

Person of the Year for 2003



Person of
the Year

WETA president and

long-time Western

manufacturer

David Crumrine

is this year's winner.

By Grant Guimont, Editor

WHEN DAVE CRUMRINE was a youngster, he used to carry a beat-up shopping bag while riding his bike through the streets of Santa Ana, Calif. He was never bothered. He was never robbed. In fact, no one ever gave him a second glance. Perhaps they should have, because there was more than \$50,000 worth of fine jewelry in that bag. Little did anyone suspect.

Crumrine can reminisce fondly about his past adventures now, but admittedly it was a giant responsibility for anyone—let alone a teenager. It was a simpler time back in the '50s, and Crumrine was learning all about the family trade by making those weekly repair runs for his parents.



Back then, the Crumrines were strictly in the jewelry repair business. That all changed on the day that Knott's Berry Farm came calling. In the early '60s, the theme park asked the Crumrines to design a line of Western buckles for them. The Crumrines complied and everything fell into place. Soon enough, other stores around the Los Angeles area were asking the Crumrines if they could carry their Western buckle line too—a legend was born.

From there, they began showing at horse shows and special events, including the famed Cow Palace in San Francisco. Shortly thereafter, Dave Crumrine's father figured out that the Denver tradeshow was an untapped market for their new designs and began showing there immediately. The Crumrines discovered that there was tremendous interest in their original designs, but for many retailers the price of the buckles wasn't affordable. What happened next was a mini-revolution in the Western buckle business.

In order to cut costs, the Crumrines developed a process for duplicating the look of hand engraving. By doing so, they had created the middle price point in Western buckles, and the results were staggering.

By the '80s, the Western buckle side of the company had grown so fast, that the Crumrines completely deserted the fine jewelry aspect of their business. Crumrine Gold & Silversmith then relocated to Reno and had 15 dedicated employees on its staff.

The Early Days

During these exciting times, Dave Crumrine was learning the business from the bottom up. It started with him helping his mother and father after school sweeping floors and making the famous deliveries.

In time, Crumrine replaced his bike with a car for those weekly deliveries, and his expertise in the company grew as well. He learned the casting process, worked with the wax figures, and designed overlays from scratch. But Dave Crumrine wasn't quite ready to take over the business just yet.

Around the time that the Crumrine family ventured into the Western buckle business, another mini-revolution was hitting America—it was known as the British Invasion and Crumrine was listening. Growing up in Santa Ana only fueled his desire more, just up the road you had bands like The Beach Boys hitting it big, along with surfer bands on every corner. Crumrine didn't want to be left out.

First came The Dimensions, then the Scotsmen, and somewhere in there, the name became Heritage. Crumrine was in all of these bands playing the keyboards, and rebelling as only rock 'n roll teenagers can.

At one point, Crumrine and his band fought the school board's dress code over the length of their hair. The band's argument was their look was an important element in obtaining a record deal. The school board listened and eventually relented, giving the band a deadline in which to obtain the record contract.

"We came close, but never close enough," Crumrine said. "I guess it just wasn't meant to be. It sure was fun while it lasted though."

After he chased his dream, Crumrine went on to obtain his degree from what was then called Cal State—Fullerton. From there, Crumrine went to work full time at his parents' company. The year was 1972.

Today, Crumrine remains CEO and president of Crumrine Gold & Silversmiths—sharing ownership with his two sisters. Admittedly, Crumrine states that his sister and brother-in-law run the company now, but he has another venture in the works that he is incredibly excited about, Chelsea Belt & Purse Collections, which debuted just a short time ago.



WETA

This past year marked an important historical footnote in the timeline of the equine industry. With the inception of the Western and English Trade Association, many feel that our industry has reached a crossroads of sorts—but where that road will lead us is anyone's guess.

One of the first industry people to heed the call was Dave Crumrine. He was a part of the interim board of WETA that forged the Western and English Retail Association (WERA) and the Western and English Manufacturing Association (WAEMA) into one viable unit. At the time, Crumrine served as the out-going vice-president of WAEMA.

Shortly thereafter, a nominating committee was formed to create the new board for WETA, and Dave Crumrine was elected as the inaugural president for the association.

Holding the office of president carries enough pressure with it, let alone being the first president in the history of the organization. That however, has not hampered Crumrine in his pursuit to make WETA a formidable ally of this industry.

"More than anything, our industry needed to unify its message," Crumrine said. "We needed to act with a singular voice in order to create a vision for our future."

Besides unity, WETA has other immediate goals that they would like to turn into realities. Currently, the association is developing a standard for information and research within the industry—an area that has been sorely lacking in the past.

WETA would also like to heighten the awareness of our industry in the form of promotion, not merely as a trend, but as a lifestyle in and of itself. In order to influence the outside however, our industry first needs to be able to clearly define themselves to the global world, which is obviously another important goal of WETA.

In order to define the strengths and merits of the industry, the association hopes to create a level of communication, which has previously not existed. By providing this open forum for different segments of the industry to come to a consensus, some clear direction for our industry as a whole is now a probability.

It won't be easy and Crumrine knows it. "We understand that there are some critics of WETA. But we're brand new, and we truly want to unify our industry. We want to make this work."

Some critics have been more outspoken than others, and their opinions always hold weight, but Crumrine senses a few other obstacles that may hamper the association even more—apathy for one.

"I think there's people on the fence about this subject, people that are taking a wait-and-see attitude," he said. "While others won't even budge until they see results from us. But without their initial participation that creates an interesting Catch-22."

Skepticism aside, WETA also faces the very real challenges of creating enough revenue to implement its ideas, and people's basic fear that by giving help to an organization that they may in turn devalue their own individual business.

Add to this fact that others in the industry have made it known that they believe WETA is too focused on Western ideals and not enough on English—and you begin to realize the tremendous undertaking an association like this really can be.

"I really want to express our sincere interest and need for creating an English contingency within WETA," Crumrine said. "It's in our name."

Crumrine went on to mention the presentation given by Chip Alexander of Bailey Hats at the King of Prussia tradeshow, which Crumrine deemed "a calculated move" in order to increase English participation in the organization. Crumrine is quick to note that there is value in the organization for the English side of the industry as well, who currently does not have any other association representing its needs.

Being a trailblazer can be a long and lonely road, but Crumrine truly believes that there is only strength in numbers, not in division.

"We need them to be a part of us," Crumrine said. "We're not whole without them."

The Industry

By now, we know the story of the market and the affect its having on the industry. And perhaps WETA's biggest challenge will be creating some optimism in this unstable time. For Crumrine, that's an easy call to answer—it starts by "rallying around the horse."



The one constant. The single iconic image that touches all segments of the industry. The living symbol of our future. The horse. That may be overstating it a bit, but there is more than a grain of truth in that statement.

"We need to be able to redefine what Western is for the next generation, or we will lose that opportunity," Crumrine said. "I think it all starts with the horse."

Diversification is one of the leading opponents of the equine retailer according to Crumrine. The larger chain stores, the Farm and Ranches—their ability to sell lawnmowers, as

well as cowboy hats isn't leaving much room for the independent stores to survive in.

"The secret is not only getting people in your stores, but being able to keep them there," Crumrine said.

Or in other words—diversification. Crumrine believes that you can't be just one thing to your customers anymore. He also cites the deal-driven society we're living in, as well as the loss of product loyalty that this creates, as chief culprits affecting our industry today.

"There are areas focusing around the horse that are optimistic because they are showing some consistency," he said. "But other segments, like the apparel side are feeling a downturn."

That too will become a priority of WETA, discovering what customers want long before it becomes a crisis for retailers and manufacturers alike.

The Future

No one can predict the future with any accuracy. Perhaps the greatest difficulty a leader is ever saddled with is engaging the masses that elected them with an optimistic vision of the future. When the association happens to be in its infancy, this difficulty grows exponentially. Crumrine realizes this too, so he has surrounded himself with some familiar faces that will be able to handle the early obstacles, while deftly keeping one eye on the near future.

Crumrine said, "In five years, I would like to see all the manufacturers, retailers, and reps involved in the vision of WETA and its expansion into what the association touches and reaches."

Most important to the idea of this broadening vision is the incorporation of associates to WETA. Associates is the term given to individuals or groups that do not fall into the categories of manufacturer, retailer, or

rep. However, the term associate is not exclusive in its definition. In fact, Crumrine sees the associates as the biggest opportunity for WETA down the road.

"Our by-laws for the foundation are a living, breathing thing," he said. "What we expect to happen is that some of the seats on our board will be given up to a more far-reaching definition of what our industry currently represents. I mean we're talking about public relations organizations, media gurus, technology experts, rodeo associations, riding associations, pharmaceutical companies, automobile makers, and financial institutions."



It's these peripheral segments of the horse industry that will ultimately make the industry more profitable, Crumrine believes.

"There's such an untapped market that we aren't even aware of," Crumrine said. "I really believe the only thing that will limit us is our own imagination."

Some of the other elements of WETA's vision include: the association offering healthcare and other benefits; a dedicated help line with customer service representatives available to answer industry questions; a massive promotional program that promotes the Western and English lifestyle; and the incorporation of other existing associations into the fold of WETA, such as the Future Farmers of America and the Paint Horse Association, to name a few.

The Honor

Now in its second year, the Tack 'n Togs Person of the Year award is quickly becoming a mainstay within the industry. We asked Crumrine how it felt to be this year's recipient.

"It's very humbling to win such a prestigious award," Crumrine said. "It's something that I never expected, and I hope that I am able to honor it as much as it honors me."

The 2003 Tack 'n Togs Person of the Year award is presented to Dave Crumrine for his years of service within the Western industry, his continued commitment as an ambassador for our industry, his on-going promotional work for the equine lifestyle, and his dedication and courage in being the first to represent our industry as a whole as president of WETA.

"I would like to thank Tack 'n Togs for their effort to improve our industry," Crumrine said. "Your articles are written to educate retailers, and a lot of what we need to do in the future is through the venue of education. I want to do my best in order to represent what this award means to me."

Congratulations Dave for this honor with our sincere thanks for your support—the staff of Tack 'n Togs.