

ADVANCE OPTICAL HISTORY

Founded in 1922 by Louis Gwartzman, Advance Optical started as a supply house operating out of a back bedroom. Two years later, Lou's brother Sam joined the company selling frames and stock lenses. Sensing opportunity, sometime during the 1930s, a laboratory was added and a branch laboratory was opened in Buffalo.

During the 1940s, Louis commuted from Rochester and managed the Buffalo branch while Sam ran Rochester. Greyhound Express was the link between the two branches. The brothers worked seven days a week and established a reputation for quality work. It was truly a family operation. Sam's son, Morley, had worked as errand boy, in the mail room and at a variety of other jobs from the time he was eight. Morley, with no interest in the optical business, graduated from the University of Michigan in Business Administration and immediately left for New York to work in the advertising field. A year later his father called with news that Louis was going in the hospital, asking him to come home to Rochester to help out while Lou was recuperating, promising it would just be for the summer. That was 1961 and Morley never returned to New York City.

The family had a tradition of spending Sunday at the office. Morley and his sister would fold mailing boxes or do whatever else was needed while their mother and father opened mail and lined up jobs for Monday. Following that, Sam took them all out to dinner. The company continued selling frames and lenses along with laboratory service and frames continue as an important part of the company's business today.

During the '40s and '50s, when Kryptoks were the most-used bifocal, Advance maintained a large inventory of blanks. Morley remembers his Dad saying, "One thing you can be sure of, Morley. Kryptoks will never go out of style!"

The Buffalo branch was sold in the 1960s and shortly thereafter, Louis retired. In the late 1960s, Sam became ill and Morley took over direction of the company. At this point, Morley's younger sister, Ann, joined the company. The company had always been deeply involved in frame sales and Morley remembers the impact of the Cambridge frame. For at least six months, sales were so heavy, factory back orders were a common event. Advance determined not to run out and during the peak years of Cambridge sales, the company kept a year's inventory of that frame on hand. Their first designer line was Sophia Loren and Advance did more business with Zyloware in the month after it came out than they had in years previously. With Artcraft as a neighbor in Rochester, Advance has distributed Artcraft products for years. Artcraft is celebrating their 96th anniversary as Advance celebrates their 92nd year.

When Ann's husband, Arthur Kolko, joined the company in the 1970s, he employed his computer background to expand the lab, get Advance up and running on computers and outfit the lab with new and updated equipment.

The company had occupied four different locations through the years in downtown Rochester. In 1982, the main Rochester post office moved out of the downtown area and Advance Optical followed and built a new facility a mile from the new post office. The family tradition continued as Morley and Ann's sister Honi joined Advance Optical. Many of the three siblings' children would work at Advance on and off throughout the years.

Advance Optical was sold in 2008 and became an Essilor Partner Lab. Ann and Arthur retired the same year, while Morley stayed on until 2009 to facilitate the transition and to help pass on the torch to Marc Rubinrott, Advance's new President and General Manager. Morley's daughter Lisa (De Marco) re-joined the company in 2005 and aspires to continue her father's legacy of maintaining a high standard for quality and providing exceptional customer service.