

Dr the Hon Allan ZEMAN

Citation

Dr the Hon Allan Zeman must be Hong Kong's only Grand Bauhinia Medal winner with three nicknames. He is known variously as the Father of Lan Kwai Fong, the Mouse Killer or a 'Born-Again' Chinese. These names, all affectionate, show his place in the heart of the city and its citizens. But they don't stretch far enough to cover many of his good deeds and multiple achievements. With his fingers in so many public service pies, which include the Community Chest and West Kowloon Cultural District Authority, also having served with the Hong Kong Tourism Commission, the former Cultural and Heritage Commission and the Urban Renewal Authority, it seems that no agency wants to miss out on his brains and blessing. One of his remarkable feats is that despite being the darling of every post-Handover administration he has left unruffled the feathers of any political player. He can rub shoulders with the rich, the radicals or the rootless. He sees even potential enemies as prospective partners. He likes to call himself the Happiness Creator. And who can argue with that? Every city needs an Allan Zeman.

But, Dr Zeman will forever be known as the creator and developer of Lan Kwai Fong, a Western oasis of the good life of which he now owns 65%. At the height of the pre-1997 jitters when residents were fleeing Hong Kong in a mass exodus, he doubled down on a city living 'on borrowed time', buying up an entire block and transforming it into the must-visit destination to which expatriates,

visitors and returnees now flock. Lan Kwai Fong is the envy of every up-and-coming Asian city. No fewer than 15 Chinese cities now want their own replica of this iconic Hong Kong neighborhood.

Next to Lan Kwai Fong, Dr Zeman's face is most often linked with Ocean Park. When he was appointed its Chairman, Ocean Park was fraying at the edges and ready to throw in its towel in a toe-to-toe with the newly arrived Mickey Mouse and all that stands behind this world icon. A hopelessly asymmetric contest, everybody feared that the local David would be no match for the global Goliath. Dr Zeman himself was the first to admit that prior to his appointment, he had never once set foot inside the local theme park.

But Dr Zeman doesn't mind being an underdog. His whole life is about taking on outsized challenges where the odds are long and the situation desperate. At age seven, in Montreal, he lost his father and had to learn to survive by his wits and his can-do spirit. For a man who has never read a book in his life, Dr Zeman can smell an opportunity from the other side of the Pacific. In the late seventies of the last century, he came here as a garment trader and ended up as a city father of the Hong Kong SAR.

In Ocean Park, we see the Allan Zeman magic at work. When others saw the end, he saw the beginning of a rebirth. He quickly redefined the

rules of the contest: Disneyland is an imported fantasy, Ocean Park is alive with local color, where the ocean beckons, and animals frolic. He turned it into a place that is environmentally and educationally friendly. To everybody's surprise, Ocean Park outperformed Disney, prompting Forbes to call him the Mouse Killer. The truth is, both theme parks thrive in healthy competition, with Ocean Park now among the world's top-50 most visited destinations.

Kipling had famously said that East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet. But in Lan Kwai Fong and Ocean Park, Dr Zeman has proved him wrong twice.

As a university, we celebrate the Allan Zeman's spirit as much as his achievements: His creativity is people-based. His out-of-the-box thinking comes from looking at things from other people needs. Part of his creativity is expecting the unexpected and milking the most out of every situation. Always brimming with confidence, Dr Zeman does not have a negative bone in his body. If there is an Allan Zeman motto, it is this: self-confidence opens doors and overcomes obstacles. Never known to be upset for more than five minutes, his amazing amnesia and amiability keep him alive to life's many possibilities. He lives horizontally, travelling far and wide, and he lives vertically, sucking the intensity out of every endeavor.

Today, local children thank him for bringing Halloween to Hong Kong. Adults love him for giving them a place to play hard after working hard. And everybody adores a man with the Midas touch and a charitable heart.

Mr Council Chairman, on behalf of the Council of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, I have the high honor of presenting to you Dr the Hon Allan Zeman, GBM, GBS, JP, Chairman of Ocean Park, for the award of Doctor of Business Administration *honoris causa*.