

CONCEALED CARRY COMES TO ILLINOIS

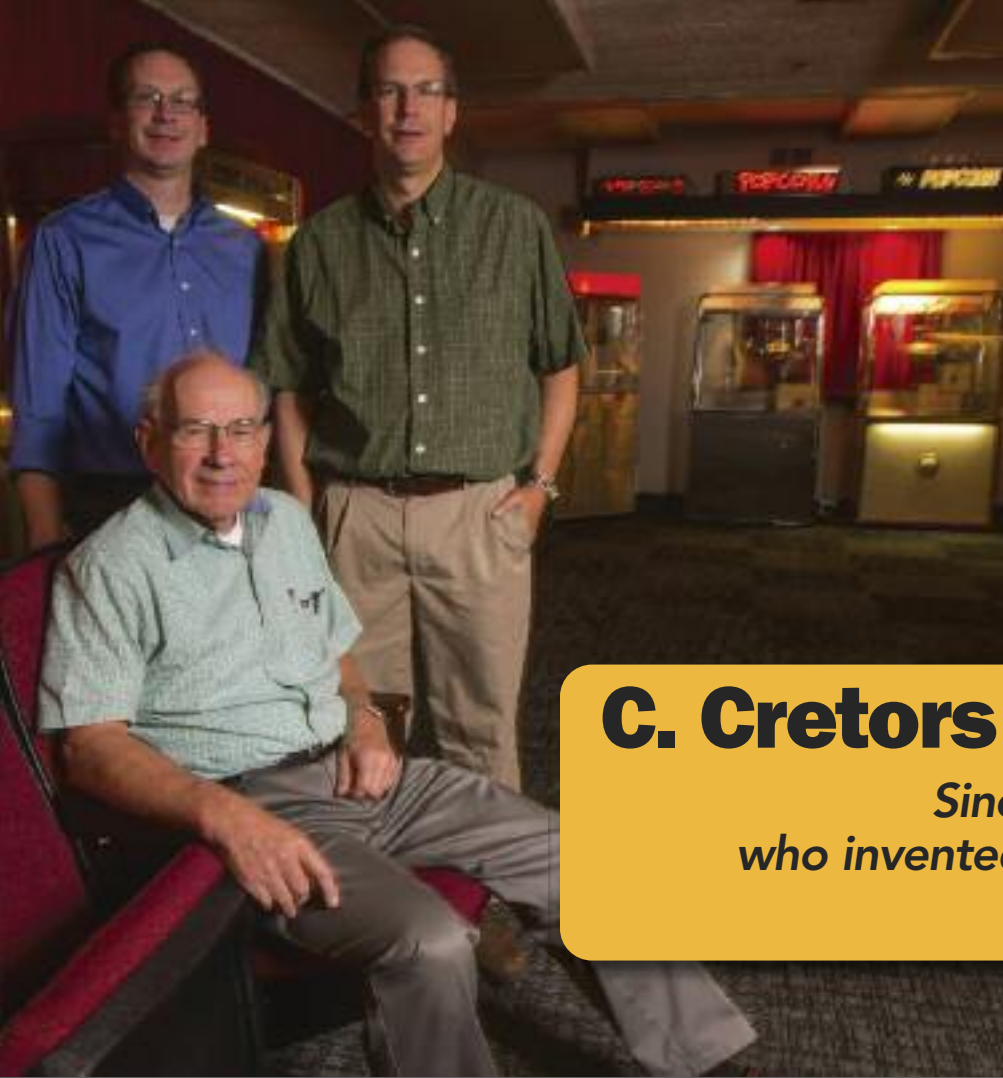
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A photograph of three men standing in front of a vintage wooden peanut cart. The cart has a sign that reads "FRESH ROASTED PEANUTS". The man on the left is wearing a green shirt and khaki pants. The man in the middle is wearing a light blue shirt and is standing behind the cart. The man on the right is wearing a blue shirt and dark pants. The cart is decorated with lights and has a large wooden wheel in the foreground.

**IMA MEMBER PROFILE:
C. Cretors & Company
Common tax opportunities
and challenges for
Illinois manufacturers**



IMA MEMBER PROFILE:
C. Cretors & Company is a family business . . . pictured (from left) are Andrew Cretors, Charles "Bud" Cretors and Charlie Cretors (seated)

C. Cretors & Company

Since 1885 . . . the people who invented the popcorn machine

By Dan Naumovich

The marriage of popcorn and movies has been such a harmonious and enduring relationship that most people have never even considered how the two got together in the first place. As is usually the case in these situations, there is a fascinating story of how they met. It's a tale of innovation, circumstances and an Illinois-based manufacturer.

When movie theaters first began popping up in the early 1900s, their proprietors had to decide how they wanted to present themselves to the public. At the time, theaters were the home of either fine arts performances or bawdy burlesque shows. Deciding that they would rather be associated with the former, they went for a more dignified atmosphere, one that didn't include the selling of concessions.

Over time, the movie houses proved quite popular and ticket holders waited in long lines on the sidewalk. Industrious street vendors, selling what was still a novel snack at the time, rolled up with their popcorn carts to feed the theatergoers while they waited for the doors to

open. Years later, the movie proprietors decided to take over this attractive revenue stream and purchased their own poppers. And all throughout the world, they are still doing so to this day.

Andrew Cretors knows the story well. His great, great grandfather, Charles Cretors, founded C. Cretors & Company in 1885. He also invented those poppers that brought popcorn to the masses. Today, Andrew serves as president, having taken over for his father, Charlie Cretors, in 2006. His brother, Charles "Bud" Cretors and sister, Beth Youdell, are also involved in the business. Charlie said that keeping things in the family has been a key to their success.

"This is especially true in the export business. Most of the older cultures of the world see family as very important. The fact that our family has continued to run the business, rather than cash in on it, is respected. People also like to have a face. If you have a complaint with General Motors, there is no Mr. General Motors to speak to. You can, however, speak to Mr. Cretors," he said.

Similar to the Chicago Bears, the Cretors franchise originally hailed from downstate Decatur before moving up north and hitting it big. Not only did Charles Cretors invent the first commercial popcorn popper, a steam-powered machine, but he also came up with the process of popping the corn in oil. This resulted in more even cooking temperatures and more flavorful popcorn.

In 1893, Charles introduced his product to the public at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, where the smell of buttered popcorn drew much attention his way. At the turn of the century his company invented a horse-drawn popcorn wagon and in the following decade designed poppers that were powered by electricity. When the Depression hit in the 1930s, the cheap entertainment offered by movies created a boom not just for theater owners, but for the Cretors Company as well.

"That was the market we grew up in and that's where a lot of our sales throughout the years have come from. Every major movie theater chain in the U.S. and pretty



When C. Cretors & Company was just getting started, they used the above apparatus to entice customers to try their new popcorn snack.

much throughout the whole world has had a machine from us," Andrew said.

Anyone today who has ever volunteered to work the concession stand at one of their child's sporting events has most likely operated a Cretors machine. In addition to the popcorn poppers, the company manufactures other staples of the trade such as cotton candy makers, hot dog cookers, nacho cheese dispensers, and snow cone shavers. Cretors also provides equipment to commercial food producers. Intersnack, Frito-Lay and MOM Brands (formerly, Malt-O-Meal Company) are among its industrial clients.

While the company manufactures and sells concession equipment, what the customer is really buying is an opportunity. Whether it's a school, a candy shop, a movie theater or a giant food manufacturer, the customer views the Cretors' products as a means of generating revenue.

"It's been recognized since the days of my great, great grandfather that people buy our equipment to make money. And when you think about it, they're really buying a promise for their investment. So it's extremely important to us that the machines perform well over time," Andrew Cretors said.

As domestic manufacturing has continued to move overseas, Cretors has taken advantage of their position as an "American Made" company.

"We put a Made in America sticker on every box that goes out, unless it's going out to parts of the world where they may not want that," Andrew said.

As an international company and the leader in their market, Andrew said that one of the biggest chal-

lenges that they currently face is simply keeping up with demand. Still, they are keeping an eye on foreign competition.

"We've seen in other markets where the foreign competition initially offers poor quality, but then they stick with it and start to improve. So we're cautiously watching our competitors to see if they improve enough to where it would make it difficult for us," he said.

At home, one of the challenges the company faces is finding workers with the necessary experience and expertise to operate in a manufacturing environment.

"There's a lack of skilled labor. We need to find people who can put our stuff together. They need to be able to read wiring diagrams. They need to be able to operate a lathe and know how to cut metal," Andre said.

In terms of the current business environment for manufacturers, Andrew feels that the state is making efforts to create favorable conditions. He said that his company has faced challenges in maneuvering through the red tape when attempting to attain certain incentives being offered and he thinks the manufacturing industry as a whole would be better served if the availability of such incentives were better communicated. That said, Andrew admits to not being very politically involved. That is why he values the company's membership in the IMA.

"The voice that IMA provides up the chain and into the political arena is huge. In the grand scheme of

things, we're not that big of a company. We don't have lobbyists and lawyers and PR companies out there advocating for us, so an organization like IMA lets us leverage our company into a much larger voice," he said.

C. Cretors & Company has been a member of the IMA since 1940. Having an association that specifically addresses the needs of manufacturers has also proved beneficial over the years.

"The IMA has been beneficial from a benchmarking standpoint and a networking standpoint. It gives us the ability to speak to other people who are manufacturers. There are a lot of other peer groups out there, but sometimes if you're the only manufacturer sitting around a table of service providers, it can be difficult to relate," he said.

C. Cretors & Company has been a leader in Illinois manufacturing for 128 years. Their long-term success can be attributed to many things — chief among them a commitment to quality and the consistency that results from remaining a family-run business. Asked for his take on why they have remained so strong for so many years, Charlie credits a simple approach:

"Probably just by being direct and honest with customers and employees." ■

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C. Cretors & Company employee Danny Sotelo assembles a popcorn machine at the company's manufacturing facility.

