

When We Were Young and Unafraid:

The Creation of a Continuing Education Business

David and Vicky Crane

We are often asked how we ever got started in this business, Dental Seminars & Symposia. For you, for this 30th Anniversary Hawaiian Dental Forum, here's the story . . . at least a tongue-in-cheek version of it.



In 1980 we married, joined our six children (three each - five girls and one boy - all within a six-year age range) into a blended family, ran a springing-heifer farm, began presenting our dental forums, and continued on with life as usual. David had a full-time private dental practice in Chippewa Falls, which he entered the day his grandfather, Dr. Leon Howard Dorland, retired.

David was a committed pilot with the Chippewa division of the Civil Air Patrol. He was also founder of the Society for Energy Conservation in Chippewa Falls, an educational organization. When he built his current office in 1976, it was the first building in Chippewa Falls built to the energy standards that had recently been developed by the University of Saskatchewan. In 1979 he bought an 80-acre farm (won't the kids just love it? NOOOO!), completely gutted the farmhouse, and rebuilt it according to the highest energy standards possible for a rebuilt home, incorporating solar power. He rented additional land and had 110 acres under plow and 70 head of livestock, along with chickens, a goat, a buffalo, a dog, cats, and bats in the attic. Then in the early eighties he and a friend started a computer business to sell hardware and software to dentists and physicians. His interest in technology continues today.

I (Vicky) was a "displaced homemaker" with no education beyond high school, minimal work experience and three daughters to support. After a disappointing job search, I followed the advice of a street-smart friend. Since I wasn't qualified for anything, he suggested, I should take a Civil Service test and work for the government. I aced a statewide exam and accepted a position assisting the unemployed (irony intended). I also began taking night classes at the local university. After my first year, my employer, DILHR - Job Service, allowed me to work part-time fall semesters (taking overloads at the university, 18-21 credits) and work overtime spring semesters when the unemployment load was higher (taking night courses, 6 credits). At the time of our marriage, I had one year remaining of my bachelor's program, which I earned Summa Cum Laude.

So . . . the players, the zeitgeist, and the seminars.

Two primary motives intersected that inspired us to begin the seminar business. First, we looked for vacation opportunities for our family which we could integrate with continuing education for David. His practice represented the cutting-edge of his



profession combined with the work ethic and public service he'd learned from his grandfather, a man who served as a dentist in WWI and bartered dentistry for chickens and lawn-mowing during the Depression. David amassed some of the highest annual continuing education credits of any dentist in Wisconsin. He had recently studied at the Shealy Pain Clinic Institute and taken courses throughout the nation on acupuncture and biofeedback for dentists. But when we looked for courses we could combine with family vacations, we did not find much.

Second, David was often frustrated with the organization or lack thereof of many of the seminars and workshops he attended. He continually talked of an organizational structure that would "work" professionally and practically for the dentists attending. At the same time he was increasingly

being asked to put on programs himself. As he gained experience and reputation as a presenter, we got the bright idea: "Hey! We'll put on programs ourselves. The kind of programs we would like to attend."

So Dental Seminars & Symposia was born. We joined the Chicago Association of Direct Marketing and were charter members of CHEXPO, an organization of continuing education providers for healthcare professionals. We began with one winter program, a week-long "forum" style workshop on Maui, and one summer program, a similar week-long workshop at Lakeswoods Resort near Cable in northern Wisconsin. Being the business neophytes we were, we greatly overestimated the effectiveness of direct-marketing and of our own appeal. Twelve dentists attended our first Maui program, God rest their souls. The forum was held in the board room of the Royal Lahaina Resort. One dentist (from Chicago) attended our first Lakewoods program. We did inform him of the lack of enthusiasm for our program and offer him his money back. But he was eager to attend. Our families spent a delightful week together and we adults spent four mornings a week in meetings.



Within a few years our meetings had successfully filled the niche that had first concerned us. Our numbers grew in both Hawaii and northern Wisconsin and our reputation for professional, couple and family-friendly programs became established. Beyond our two annual programs

we marketed and facilitated week-end programs in locations such as Orlando, Nashville, Minneapolis, and Las Vegas. In our enthusiasm, we decided to invite participants to join us in a health care expedition to China. In 1981 and 1982 we led three such expeditions on 21 day visits to China with stops in Hong Kong and Japan. We cherish the experience and memories of those trips to China before her modernization.

In 1984 we acceded to a dear relative's oft-repeated request to visit him in Bolivia and see "his Bolivia". Father Nicholas (Gordon) Fritz was a Maryknoll

missionary in Bolivia for 52 years. We fell headlong in love with the children we visited in orphanages and street shelters. And so began another phase and branch of our work, traveling to Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Paraguay, Brazil, Argentina, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador. Working with Rotary, government groups, business groups, and educators, we established six dental clinics in Bolivia and five in Nicaragua. All are primarily self-sustaining at this time. We are now working with Rotary on water projects in Bolivian villages.

Our Hawaiian programs have survived economic downturns and two major hurricanes. We've met many extraordinary individuals and made lifelong friends. Executives and staff at our hotels often tell us how much they enjoy our groups because 1) they're consistent and reliable and 2) the participants are "nice", "polite", "real people". Our speakers enjoy the casualness of the meetings, the questions they receive from participants, and the one-on-one discussions they are able to have with doctors after the morning and during the week.

As for us, we both enjoy our work and neither of us is ready to retire. Our children have all grown up and we LIKE the people they've become! And we've got ten grandchildren. David has been flying for almost 50 years and has started another half-dozen companies, at least. I earned a master's degree, have taught for decades, and served as President of the Wisconsin Council on Family Relations. We are blessed beyond our expectations. And we are deeply grateful to those of you who have supported our educational endeavor over the years.

Thank you.

David and Vicky



David and Vicky Crane with Chancellor Levin-Stankevich, receiving Lifetime Excellence Award from UWEC Alumni Association, December, 2006 for over 25 years of humanitarian service in Latin America.