

EXECUTIVE Q&A WITH JOHN CRESAP

Former wholesaler in beer market welcomes new foundation role

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John Cresap's business card bears the image of an eagle taking flight. It's an apt logo for the Cresap Family Foundation, which took flight four years ago when brewer Anheuser-Busch, with its classic eagle trademark, bought the family's 43-year-old beer business.

The Cresap family — Denny and Gail Cresap, and their only child, John — took some of the proceeds from the \$182 million sale to launch the foundation, which John Cresap heads along with Cresap Capital LLC.

"We want to give back to the communities across the 27 counties in which we 'distributed,'" John Cresap said.

In three years of grant-making, the foundation has awarded \$2.5 million, including \$1.3 million this year alone. Statewide beneficiaries range from health care to pre-kindergarten education organizations and include Moore tornado relief, Positive Tomorrows and the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma.

Under Cresap Capital, Cresap, among other things, oversees a 15,000-acre, family cattle ranch north of Nowata, a 10-acre high-end residential development at Grand Lake, and some home building in Edmond.

From his offices at 1024 E. Britton, Cresap, 51, recently sat down with *The Oklahoman* to talk about his life and career. This is an edited transcript:

Q: You were 4 when your father became a beer wholesaler in Bartlesville in 1968. Tell us about the early days of the family business.

A: Before moving to Bartlesville, we lived two years in Pawhuska where my Dad had a Ford dealership. He paid some \$17,000 for the Bartlesville Anheuser-Busch distributorship, which originally covered three counties: Washington, Nowata and Osage. There was only one truck and one employee; my mom kept the books and we sold about 30,000 cases per year.

When we sold the business in 2011, we — Premium Beers of Oklahoma — employed 370 with offices in Lawton, Ardmore and Oklahoma City. We had 300 vehicles, covered 27 counties and sold 10.5 million cases per year. We had 3,000 customers — everything from 7-Eleven and Homeland stores to Chili's restaurants, and ranked 13th among Anheuser-Busch's 600 beer distributorships. We sold more beer here than Miami, New Orleans or Kansas City.

Q: How'd you spend your childhood?

A: Working in the family business. When I was young, I'd play hide-and-seek among the beer cases. In junior high, I cleaned floors and toilets, and high school did everything from sales and marketing to cleaning draft lines. Pretty much every weekend year-round, we'd go to Grand Lake, where my mom's parents had a home and we still do. For two summers during high school, my parents sent me on one-month European group tours — first to Italy, France, Belgium and Germany and the next year to Egypt and Israel. Those trips opened my eyes that



A former beer wholesaler, John Cresap now oversees his family's foundation, which has awarded \$2.5 million in grants to organizations statewide, including \$1.3 million this year alone. (PHOTO BY PAUL HELLSTERN, THE OKLAHOMAN)

PERSONALLY SPEAKING

Positions: president, Cresap Family Foundation and Cresap Capital LLC

Birth date/childhood home: Aug. 17, 1964/Bartlesville

Education: College of Santa Fe, bachelor's in business administration

Partner: Cody Sutton, Dallas friends introduced them 15 years ago.

Pets: two Bernese Mountain dogs and one cat

Residence: He lives on 50 acres in northeast Oklahoma City.

Professional/community involvement: He is a member of the Young Presidents Organization and dedicates time to several local social organizations.

Pastimes: Cheering on the Thunder basketball and Sooner football teams, traveling, art collecting, boating on Grand Lake, scuba diving in the Cayman Islands and spending time with family.

there's a whole world out there, and I wanted to be a part of it.

Q: Why'd you choose the College of Santa Fe for college?

A: I always knew I was going to run the family business, and I wanted to live somewhere other than Oklahoma. I also liked to snow ski. As an upper-classman, I attended Trinity in San Antonio because my aunt was on the board there, but I returned to the College of Santa Fe. After graduation, I worked two years in marketing for a Denver brewery of Anheuser-Busch. It was a great experience to understand what a good brewer wants from a good wholesaler.

Q: Once you joined the family business, what roles did you hold?

A: When my dad bought the distributorship in Ardmore in '88, he immediately put me in charge. It was challenging. Not only was I the owner's son, but I was 24 and the youngest among 20 employees; there were people twice my age. And of course when you buy a company, there's always things you want to change.

I leased a condo in downtown Ardmore for five years. In '93, I moved

to Lawton, where I worked five years in that distributorship. But from '94 on, I spent my weekends in Oklahoma City, where I'd bought a home in Heritage Hills. Then, in 1999, the year my dad retired, we bought the Oklahoma City distributorship. We also had Norman, Tecumseh and Guthrie, and eventually Clinton and Altus. Every few years, we'd buy more businesses or add labels like Corona and Monster Energy Drink. When we first started it was only Bud and Miller. I'd periodically get on a beer truck to help deliver beer on our biggest holiday weekends July 4, Memorial and Labor Day. I'd dress as a driver and ask customers' what was on their minds; kind of like the TV show "Undercover Boss."

Q: Do you even like beer?

A: I do. I'm loyal to the domestics. Bud brought us to the party. It's who we were, and we also knew the Busch family. I like Michelob Ultra, Corona and Goose Island.

Q: You're an avid world traveler. Where have you been?

A: I've probably seen 45 to 50 countries. This year, I visited seven including Croatia, Italy, France and

Peru — where I climbed the 9,000-foot Machu Picchu. Over Christmas, I'm going to Cuba now that it's opened up. In all my travels, I was most

moved when I visited southern Africa — including Malawi, Zimbabwe and South Africa. Along with going on a safari, I brought little toys from Target to

hand out to the children. You should've seen their faces light up. They're the happiest people in the world. They don't realize what they don't have.

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