

## Building ties to customers

**Crown Ace Hardware prides itself on cultivating relationships with surrounding homeowners, having tricky-to-find replacement parts.**

By Sarah Peters

As beautiful as homes are in Newport Beach, it can be incredibly daunting to find replacement parts for that turn-of-the-century plumbing.

Crown Ace Hardware has made this its specialty. Having grown and expanded in the community for more than 60 years, the small hardware chain has developed a reputation for customer service and carrying those hard-to-find parts and fixtures for older homes.

"What we know is our customers," said Mark Schulein, Crown Ace Hardware president. "We are very community centric."

Corona del Mar, the site of the first Crown Ace in 1949, is just one of the communities the chain is located. Other locations are Costa Mesa, Irvine, Anaheim Hills and others throughout Southern California and Arizona. Crown Ace's corporate headquarters is located in Huntington Beach.

The East Coast Highway store, once just 5,000 square feet, expanded over the years to 8,300 square feet and two floors of retail space.

With most of the company's 17 stores ranging between 6,500 and 15,000 square feet, the compact stores could be easily swallowed inside a big-box chain like Home Depot.

However, Crown Ace makes the most of its space by localizing the inventory to the surrounding community — a major convenience for homeowners in areas such as Newport Beach, where many homes date back to the turn of the 20th century, Schulein said.

The company also prides itself on building long-term customer relationships, which is another thing often lacking from the mammoth hardware warehouses, he said.

"The culture of our company is based on being a resource to the community," Schulein said. "We want to be the most helpful hardware store on the planet."

That ambitious mission began with Schulein's father, Jeff Schulein, who bought the original mom-and-pop hardware store in 1974 after falling in love with coastal Newport Beach.

Jeff Schulein ran the store for decades before handing the reins over to his son, who now continues the same formula of cultivating helpful employees and meeting customer expectations.

"I'm very fortunate that I have amazing parents who are both amazing role models," Schulein said. "The culture of the company is based on them."



Mark Schulein stands at the original Crown Ace Hardware store in Corona del Mar. The Huntington Beach-based hardware store chain now has 17 locations throughout Southern California and into Arizona. (Don Leach, Daily Pilot / February 13, 2012)



Mark Schulein, president, stands at the original Crown Ace Hardware store in Corona del Mar. The story begins with Schulein's father, Jeff Schulein, who bought the original mom-and-pop hardware store in 1974 after falling in love with coastal Newport Beach. Jeff Schulein ran the store for decades before handing the reins over to his son.