



## **IAAS Walks of Life 2012**

### **Edward F. Crawford**

When Edward F. Crawford was growing up in Cleveland Heights in the 1950s, he frequently drove down Liberty Boulevard, passing the magnificent Irish Cultural Garden. Four years ago, he happened to drive the same route and was shocked by what he saw. The garden had fallen into disrepair and was no longer the magnificent attraction he remembered.

The following week, Crawford returned to the garden with a few friends. They knew they had to do something. What started out as a three-year project morphed into a four-year mission costing more than \$400,000. The resulting renovation has returned the site into a beautiful garden tribute to earlier generations and artists.

The centerpiece of the renovated garden is a 6 ½ ton granite recirculating fountain built in Ireland to replicate in intricate detail the centuries-old fountain standing in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. Crawford said he first saw the fountain during a business trip to Ireland and knew replicating it in the Irish Cultural Garden would be a perfect tribute to Cleveland's Irish community.

Crawford began his career as a salesman for Inland Steel. He was attending night school at John Carroll University at the time, but dropped out after 2½ years to launch his own business, Cleveland Steel Container, in 1962, to produce paint cans for the paint industry. Two years later, he created the Crawford Group as a family enterprise investing in companies. By 1969, the Small Business Administration selected him as Ohio Small Businessman of the Year. He also was runner up for the national award.

That early start as an entrepreneur launched him into a career with many successes. In 1992 he sold Kay Home Products, a company named after his mother, Kay Crawford, to Park-Ohio Industries. As a result of the sale, he became a major shareholder and chairman and chief executive officer. At the time, Park-Ohio was doing about \$60 million in sales. Under his leadership, the company's sales have risen to \$1.3 billion.

Crawford said running the family-owned Crawford Group while chief executive of publicly owned Park-Ohio Industries gives him the ability to operate in both the public and private sectors. He said he has succeeded in building both enterprises by focusing on the acquisition of underachieving companies and promoting promising young leaders into supervisory positions to improve the acquired company's sales and profits. This ability to see unrecognized opportunities in business is what led him to his vision of returning the Irish Cultural Garden to its magnificent setting.

Crawford is an avid basketball player and plays on an AAU National Seniors Basketball Team out of Dallas. For 26 years, he played three times a week at the Cleveland Athletic Club and since its closing, now plays twice a week at Cuyahoga Community College.

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