

Generations: The Cote Corporation

Oct 1, 2017



51 years of service to the community

by Michael Krapovicky

The Cote Corporation has been in operation for 51 years, and continues to be a versatile, dynamic entity in today's fluctuating industrial market. Armand and his wife Carmen Cote founded the company in 1966 to support local contractors with crane and rigging service. The Cote Corporation has expanded consistently over time, purchasing the Pete Bolduc Company in 1974, then the property on 2980 Hotel Road, which now has a 40,000 square-foot storage and office complex.



Family roots: 6 year old Armand with his dad and uncles

Dan Cote Sr., treasurer, CEO, and co-owner of the Cote Corporation, described the merits of the family-based company.

"As 3rd generation company, with a 4th generation on the way, we are stakeholders in not just the

company, but our name, and our reputation as a quality service provider,” Dan Sr. said. “We take a lot of pride in what we do.”

How it began

Armand Cote, now 88, is still the president, figurehead and elder statesman of the company he created.

“I was brought up during the Depression, and had an eighth-grade education,” Armand stated with deliberation. “I worked for companies in Lewiston as a laborer, and worked myself up to a truck driver. The foreman saw I was a willing worker, and gave me the chance to operate a bulldozer, then a backhoe, then I eventually became a crane operator. I worked for Callahan Brothers in Mechanic Falls for 13 years, building bridges mostly along 95.”



Armand Cote, pictured with his first crane

The idea to form Cote Crane was borne out of necessity. “At the time in 1966, there were only a few cranes in the area.” recalled Armand. “I purchased a small crane to rent, and it grew from there. My three sons learned how to operate all the Cote Crane and Rigging machinery between schooling, and came back here to work full-time when they were done.”

Dan Gagne has worked for Cote Corporation for 26 years, currently as Controller. “One of the biggest things historically in Cote Corporation’s development would be Dan Sr., Ron and Paul Cote, Armand’s sons, coming into the business in different departments and areas, allowing us to grow,” said Gagne. “When Daniel, Dan’s son, came on board, he brought new technologies, knowledge, new information to the company. He took the skill-set of the previous generation and applied his experience to the business, giving us ways of expanding into markets we wouldn’t have considered in the past.”

Dan Sr. was a crane operator, rigger, and millwright before becoming CEO, and recounts his family’s expanding role through the company. “My brother Ron was a rigger, then came into the office, where he became a dispatcher. He retired 5 years ago as the Vice President of Operations. My brother Paul was involved with maintenance, as a mechanic, working his way

up to Mechanics Supervisor. Armand, my dad, was always hands-on in the field, making things happen out there, keeping things in line. It's very important to know that this is how we got to where we are today."

Daniel Cote Jr., Dan's son, is a graduate of Clarkson University with a degree in engineering. "After I saw how the rest of the world runs, it certainly gave me a deep appreciation for what I had back home." Daniel said. "I had travelled to New York and Massachusetts and worked for 5 years in high-tech industries, and was very happy afterwards to return to Maine and join my family here."

"Taking pride in what you do is very easily lost in many industries," Daniel continued. "Everything we do here is really hard work; we go out and physically make things happen, operating a crane, trucking, moving heavy machinery. Finding people who are willing to do that is harder and harder. Most of the people we work for are based here in Central Maine, and that's where we try to focus, being the best in the state of Maine. We have very good project managers and project foremen. All we have to sell is a service; it's important to have the right people to make that happen, and we are fortunate to have that. We're very proud of our team here, and because of them we've had a good level of success."

"We are in a very defined, niche market," Gagne explained. "There isn't anybody out there that does what Cote Corporation does, as a whole. Although there is some competition out there that can handle some aspects of a project, companies in a wide variety of industries are generally finding us the best all-around solution. We treat all of the equipment- whether it's a small item or large heavy value item- with care and consideration, and it makes a difference to our customers."

Maine family ties

Being the best in Maine was the driving force of The Cote Corporation's business model, not wishing to expand too deeply into out-of-state markets, because of a strong family-first mentality. Dan Sr. recalled the impetus of this strategy.



51 YEARS OF LEADERSHIP:
Dan Cote Jr, Dan Cote Sr, Armand Cote,
& Dan Gagne

“My dad used to leave with a suitcase Monday morning and come back Friday, week in and week out, year in and year out,” said Dan Sr. “Between him and my mom, Carmen, they decided with four rambunctious kids running around, it was

time to regroup, and focus more on being at home.”



“My experience with the Cote Corporation is that they realize that the employees are the ones that make the company work,” Daniel recounted. “We treat them all as family, with a lot of respect, and try to keep in mind the things that are important to them. We try to make it possible

to take care of their family needs, desires and issues, as often as we can, to make it easy for someone with a family to work here. That’s the kind of stable people we want.”

“We are very conscious of our business decisions, as to what’s good for our employees and their happiness in the long run,” Daniel continued. “Lots of companies in our industry send people off on long contracts without regard for family life; and while that might be more lucrative in the short term, it’s not the best for keeping valuable people. Giving them the opportunity to have a stable, happy family life; because mom or dad can go home every night, really makes a big difference.”

The Cote Corporation is built upon a core set of specialized, hard-working individuals. Many of their employees are second- and even third-generation, all with a deep and lasting commitment to the company.

“Our employees are willing to recommend their work experience to someone they care about; how it’s been very positive,” Daniel said. “That’s how we’ve often ended up with members of the same family working here. The Cote Corporation has a lot of longevity with regards to employees, which is rare in this field, very much a blue-collar industry. Having very little turnover helps with our trade, which is quite uncommon. We are focused on developing teachers for the next generation of Cote Corporation employees and passing along the trade. It really helped our company’s success; being able to hold on to our valued employees.”



“We live in Maine, which in relation to a lot of regions is a very small economy- so our work opportunities are ever-changing.” said Daniel. “Some years we may do a lot of work for the communications industry; the next, the power industry, or paper mills. This adaptability is what has really helped us succeed for over 50 years. We cover the entire state of Maine, geographically. So we have jobs nine, ten hours away at times, which is necessary to sustain our business. Many times, other independent contractors we’ve worked alongside recommend our services to companies in other geographical areas, because they are pleased and impressed with us. That said, when asked to send our team out of state for weeks, months at a time, we generally will turn down the opportunity.”

“We’d estimate 25 percent of our business is right here,” Dan Sr. surmised. “Back in the ‘60s and early ‘70s, 60 percent of our customer base was in Lewiston/Auburn. We’ve seen manufacturing decline over the years; most of the large shoe and textile plants that were a big source of our clientele are gone. However, we’ve found other opportunities in markets in LA in communications, retail, and in the medical field.”

“When there were a few big customers in town such as the shoe mills, we had positive interactions with the managers and employees that fanned out as these folks found work elsewhere,” Daniel said. “As their horizons have expanded, it’s given us the opportunity to expand along with them, while still keeping ties with the original companies. It’s been an

interesting dynamic how we've been able to establish and grow our customer base throughout the changing business climate."

A Good Corporate Citizen

"The Cote Corporation is really trying to be the best at what we do, and having more and more of the market share here in Maine." Daniel attests. "To be the best is how we are going to grow. We're really happy and comfortable living and thriving here, pushing to be the best crane and rigging company in the state of Maine. Good things will happen if we focus on doing that. We don't have eyes on expanding into New York or Massachusetts; we're looking at expanding internally. We hoping to be a bigger and bigger part of the industries we currently support; finding new industries in Maine to support is what we think is the best way to grow."



"What we attempt to do is be a good corporate citizen," Dan Gagne noted. "We are part of the Auburn Business Association and the Chamber of Commerce. We participate as much as possible with the schools' Project Graduation. We support events such as the Liberty Festival. Dan Cote Sr. was the president of the Auburn Business Association for a number of years, as well as a member of various local committees and organizations. Dan Cote Jr. was the Associated Builders and Contractors' director at one time. We take a strong part in the community as much as

possible, while still maintaining a good focus on our own business."

"Economic growth in Lewiston/Auburn is growth for Cote Crane and Rigging," espoused Daniel. "Our family has always invested a lot of time in trying to help Lewiston/Auburn expand. Growth will attract more and more to our community, and in turn create more opportunities for business for us. I know my dad has always been really generous with his time; and my grandfather, Mr. Gagne, and my uncles always took a lot of time to help the community grow because they knew that was what was best for the company in the long run."

"I don't think we go a week without helping some charitable cause either financially, through promotion, or offering services at a discount for the schools, hospitals, charitable organizations- anything we can do to make things easier for them to get things done," adds Daniel.

"We have been involved in the Moxie Parade in Lisbon, we've installed Christmas trees in Lewiston and Auburn, and assisted in the transportation and installation of the Veterans Memorial Park monument project," said Dan Sr., listing the Cote Corporation's extensive work for many charitable institutions. "We've raised money or done work at little to no cost for folks such as Museum LA, (Good Shepherd) Food Bank, and the Catholic Diocese. We've had a banner on our building promoting The House in The Woods, (a retreat for veterans, active servicemen and women, and their families to share challenges they may face after serving in the military – houseinthewoods.org). It's one of the many organizations in which we take a special interest."

For their substantial community service, The Cote Corporation has received Museum L/A's Business Support award, The Lewiston-Auburn Economic Growth Council's Business of the Year award, and the Department of the Navy's PWD Maine Safety Award.

"I have a hat I wear; the logo on it is 'L/A – It's Happening Here,'" exulted Dan Sr. "It is 'Happening Here' in Lewiston/Auburn – with everybody helping it happen. We like to think we're a part of that."

The Cote Corporation 2980 Hotel Road, Auburn, 1-800-696-6282 www.cotecrane.com