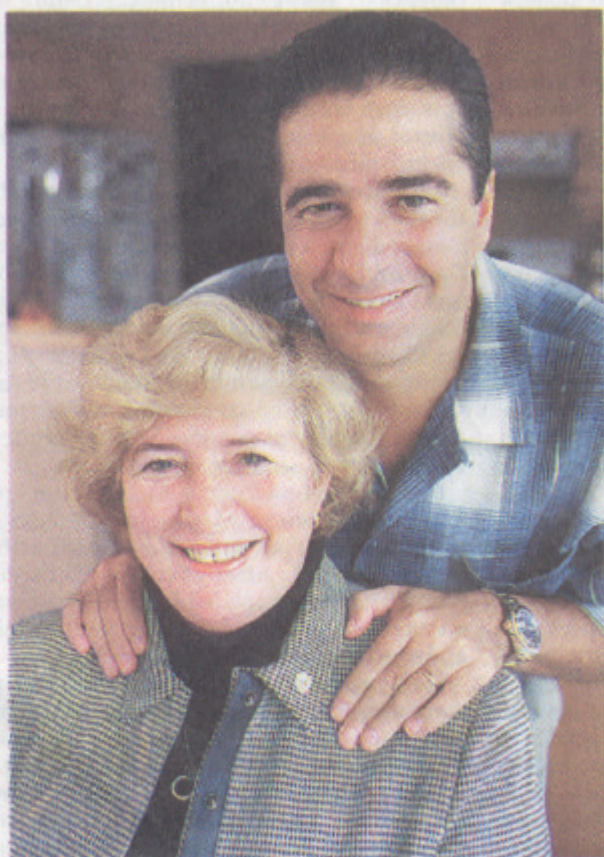


## The CO-FOUNDERS



ROD MACIVOR, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

**A**nother CEO/HR team, Ömür and Zahide Sezerman founded OZ Optics in Halifax in 1985. Today the company's office, decorated with the blue and yellow of Ömür's favourite soccer team from his native Turkey, is located in the midst of fields off Carp Road. He is such a soccer fanatic that he attached an indoor field, the OZ Dome, to the office, and started a professional team. There's a restaurant (the salads use tomatoes and cucumbers from Zahide's garden), bar and weight room. Sports camps are available for children both of OZ employees, and from the community.

It's the OZ culture. It's impressive.

And it took a while to build it.

The two came to Canada in 1978 so that Ömür could do graduate work in engineering at Dalhousie University in Halifax — the only place that accepted him. Ömür, Zahide and their young daughter, Yesim, lived in a university residence, while he struggled to entice Canadian companies to buy his fibre-optic components. His wife worked part-time doing the banking and administrative tasks while looking after their daughter. Their subsequent move to the U.S., an effort to get OZ off the ground, was the hardest time in their high-tech lives.

"I would say it was the most stressful time of our marriage," Ömür said, adding that during the move, Zahide was pregnant with their second child. "Because I was working like hell, and she was with the kid already, and another one was coming up. With the first child I could help because I was a student. Now I had to make a living so I wasn't able to help as much. I hope we never have to go through that stress again. I don't think either one of us could take it."

They've come a long way, over the years negotiating the terms of their relationship, as life, and work, partners. Part of that is not cutting each other any slack, he said.

"I think she resigned a thousand times and I fired her a thousand and one times," he laughed.

"You can't be not hard on someone because she is your wife. That's not the case with me. With me, it's like turning off or on a switch. If somebody is here, working, I don't treat them special. If anything, I put them on a higher pedestal."

Zahide said she knows she is "under more scrutiny and treated tougher than anyone else."

She is often the go-between, the mother hen/good cop whom employees confide in rather than face the big boss, she said. She encourages employees to confront her husband, but if they don't feel comfortable, she doesn't mind speaking to him on their behalf. It's something her husband regrets, but understands.

"A lot of times, people who don't want to talk to me, go and talk to Zahide. I'd rather they come and talk to me, I'm not as bad as they think I am. But I'm more of a straight shooter. I don't go around bushes and hint at things, I just go and say it the way it's supposed to be said."