

Q How did you get your start in the optical field?

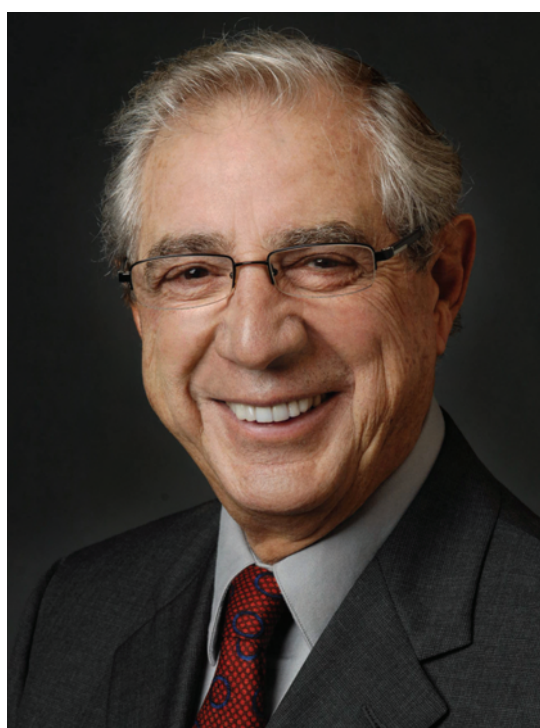
candid conversations between *Optical Lab Products'* Jim Grootegoed and leaders in the optical laboratory field

JOSEPH SANTINELLI joined his uncle's optical equipment company, A LeMay and Co., in 1954 and so began a legacy that continues today. Santinelli International started as a one-man operation out of Joseph Santinelli's home, and now he is chairman of an international operation headquartered in Long Island, New York. The company has been the sole U.S. distributor of the NIDEK line of finishing equipment for the past 19 years. In the 1980s, Joseph Santinelli handed over leadership of the company to his son, Gerard Santinelli, who is now president and CEO.

A **JOSEPH SANTINELLI** I was introduced to the optical industry at the age of eight living over my uncle Arthur Lemay's edging machine storefront factory in Brooklyn, NY. My first job was running errands and sweeping the factory floor of the metal shavings. After graduating college, I started working for my uncle Arthur Lemay in sales.

As an apprentice I learned how to grind lenses while working part-time after school at a prescription lab named Unique Optical in Manhattan right at the transformation of glass to plastic and simultaneously witnessed the introduction of diamond generators replacing carborundum grinding. Along with my uncle, we designed the first history-making diamond edger to the industry, the Diamaline Edger, which we introduced at a trade show at the Pennsylvania Hotel in New York, circa 1959.

So, I was really at the beginning of the fundamental change in the optical business, allowing fashion and improved efficiency into the eyewear business. It was a radical change that I look back upon with much relish.



JIM GROOTEGOED. When did you start your own company?

JS A LeMay and Co. grew by leaps and bounds, we ultimately introduced a new model, the robot edger, and soon became the number one company in the industry. Santinelli Sales (the precursor to Santinelli International) was formed to distribute LeMay edgers.

In the 1970s, there was a major transformation of the equipment necessary to meet the needs of the industry. I realized I needed such an edger for my new company to distribute so met with O.W. Coburn, at his invitation. A distribution agreement developed and subsequently, we sold many Coburn edgers.

But I was always looking for improved technology. In 1973, I went to the MIDO show and met with a small Italian edger manufacturer called Fomap. I was impressed by their lens edger and took on their U.S. distributorship. It was the finest Italian edger,

but it was overly designed, and you needed to be an engineer to run it. Lenses were inexpensive at the time. There was no such thing as high-tech lenses, so the U.S. needed a fast and cheap machine.

JG Is that when you got involved with NIDEK?

JS At the Vision Expo in Manhattan, Santinelli's booth was right next to NIDEK's, which was a fateful positioning! Upon seeing the prototype they were exhibiting, we realized that a partnership with them could vault us to the forefront of the edging business because of their superior technology.

We quickly met with NIDEK's vice president to discuss exclusive distributorship in the U.S. After intense meetings, the partnership was agreed upon and the following week, we flew to Gamagori in Japan to sign the contract.

It's been a perfect union, combining our passion and knowledge of the industry, along with our marketing savvy, and their high-tech engineering to create the number one brand in the U.S.

JG How has the Santinelli/NIDEK relationship evolved?

JS Over the years, we've developed a very strong, respectful relationship with NIDEK. We share U.S. lens and frames trends and needs, and they respond with technology to meet those needs. Subsequently, the U.S. has become one of the largest markets for NIDEK.

JG What can we expect from Santinelli and NIDEK in the future?

JS Together with NIDEK, we've working on exciting projects that will dazzle the industry. Additionally, our technology continues to improve to meet lens-finishing challenges. Sophisticated and expensive lenses continue to hit the market, and if you don't have the right equipment, there are a lot of things that can affect profits, both the retail lab and the wholesale labs.

So, we've got a nice basketful of surprises—stay tuned! ☐