



HONG KONG 香港工程師
ENGINEER
The Journal of the Hong Kong Institution of Engineers

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Seeing a precious dream come true - Ir Dr Wilfred S Y Chan, President 1985/86

When I was co-opted into the Council in 1978, I made a pledge to do something meaningful and substantial that would benefit each and everyone of our entire membership.

I had two dreams: to raise funds to buy our own premises and to build our own recreation club. I knew both were daunting tasks that would require the fullest cooperation of the Council and the general membership.

With my training in business planning from both Shell and Esso, I knew how vital it was that we had a detailed action plan if we were to succeed. In 1984, the year before I became President, I managed to convince the Council to allow me to form a Fundraising Committee to go out with hat in hand to seek the financial support of the Hong Kong community.

As chairman of this committee, it was incumbent upon myself to ensure that our fundraising efforts would bring in the desired results. Since the committee members were working for us part-time and after long office-hours, we knew that we could not expect the members to sustain the tedious task of soliciting donations, often from complete strangers. Therefore, to maintain the impetus of our campaign, committee members were changed every two months in order to bring in fresh minds. This, in my view, was one of the crucial factors in achieving our goal. I set HK\$5 million as our target; in the end, we raised a total HK\$7 million.

The other major factor was the organised way in which we went about soliciting donations. We divided the Hong Kong community into major sectors such as the business sector, the professional sector and the HKIE sector. There were sub-divisions in each sector. As an example, the oil industry and the banks were sub-divisions of the business sector. Once we identified the business or industry, we went after the leader in each sub-division, and once the leading firm contributed to our fund, the others in the same sub-division followed. That was how it worked and it worked very well for us indeed.

In the professional sector, we of course targeted all the engineering consultancies in Hong Kong. Practically all of them came to our rescue by contributing something towards our building fund.

Our membership also rose to the occasion by chipping in with a few dollars to thousands of dollars. For the "Walk for the Engineers", I approached the late Harold Beaton, who was then the Director of Highways, to allow us to raise funds by walking on the newly completed Island Eastern Corridor before he opened it to traffic. To add publicity and flavour to this walk, I managed to get Sir Wilfred Newton, who was chairman of Mass Transit Railway Corporation, to officiate at the ribbon-cutting that kicked off the "Walk for the Engineers". This walk netted us nearly HK\$300,000.00

There is just one other thing in connection with this project that I wish to record.

When Ir Malcolm Matthews became President, he invited me to a lunch during which he said to me that if we had not raised funds to buy our own premises, HKIE would have gone bankrupt. In addition to this, he also presented me with the first President's Award at the 1995 Annual Dinner, to thank me and my committee for raising the necessary funds for the good of the general membership.

The reason I selected this story for the special issue is to try to spur our younger members on to do something really substantial for our Institution.

I have only achieved one of my two dreams - the recreation club is still on the backburner, waiting to be taken up by one of our very rich engineers who could easily donate the necessary land and building to house the HKIE Club.

Who knows. My second dream may come true one of these days. I am forever an optimist.



Ir Dr Chan with the late former Hong Kong Governor Sir Edward Youde unveiling the plaque commemorating the official opening of HKIE's headquarters