



Dr. Irving Bennett

June 11, 1923 - September 7, 2020

Dr. Irving Bennett passed away on September 7 in the company of his loved ones. He was an amazing man, husband and father. Born on June 11, 1923 in Port Henry, New York, he grew up in Mineville in upper state New York, the youngest of four children. His family was poor but his father taught him the importance of philanthropy, something he continued to practice his entire life and of which he was most proud.

Dr. Bennett received his doctorate of optometry degree from Pennsylvania College of Optometry (now Salus University) in 1944 and then served as an optometrist in the Army Air Forces Medical Corps, ultimately moving to Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania to open his optometric practice in 1946 and continuing for 45 years. He became involved in local politics early on, running for and winning a seat on the Beaver Falls School Board in 1948. He served on the board for 17 years, mostly as president. During that time he recruited the first African American teacher. In the mid 1950's, as president of the Beaver Falls Recreation Commission, he oversaw the Commission's purchase of the previously privately owned and "whites only" Morado Pool and forced its integration. He was president of United Jewish Community for several years, overseeing the fundraising for and construction of the Jewish Community Center. He was the first to import Varilux progressive lenses to the United States and, at one point, more of his patients wore Varilux lenses than in the entire rest of the country.

Dr. Bennett was heavily involved in optometric society leadership. He served on many committees and received state and national awards too numerous to list but including the American Optometric Association (AOA) National Optometrist of the Year (1972), AOA National Distinguished Award (1997), Review of Optometry's Optometrist of the Decade for Practice Management (2000) and was inducted into the National Optometric Hall of Fame (2004). He was an avid writer and lecturer on business management of optometric practices and was editor of optometric magazines including the AOA Journal and Optometric Management. As the founder and president of Advisory Enterprises, he was publisher of Optometric Management and Ophthalmology Management, among others. He was the founder of Optifair, the first national ophthalmic trade show and precursor to Vision Expo. He served as a consultant to the optical industry serving both national and international clients. In order to promote business acumen in optometric students, he contributed to and aided in the formation of the Bennett Career Services Center at Salus University.

As the first optometrist in his family, he started an optometric dynasty. His brother, Milton, who was the one who pushed him into the field, followed suit shortly thereafter. Next was his son, Donald, who went on to become an ophthalmologist in Louisville, Kentucky, and practiced ophthalmology the way Dr. Bennett felt it should be practiced, doing only secondary and tertiary care and no primary care. His daughter, Linda, was next, beginning practice in Belmont, Massachusetts. This was the impetus for a series of articles in Optometric Management that Dr. Bennett penned on practice management titled, "Dear Linda." The most recent legacy into the optometric field is Linda's daughter, Rebecca, who joined her mother in practice in 2008.

Dr. Bennett spent many winters and, ultimately his retirement, in Sarasota where he remained active attending the arts and served on many organized

optometric and local committees. A resident of Pelican Cove for many years, he developed a Cultural Concerts Series, designed and moderated many courses at the Pelican Cove University and wrote a 100+ page History of Pelican Cove book. Later, at The Glenridge, he served on more committees and wrote the "Be Well" newsletter with health advice which he continued doing until just recently.

He met Trude while attending college and the two were married while he served in the army. The couple celebrated 75 years of marriage in July. Dr. Bennett is survived by Trude, his two children, Linda Bennett, O.D., and Donald Bennett, O.D., M.D., four grandchildren, Courtnee Bennett, Rebecca Bennett Maida, O.D., Joslyn Overby and Beth Huey, five great grandchildren and his most special friend, Ginette Hersh.

Funeral services will take place at Sarasota National Cemetery on September 8 at 12:30 PM, and can be seen on Zoom following the instructions below.

Donations in his honor can be made to the United Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee.

Tribute Wall

KT

“ Please accept my condolences for your loss. Dr. Bennett was a great man and a great boss. He could be tough, but always fair. When he would go to Florida for part of the year, we had to make a list of all the patients who wouldn't see any other Dr. Then when he got back, we would call and schedule them. Believe me, that list was long!!

Dr. Bennett was always so generous. He would take the staff out to dinner often and he would bring us gifts when he traveled. We so looked forward to those times.

The world has lost a great man!! Again, to his family, you have my sympathy.

kris thellman - September 20, 2020 at 02:06 PM

LG

“ I had the pleasure of attending many of Dr. Bennett's board meetings at PCO. It was brilliant, he pulled together leaders of every major company to understand the present state and future of optometry. I am grateful for his commitment in our industry, and learned a lot from him. Condolences to his family.

Lauren Gold

lauren gold - September 14, 2020 at 10:22 AM

CM

“ As area practicing optometrists, Irving always included us in the "retired optometrists" luncheon. We went as often as we could, scheduling out of the office, so we could see him and hear his wisdom. I personally enjoyed his conversations and sat on the side of "his good ear" and welcomed his suggestions for lunch and of course dessert (the chocolate cake). He bragged often about his daughter and grand daughter practicing optometry. He will be missed by many and of course I will miss him too. Condolences to the family.

Dr's Michael and Carol Orwasky

Carol Mendez-Orwasky - September 10, 2020 at 04:10 PM