



Service Organization

When I first entered the field as a student and then as a young educator and practitioner in the late 1970s, I knew there was an organization of contact lens manufacturers. When I first worked in industry, our president wanted to be a leader in the Contact Lens Manufacturers Association (CLMA). But he was replaced by another president who chose to leave the CLMA because he thought the company would be better off working on common interests with larger companies. Since the early 1980s, as larger companies formed their own organization, the CLMA became the champion for the “little guy,” and my mentor Neil Bailey, OD, PhD, remained close to many of these entrepreneurial companies. Indeed, in the early days of the contact lens field, innovation came from smaller labs, many of which were owned by optometrists. Not until Bausch & Lomb introduced the soft contact lens in the early 1970s did large companies start to dominate the field. Most early toric and bifocal designs and many current designs came from the smaller labs and their inventors. Major developments in most GP materials we use have come from small entrepreneurial companies.

In the mid 1980s, the CLMA chose to sponsor and fund the Rigid Gas Permeable Lens Institute (RGPLI). First under the leadership of Dean Clements and now Ed Bennett, OD, MEd, the RGPLI has provided countless educational programs that teach students and practitioners about GP lenses. RGPLI annual programs that train contact lens residents have been especially valuable. Today the CLMA represents a high percentage of U.S. companies and numerous non-U.S. companies. Most focus on GP lens design and manufacturing, but many also provide soft contact lenses, especially custom soft lenses. The CLMA’s mission is to increase awareness and utilization of custom manufactured lenses and to provide premium education for eyecare professionals. To learn more about the services and programs that the CLMA and RGPLI provide, please read the article, “Paying Tribute to a Dedicated Organization,” on p. 40 of this issue.

Interestingly, our mission at *Contact Lens Spectrum* is similar to the CLMA’s. We provide premium education to eyecare professionals about all contact lenses. With this organization, other organizations in our field and independents, we try to serve the entire field. As with any field endeavor, partnership and collaboration are the best long-term strategies.

Joe Barr