

# 1987 CAO President's Award Presentation

**A**mong the many highlights of the 1987 Biennial Congress, "Merry-Tyme Mingle" last August in Saint John, New Brunswick was the presentation of the CAO President's Award to Dr. Irving Baker, Registrar of the College of Optometrists of Ontario.

The presentation came at the conclusion of formalities held in conjunction with the President's Banquet on Friday, August 7. Dr. Bruce Rosner, immediate past President of CAO, introduced Dr. Baker, who was greeted with a lengthy standing ovation. In accepting the award, Dr. Baker delivered a few "philosophically" thoughtful remarks, after which CAO President Dr. Scott Brisbin read the inscription on the Award.

Following are the highlights from Dr. Rosner's, Dr. Baker's and Dr. Brisbin's remarks made at the 1987 President's Award presentation.

## Dr. Bruce Rosner Introduces Dr. Baker

"In researching Irving's contributions to the profession, it wasn't long before I realized that I was writing a book. (Don't worry. You're not getting the book tonight!)"

"I find as I'm getting older, however, history becomes more interesting and certainly the curriculum vitae which Irving sent me would make an excellent Index for this book.

"It is titled, *The Irving Baker Story*.

"What struck me at the start are just how many major areas of dedication there are in which he has been involved. Any one of these "roads" that he has travelled would have been a significant career path for any individual man. However, with Irving, we have the 401 — a superhighway.

"To give you a little idea of what I'm talking about, he has been actively playing major roles in our profession in a continuous, unbroken string for forty years. Forty years! (I've been involved in

organized Optometry for twenty years and at the thought of forty, all I can say is 'whew!')

"The story, however, still goes on. He is truly an amazing man.

"To start with, he graduated in 1943 from the College of Optometry of Ontario. Upon graduation, he was awarded the George M. Bosnell Medal for Clinical Optometry and this is where one of his many special interests — in Applied Optics — started.

"And he's carried these interests throughout his many years in service to this profession. In fact, and I'm not sure if many of you realize this, he practised his profession first throughout the Maritimes, as a District Consultant in the Medical Corps during the Second World War.

"He then entered private practice in 1946 in Toronto and, in 1947, we see the beginnings of "Irving Baker the faculty member".

"He has been a clinician — Clinical Director at the College.

"He was appointed Adjunct Professor at the University of Waterloo in 1967 and, another interesting fact, still holds that position today. The only faculty person to be at the School longer than him is Professor Emeritus Ted Fisher.

"Certainly his career may have been complete with this. But I'm just getting warmed up!

"He was the youngest and longest lasting President of the Ontario Association of Optometrists. (I believe at the age of 28. That's quite an achievement.)

"But still not enough!

"The Association man was off and running. He then spent six years on the Council of CAO, being at the first CAO Congress in Montréal in 1954. He has attended, in fact, 17 of the 20 Congresses that CAO has held over the years.

"At the time, prepaid health care in Canada didn't include Optometry and Irving was a major force in positioning the profession finally to overcome this

but, at the same time, he was a major contributor to establishing Optometry at the University of Waterloo.

"(In fact, that's why he missed one of those Congresses and here's one of many dramatic moments I would include if I were to write the book. He was the one that had to stay behind, waiting for that phone call in 1967, which would confirm the decision to accept Optometry at the University of Waterloo. He's the one that got the call and phoned the President at the Congress that year in Montréal to announce that Optometry was in at Waterloo.

"What about Irving Baker the Registrar — the Registrar of registrars?

"That began in 1949. He was with the Board of Examiners of Ontario, then the Board of Directors of the College from 1961 to 1967 and then became Registrar of the College, a position which he still holds.

"He became a Fellow of the Academy and in 1949 was on their Editorial Council. He was also Head of their Section on Public Health and Occupational Vision.

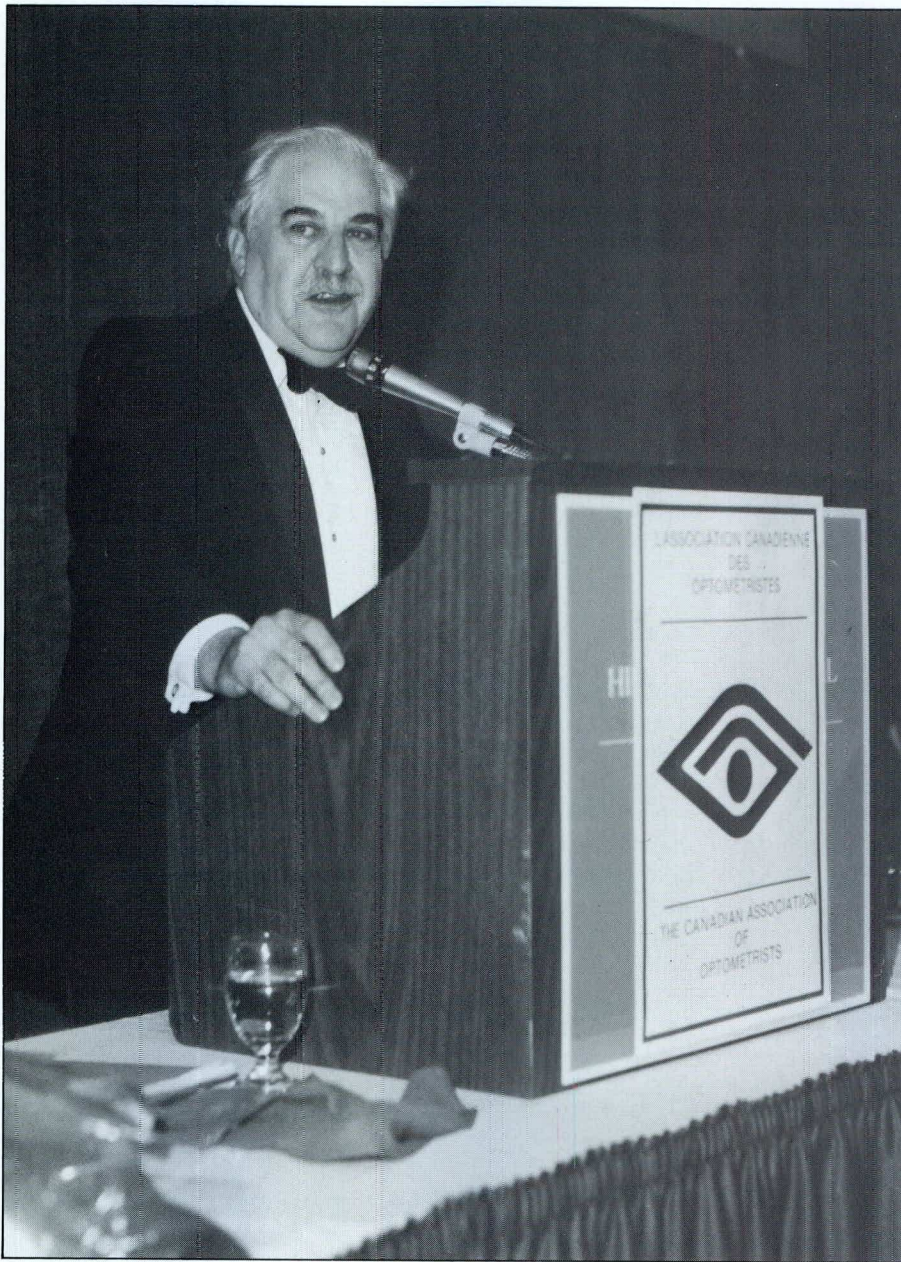
"He was made a member Emeritus in 1985, the year after he received the Ontario Association of Optometrists' James Cobean Memorial Award.

"With such a background, it is not surprising to see his name appearing as author or co-author of numerous papers and submissions, for example, to the Commission on Health and the Healing Arts, which eventually led to one of this country's landmark pieces of health legislation, the Ontario Health Disciplines Act of 1974. Today, he continues to author recent submissions to the province's ongoing Health Professions Review.

"He had then, and has now, one of the best optometric minds in the country. And every provincial Association has called him time and time again for his advice.

"I remember many times during my tenure as President and on the Council of the Manitoba Optometric Society when





Dr. Irving Baker

the word would go out — ‘Call Irving!’ That’s all that had to be said. We needed an opinion; we needed some advice; the wording wasn’t right; we needed that special insight. ‘Call Irving!’

“And the advice was always there. But more than being just an advisor, Irving has an uncanny ability to identify future trends. Put this together with his insistence on excellence, the right word, the right answer and this is what helped produce the many far-reaching advances in this profession across the country and especially in Ontario. No matter how hot the discussions and negotiations got, his remained the coolest head in Canadian Optometry.

“But, through all this, Irving Baker is a strong family man with his wife of

nearly forty years, Helen, and their two sons, Mitchell and Jim. In fact, I don’t know how Helen has survived those forty years, those many years. (I said I wouldn’t say this, Helen.) But she told me the other day when I was talking to her that Irving is an extremely disciplined man, except of course, when it comes to time and, during these long, long meetings, she knew that everything was alright so long as she didn’t get a ransom note.

“I don’t know if she’s ever told you that, Irving.

“The last interesting little tidbit, by the way, is that, back in the early years of the CAO, when funds were rather scarce, the Baker household was the place where many of our CAO Councillors had dinner during their meetings. And, while I wasn’t there personally, it’s nice to be able to finally return the favour and host the

two of you tonight as our guests.

“Well, I’m exhausted, just from having reviewed *The Irving Baker Story*.”

### Dr. Baker’s Acceptance of the 1987 CAO President’s Award

“This time of the night is no time to become terribly serious, nor to talk for any great length of time.

“As a matter of fact, you heard some marvelous things about my wife, but I think that it went far beyond the call of duty this afternoon when she sprained her ankle. (It was this afternoon, you see, that I had set aside to write my speech and I never got around to it.) That’s rather typical of her contribution, by the way.

“Tonight is full of memories for me because it was some forty-four years ago, just about this time of the year, that I got off a train in Halifax after riding on it for some two days and two nights.

“It was two o’clock in the morning and I arrived at the Halifax station which was rather empty — this was 1943. It was raining, and ‘fogging’, just what I had to get used to and, as I looked around, carrying all my kit, plus an ophthalmoscope and a retinoscope, I found one person in the station. He looked at me and I looked at him and I asked where the military police were because I thought maybe they knew where I should be going — because I sure didn’t. He asked me who I was, and what I was, and my very first Eastern Canada greeting was, “By God, not another Upper Canadian.”

“This used to be the ‘Maritime’ provinces; they’re now the ‘Atlantic’ provinces and I would wager that in the some three years that I served here that I’ve probably seen as much or more of all the places you do not want to see in the Atlantic provinces. That was my job — to go everywhere where nobody else wanted to go.

“(Incidentally, the music tonight was very reminiscent of that time and I’m not sure that it was put on for me and my wife, but we appreciated it, nevertheless).

“People who do the kinds of things I’ve done in four decades are not terribly unusual. In part, we are probably opportunist in the sense that opportunities arise and one takes them. But I must say to you that I’ve probably gained more than I’ve given.

“I see a lot of people here who I recognize from when you were students. The only difference is that you still look a lot



younger all the time and many of you I don't recognize at all, likely because, as students, I never found you dressed this well.

"It's been a great time; great, because it's been challenging. It's had its rewards; it's had its frustrations but not very many defeats, because you just don't let frustrations and losses ever amount to a defeat.

"I think I can now talk a little philosophically and identify — or try to identify — where the challenges are going to be for you in the next forty years.

"I was impressed with the CAO meeting today and particularly by the speakers who represented the American Optometric Association and the IOOL. Listening to them, you can come up with a relatively clear picture of the direction in which not only Optometry is going, but in which health care services are likely to go in the next little while.

"I would make a point to you, however. Optometry suffers from a little bit of paranoia, sometimes a whole lot of paranoia. I say that in this context: that we react sometimes as though what is happening to us never happened to anyone else or is happening to anyone else. And that's simply not a fact.

"I've had the opportunity of working with the other four, senior professions, Medicine, Nursing, Dentistry and Pharmacy, for a good number of years now in the province of Ontario and we have a bit of a club, Registrars do. The thing that I learned mostly through those meetings has been that almost all of those groups have problems similar to those of optometrists.

"And I say this because if we continue to suffer feelings that we're persecuted or singled out, I think that our reactions, instead of being pro-active, will be reactive, and that's deadly.

"It's deadly because it stifles dialogue.

"The challenge that faces Optometry and the other health professions I think is pretty clear, at least in Canada.

"We have gone through a phase of evolution from the time we began in the early 1900's in this country, where the only protection that the public had was the licensing process and the law of negligence — which doesn't work. More recently, we've seen an update of licensing and some accountability. But we also see another trend occurring now and accountability without quality assurance just doesn't fly anymore.

"So it seems to me that the challenge lies in several areas and the one thing that I would leave with you is that the most important thing for optometrists and optometric organizations to do is to begin talking to each other. And I don't mean talking in the sense of who's to blame, and who's not to blame, or who's successful or who's not successful. I'm talking about dialogue in a more functional and philosophical sense.

"What are we? Where do we want to go? How do we want to get there? What does the public need?

"Don't worry about who's going to do it. While there seems to be a great deal of emphasis upon communication, which is essential, the fact is that you must have something to communicate. The fact is that, unless you **have** the facts and unless you provide what you say you are providing, it won't fly no matter how good the communications are.

"I think this is a time for you, in granting this honour to me, to stop and think — not about me, but what do **you** want for yourselves, as practitioners; what kind of contribution do you wish to make? I think those are the challenges.

"So on behalf of my family and wife, who really didn't have to fall down and cut this short, thank you."

### Dr. Brisbin Concludes the Ceremony

"Irving, I know that not only the people in this room, but optometrists and anyone involved with Optometry all across this country share the sentiments that were expressed here tonight in honouring you, and the debt of gratitude that we all owe to Irving Baker for a great deal of what this profession is today.

"This plaque says,

*'The Canadian Association of Optometrists President's Award, presented to Dr. Irving Baker, August 7, 1987 in recognition and sincere appreciation for his tireless commitment as clinician, educator, author, legislator, registrar, advocate and mentor to the profession of Optometry.'*

*'This award pays particular tribute to his dedicated service, motivation and far-reaching influence on the practice of Optometry across Canada.'*

"I can't think of any better way to say thank you to Irving Baker."

