

Ray Emeritz: Remembering a Friend of the Industry.

We are sad to announce that on the morning of February 12, just a few weeks shy of his 91st birthday, Ray Emeritz, a devoted Panavision employee, and a great friend to many in the New York production scene, passed away.

For years, Ray was the “go-to” guy at Panavision New York and its predecessor companies. At 90 years old, Ray still showed up for work when he was able, acting as a “goodwill ambassador” for customers, supporting clients, staff and management with his broad range of knowledge and his determination to provide the very best products and service. His expertise in repairing, modifying, setting up and testing motion picture cameras and accessories of every make and model was legendary. (Following are some of the highlights from the recent article that ran in the American Society of Cinematographers newsletter).

Ray’s history with the entertainment industry was long and varied. He began his career in 1939 with Eastman Kodak, in their Chicago office, as a trainee in the camera repair division. In 1941, he joined the US Army, and was sent to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey Signal Corps, Army Pictorial Service for training on cameras and photo equipment. From there, he was sent to the 182nd Signal Photo Company at Camp Robinson, Arkansas, and then to the Bell & Howell factory for additional training on motion picture cameras, lenses and projectors. In the fall of 1942, Ray found himself in Salisbury, England, where his skills found him maintaining cameras used to record the African invasion. Sent to London, he was in charge of the first camera and photo equipment maintenance center in England. Throughout what was known as the “baby blitz,” he maintained all the motion picture cameras: 35mm, 16mm, still, studio and aerial cameras as well as the lenses for Army, Navy, Air Force and foreign correspondents for “Life,” “Look,” and any newsreel and independent publications. Ray was even responsible for preparing the cameras for photographic units assigned to D-Day forces.

In 1944, he was transferred to Paris, where he started the first camera and photo equipment maintenance center in France. His assignment was to train needed personnel, which he did for a year until he was discharged.

After the war, Ray landed in New York City and started Camera Services Inc., maintaining all the photo equipment, as well as designing and building special camera devices. He held the patent on 3-D viewing devices, of which he constructed 300 units.

In the summer of 1955, Ray left Camera Services Inc and joined Frank and Burt Zucker’s company, Camera Equipment Company. After Burt died, he joined Florman and Babb, which eventually merged with Camera Equipment Company, forming F&BCECO, Inc. As director of engineering, he designed and constructed special lens mounts, reflex and video systems for Mitchell, Bell & Howell, and other cameras. He designed and built the National Football League high-speed 16mm camera and 800 Auricon conversions.

In 1967, he joined General Camera as chief engineer, continuing to design and build equipment for the changing techniques of our industry. General Camera became the New York representative of Panavision and later evolved into Panavision New York (PANY). Ray held the chief engineer position for 42 years, until his recent passing. “Ray was a sweet gentle man who was always generous with the information he acquired over the past 50 years,” said Sol Negrin, ASC. “He was a person who was really close to the heartbeat of the industry and the guy to seek out if something needed improvement or innovation.” Cinematographer Owen Roizman, ASC, called him the ‘godfather’ of technicians. “His demeanor, his personality – he was always so calm,” he said. “I never saw him get flustered about anything. He always had a pleasant smile, always had kind words to say. He had an air of karma wherever he went. And that’s what I loved about him.”

“Ray was truly devoted to his work. There wasn’t a problem he couldn’t solve when one of our clients called,” said Bob Beitcher, President and CEO, Panavision Inc. “Ray’s presence will be sorely missed across the company. He’s now resting with a small group of real industry legends.”