

Earl Crane, 50 Years of Equipment

by George L. Zeis



Crane combines product lines, like this Steiner tractor and Dedoes drum aerator, to provide his customers with efficient equipment. Crane (left) shows customer the hydraulic lift system of the tractor.

It is 7:00 in the morning and Earl J. Crane is already at his desk working. This is not too unusual for a golf course superintendent or landscape contractor, but Earl is 78-years-old and a manufacturer's representative for Dedoes, Buckner, Lawn Genie, Deines, Roseman, Locke, and Steiner in Tiffin, OH, a small farming community south of Toledo.

Crane sold his first turf product, a Locke Tri-Plex reel mower, in the 1930's in the Detroit area. Orphaned at the age of three, Crane learned early that selling was his ticket to success.

While attending a turf field day in Michigan in the late 30's, Crane met H.M. Cooper, developer of the first self-propelled reel mower, and took on the Cooper Champion Greens mower. In those days, it cost \$295 and weighed 120 pounds. Crane sold 3,000 Cooper mowers to Firestone in 1940 for its dealer network. Things looked

rosy for turf equipment markets.

After a stint in the Army, Crane responded to an urge to get into the golf course business and bought Chippewa Golf Course, near Toledo. He and his partner paid \$52,000 for the 177-acres, to be paid off over 20 years. "After working our tails off for three years, we sold the place," Crane said thankfully. The land today, Crane estimates, would be worth more than \$3 million.

While part owner and superintendent of Chippewa Golf Course, Crane began to compare equipment. He became especially interested in turf aerators. "The Terferator, developed in the 20's, drilled holes in the ground. Only a few greens could be done per day, compared to today's equipment which can do 18 greens in less than four hours," Crane observes.

"Aeration of golf courses before World War II was a luxury. Golf course maintenance didn't really

become a must until President Dwight Eisenhower popularized the sport."

Crane's interest in aerators grew when he met Arnold Dedoes in 1969. "My brother-in-law in Michigan had used a Dedoes and spoke highly of it. I decided to try to add the line to other turf products I sold." Arnold Dedoes reluctantly provided Crane with a demonstration model which he quickly sold to the Cleveland Country Club. Today, Crane supervises 40 U.S. Dedoes dealers and 16 other dealers outside the country.

Crane notes that up to now, golf courses have been the big market for aerators. "But," he said, "we are now going after lawn care companies, industrial parks, and even the homeowner."

Crane travels more than 60,000 miles each year visiting dealers, giving demonstrations, and servicing customers. "A good demonstration is a very convincing sales tool," he adds.

One of Crane's specialties is combining products from various equipment lines to provide the turf manager with more flexibility. One recent example is his combination of a Steiner center-pivot, four-wheel-drive tractor with Dedoes drum aerators. The speed and maneuverability of the small tractor speeds up aerating of large, curved turf areas.

Crane tried to retire in 1971 to Arizona at the normal age of 65. After four years of observing the person managing his business, he decided to get reinvolved and hasn't let up since. "I'm taking it day by day, month by month," Crane cheerfully answers. "But one thing is for sure, I'm going to keep busy. It keeps a fellow young."

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