



# Company History

## Changing the Landscape for Growers

Ariens Company began in 1933 when Henry Ariens and his three sons – Steve, Leon and Francis – worked to develop the first American-made rotary tiller. At a time when other manufacturers were experimenting with imported tillers, Ariens Company was conducting educational programs to teach commercial growers, nurserymen and landscapers how the new Ariens Model A Tiller, powered with an air-cooled engine, “plows as it discs as it harrows.”

It took the Ariens family many years of experimentation, education and perseverance before rotary tilling became accepted as a proven agricultural tool. Many commercial tiller models followed, all aimed at improving output for vegetable growers around the country. Ariens Company introduced the more compact Model B Tiller, the Roller-Tiller, the Multi-Tiller Tractor Tiller, the Jitterbug single-row front rotary tiller and the Tillivator RC for celery growers in Florida.

By 1940, Ariens Company tillers were well established with greenhouse vegetable growers in Michigan and Ohio. The tillers ensured better soil conditions for improved plant growth and more abundant harvests. Tillers also eliminated hand spading and the “old-fashioned” horse-and-plow operation.

During the 1940s, the company introduced the Aggmixer to make soil, cement and blacktop runways for secondary airports and military training bases. This product, along with military contracts for the U.S. Navy, Army and Air Force, helped maintain the company through the war years. In 1943, Ariens Company received the U.S. Army Ordinance Award for making 300 75-millimeter shell buggies on short notice. After World War II, Ariens retooled its facility, increasing plant size to 6,250 sq ft.

In the late '40s and early '50s, Ariens responded to the need for greater food production with the invention and development of the multi-row Tillivator, a power take-off unit for tractors cultivating from four to sixteen rows at a time.

## Post-War Residential Boom

The Gardeneer Tiller, introduced in 1950, included a rotary tiller, sickle bar and 25” lawn mower. The Yardster, introduced in 1952, included a Sno-Thro® attachment. In retrospect, both of these products would provide a glimpse into the company that would later take shape.

When Henry Ariens died in 1956, his three sons kept his legacy alive. Steve was President & Sales Manager of the company, Leon remained Vice President & Treasurer and Francis managed the

factory and Customer Service Division. He would later create the Ariens service school for lawn and garden dealers and their service technicians.

1958 was a landmark year for new products with the introduction of the Jet Tiller and the Imperial Riding Mower. This marked a new era of residential mowing products for the company. The Imperial would be followed by the Fairway Riding Mower, the Manorway Tractor and the 21-inch Peacemaker Lawn Mower. The Rocket Tiller and Sno-Thro® were introduced in 1960, also targeting consumers. Production of commercial agricultural equipment had dwindled by the late 1950s and in 1968, Ariens Company produced the last piece of farm equipment, the Hydro-Spacer.

## No Business Like Snow Business

Ariens Company has branched into many product development projects over the course of its history. One of the most enduring and successful products has been the Ariens Sno-Thro®.

Ariens Company entered the snow thrower market at the urging of an Ariens distributor in the Northeast who wanted a two-stage snow thrower for home snow removal. Product design began on December 15, 1959, and by March of 1960, a prototype was completed. Test models were demonstrated to three distributors in the Snow Belt with widespread approval. It was July 1960 when the company started production and 1,856 units were produced in the introductory season.

By the late 1970s, Ariens reached annual production as high as 100,000 machines. In November 2005, the company produced its milestone 2 millionth Sno-Thro® machine. Today, Ariens Sno-Thro is the leading snowthrower brand worldwide with distribution in the US, Canada and Europe. The company continues to introduce new models including the first all-electric Amp™ snowthrower launched in 2011.

## Acquisitions for the Future

Steve Ariens led the company until 1969 when his son, Michael Ariens, became Company President. Under Mike's leadership, Ariens Company experienced significant growth, facility expansions and the introduction of many new lawn & garden and outdoor power equipment products. He also initiated several acquisitions including the Sperry New Holland Lawn and Garden Tractor line, Edko Manufacturing and Promark Company.

The most significant of these manufacturer acquisitions occurred in 1982, when Ariens Company purchased Gravely Company, a

North Carolina lawn and garden tractor manufacturer. Like Henry Ariens, Benjamin Franklin Gravely was an early inventor of combustion-powered garden equipment. He received his first patent for the Gravely Motor Plow in 1916 and his company was incorporated in 1922. It seemed fitting these two pioneers in the outdoor power equipment industry would someday have their companies under the same management.

In 1995, Ariens acquired Stens Corporation, an aftermarket parts supplier. This marked a new type of growth opportunity for Ariens. The company had always supplied parts for its own brands of equipment, but the Stens acquisition allowed Ariens to supply replacement parts to dealers for hundreds of different brands that make up the outdoor power equipment market.

As part of Ariens Company, the Stens catalog has grown to feature products that fit over 20,000 applications. Through the years, Stens has created a distribution network of warehouses and distributors to enable it to provide next-day service to more than 90 percent of the U.S. In 2007, Stens acquired the Bynorm group of companies, one of Australia's largest distributors of replacement parts for the outdoor power equipment industry in that country.

## Repositioning and Growth

In 1998, company leadership transitioned to fourth-generation family member Dan Ariens who led the transition of Gravely® into a full-line, premium commercial brand of equipment for professional landscape contractors over the course of the next ten years. Through the mid-2000s, Gravely expanded with many new products in several categories including zero-turn, walk-behind, out-front and stand-on mowing equipment. The introduction of the Pro-Turn™ series of mowers in 2010 marked a milestone for Gravely in the commercial market. Gravely remains dealer-exclusive brand in order to provide the expert product support required by commercial landscape contractors, government purchasers and sports field maintenance personnel.

Under Dan's leadership, the company also made a transition to dealer-direct distribution and introduced Lean manufacturing principles for continuous efficiency improvement in operations. The company directly attributes its ability to remain solvent in the increasingly-competitive global marketplace to the contributions of employees using lean practices. A strong proponent of Lean manufacturing principles, he created a culture of continuous improvement that has resulted in the creation of world-class manufacturing facilities by Lean standards. He was recognized in 2007 with the Eli Whitney Productivity Award from the Society of Manufacturing Engineers (SME) and, along with other Ariens employees, is frequently tapped as a mentor by organizations promoting Lean leadership.

From 2006 through 2010 the company made several acquisitions including Locke Turf Company, National Mower, Kee Mower and Parker products for debris maintenance. In 2007, Ariens Company expanded its manufacturing capacity when it acquired the assets of the former Auburn Consolidated, Inc. (ACI) of Auburn, Neb., Key products and product features from ACI's EverRide and Great Dane brands were incorporated into the Gravely line of commercial mowing products. In 2010 Ariens Company acquired Countax Ltd. a ride-on mower manufacturer based in Oxfordshire, United Kingdom. This acquisition provided a manufacturing footprint for the company closer to European snow product customers. Another acquisition of Norwegian power equipment distributor, Søvde, helped the company expand further into the Scandinavian market.

The many acquisitions during this timeframe allowed the company to offer a new line up of products in the Chore Category to complement mowing and snow removal in all customer channels. Ariens also consolidated existing products with newly-acquired products in order to focus and build its core brands: Ariens®, Gravely®, Parker® and Countax®.

Over the same timeframe, the company completed facility upgrades and expansions at both Brillion, Wis. plants and the Stens headquarters in Jasper, Ind. to accommodate sales growth and expansion of new products. In 2007, the Ariens Foundation also provided funding for the Ariens Technology & Engineering Education Center at Brillion High School. The facility has become a national model for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education as well as a model for business-education partnerships.

## Core Values and Company Vision

Over the course of Ariens Company's history, many products have come and gone as markets changed and customers refined their needs. But Ariens continues to manufacture products with the same drive for durability that was evident back in Henry Ariens' garage.

Core American values have guided Ariens Company and the Ariens family throughout its history. In 1998, Dan Ariens took on the task of defining those values that create the Ariens culture. He selected five Company Core Values: Be Honest, Be Fair, Keep Our Commitments, Respect the Individual and Encourage Intellectual Curiosity. These are the values that inspired Henry Ariens and his sons in the early years and will continue to define the Ariens culture in the future.

Finally, he considered what the Ariens heritage really means for those employees who work at the company and the customers who purchase Ariens products. Ultimately, he summed it up with a very simple Vision Statement: Passionate People ... Astounded Customers.

