ahead. Although we have achieved a 76% satisfaction rating from the membership and an 82.2 % success rate in achieving our stated goals we will need more member involvement and commitment if we are going to get to where we want to be.

I believe optometry is a great profession with a great future, if, since we are a small group, every member gets involved. We are a small craft in a large ocean. We will need everyone's help, faith, commitment and determination if we are going to successfully navigate through whatever stormy seas lie ahead. Success depends on all of us working together. We must all take responsibility for our future. We have a keen eye and a vision for the future. We have a strong strategic position and a great brand, a strong character and a dedicated practitioner workforce. With vision, innovation and action we will succeed. I am optimistic about the future and confident that our balanced strategies will take us to the next level of vision care for Canadians. And, rest assured, CAO is there to help you!

I am very grateful and extremely proud for the opportunity and the honour to have served as your president for the past two years and helped steer the profession that I love. Thank you all for the many memories and mementos of our journey – they are precious pictures on our refrigerator door. It truly cranks me up to be a part of the new optometry and to think that we at CAO have taken the profession one small step forward.

Betty Lou and I and our family extend our profound thanks to all!

Dr. Len Koltun CAO President 2007 - 2009