

## Armenian Jewellers Association in the Making

### *Recollections of a Volunteer*

In the late summer of 1997, well past the euphoric early days of the opening of the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia in Ottawa, a buoyant can do spirit was ever present throughout the work of the Embassy. Every initiative was a new beginning, a promising potential to promote and aid Armenia.

The file of one such initiative was referred to the Ottawa Embassy by Mr. Garnik Nanagoulian, first Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to Canada, through his capacity as the Minister of Industry and Trade and Economic Development of the Republic of Armenia. During his posting as Ambassador to Canada, Mr. Nanagoulian had received a proposal to launch the formation of an international Armenian Jewelers Association. That proposal was in the final stages of planning however in the face of the upcoming deadline, added immediate attention was required. Key prominent jewelers of Armenian origin worldwide had been invited to join the association and the convention was slated to take place in a few short weeks, in September of 1997, in Yerevan. The pressing task at hand was to contact each in person, and appeal to them to please attend.

Under critical time constraints, equipped with a list of names and telephone numbers, I was entrusted with the campaign to reach and speak one to one, with each contact. It was a time before today's technological advances and the ease of communicating through e-mailing and global cell phones. The initial information and notification had been made via mail and fax, but this last push, a more personalized effort was now deemed imperative for the success of this mission. The contact list spanned the four corners of the world and to reach everyone, the calls were made throughout the days and continued into the nights.

Each conversation began with an introduction that the call was being made from the Embassy in Ottawa, on behalf of the Minister of Trade and Industry in Armenia. Following the cordial greetings, began the more delicate inquiry about their intentions to travel to Yerevan in the following few weeks. Although the calls were always pleasant and well received, it was admittedly daunting for me, to interrupt a high level businessman in the middle of his work or late at night, impose on this time and proceed with "gentle urging" to persuade him to travel to Yerevan, to participate in the convention. Clearly they all "wished they could attend," but not everyone's schedule and business commitments allowed the flexibility to travel during the required time frame. The challenge to persuade and coax the businessmen was quite motivating for me. With the knowledge that considerable time and resources had already been invested, every contact had to be pursued, again and again if necessary, to ensure the highest possible attendance.

The calls began as reminders, continued as friendly encouragements and when necessary rose to a level of urgent imploring. Through each conversation the basic message

remained clear and simple..."your participation is important and your attendance in Yerevan is crucial for the successful founding of the association." Time management to reach participants in Canada and the United States was trouble-free, Europe was relatively reasonable but Japan, Australia, Hong Kong and the Middle East, required complex scheduling. Nevertheless, over seven days and nights, the goal to reach each person directly was realized culminating in what turned out to be very positive numbers.

As a side note, it should be taken into consideration that it was a time when the rate for international long distance phone calling was still quite high. The final cost of the innumerable calls, some lengthier than others did result in quite a significant sum for the young Ottawa Embassy's budget to incur. With the blessings of the Minister and the conviction that this work was of fundamental importance for Armenia, there was no choice but to proceed. The final push to harness the technical knowledge and international experience of leading Armenian jewelers was taxing but essential. The resulting advantage to the industry in Armenia has been immeasurable.

Today, the AJA is celebrating its 15<sup>th</sup>. Anniversary. Congratulations to the founding organizers, for your foresight to recognize the importance of the potential of this industry for Armenia and realization of the Armenian Jewelers Association. With the commitment and expertise of the founding members, the inaugural convention participants and the efforts of all the current members and supporters, your efforts continue the advancement of the Armenian jewelry industry and Armenia.

Ani Mardian,  
Ottawa, Canada.