

Spotlight

ROAD TO OZ

“It was the best thing I’ve ever done in my life.”

That’s how fibre optics wizard Omur Sezerman (MSc’80) sums up his decision to come to Dalhousie to do graduate work in physics in the late ’70s.

A brilliant student and practical scientist (he graduated with a BA in physics and engineering electronics from Bogazici University in his native Turkey), the young Mr. Sezerman was keen to come to North America to seek his fortune. He also had a young family to support, so the offer of a full scholarship

from Dal made the decision a no-brainer.

Yet, despite the scholarship funding, money was tight. By the time he completed his MSc and started into a doctoral program at Dal, Mr. Sezerman knew that something had to give. That’s when he had his Eureka moment.

“I was working on the problem of how to couple light into a fibre from a laser source,” he says. The highly esoteric project led him to invent a coupling device envied

by big players, launching him on a trajectory as a successful entrepreneur.

“Basically, I had to come up with a simple idea because I had no money. People would say, ‘How could you pull that off when [telecommunications] giants like Nortel who have tons of money, couldn’t?’ It was simply a question of necessity being the mother of invention.”

With the backing of classmate Gordon Youle, (MSc’84), who was so impressed with the invention that he invested his life savings (some \$70,000) in his friend’s enterprise, Mr. Sezerman founded OZ Optics in 1985.

The name OZ is from the first initials of Omur and Zahide, his wife. Headquartered in Ottawa, Ont., the company is a world leader in the manufacture and development of fibre optic products, with 240 employees worldwide and

manufacturing facilities in Canada, Turkey and China. OZ fibre optic components have far-ranging applications in the telecommunications, military, medical and educational industries and include everything from the original coupling device invented by Mr. Sezerman to a coronary sensor used in laser surgery.

And while the company is clearly focused on growth, the corporate culture is all about its people and that means engaging them in the company by providing a welcoming work environment.

A soccer fan in a big way – the corporate colors of blue, yellow and white mirror those of his favorite soccer team back home in Turkey – Mr. Sezerman’s love of the sport is reflected in the three world-class soccer fields (two outdoor and one indoor) that dot the 24-acre OZ compound. “We promote a family environment here,” he says of the unique set-up, which also includes a full-service recreational facility complete with swimming pool, spa, weight room, restaurant and vegetable gardens. “I believe in providing full service to my employees because without the right people we have nothing.”

Joanne Ward-Jerrett



Photo: Colin Rowe