



Joseph O. Crane, Jr.

September 30, 1944 - December 21, 2025

In Loving Memory of Joe Crane

Joe Crane loved his family, horses, and rodeo. Joe was born and raised in the state of Indiana. He grew up with three brothers and one sister, (Jim, Dean, Jack, Connie) he was raised by a single mother who worked tirelessly to support her five children and was often at work more than at home. Though they were poor, Joe learned early that nothing came easily — and that if he wanted to move forward, he had to fight for it. That lesson shaped him for the rest of his life. Joe lived with a tenacity few could match.

As a boy, Joe developed a deep passion for horses and rodeo, and he decided early on that this was the only life he wanted. He made it his personal mission to be known as a cowboy by everyone who knew him and he most definitely was 100% cowboy.

After leaving school in the 8th grade, Joe enlisted in the U.S. Navy, where he became a member of the Underwater Demolition Team (UDT), the precursor to the Navy SEALs, and served during the Vietnam War. He rarely spoke positively about that time in his life and, upon returning home, famously burned his uniform, ready to leave that chapter behind.

Returning to civilian life, Joe immersed himself into rodeo across the Midwest.

He rode sale barn horses for various traders and eventually met his wife of 54 years, Cathy, while working in Lafayette, Indiana for her stepfather, Archie Pickett. Joe continued rodeoing — riding saddle bronc horses and bulls — while also working at racetracks.

When Joe and Cathy had two children, they moved to Pennsylvania so Joe could work year-round at Penn National Race Track and avoid constantly moving the family. For 17 years, Joe made his living between the First Frontier Circuit rodeos and the Penn National thoroughbred track.

At 54, Joe returned to Indiana for about 10 years to semi-retire and focus on raising bucking horses and bulls — another lifelong dream fulfilled.

In 2005, Joe and Cathy moved back to Pennsylvania primarily to help and spend time with their son as he built his business, Crane Thoroughbreds. Though mostly retired, Joe spent many years driving truck and trailer — doing pickups and drop-offs whenever needed — and stayed in that role for about 15 years until his health declined.

The greatest joy of Joe's final 14 years was his grandchildren.

He was an extraordinary grandfather. No matter what the grandkids were doing or where they were, Joe showed up. He went nearly every day just to spend a little time with them — even if it was only long enough to be seen and to let them know he was there.

Joe was known by many as a tough man — and he believed toughness was the best way to get through anything. He taught his children and grandchildren to be tough too. He never lost that fighting spirit, even at the very end. Among the last clear things he said were:

“I'm leaving whether you like it or not.”

“You gotta get tough and just get through it.”

Joe was also an unwavering optimist. He always believed things would get better and was always looking toward sunnier days. Even when times were hard or bones were broken, Joe could be heard saying:

“Aw, it’s just a bump in the road.”

“Don’t worry about it too much — it’s just a minor inconvenience.”

Those words defined him.

Joe Crane was a cowboy, a fighter, a husband, a father, and a grandfather — strong to the very end.

Tribute Wall

KB

“ I knew Joe for many years what a good friend he was. I cherish the good times we shared in the barn at Penn national. He was a true cowboy may he rest in peace love Karen beattie

Karen Beattie - December 31, 2025 at 03:19 PM

VR

“ First off my heartfelt sympathies for the crane family in the loss of their loved one, I met Joe when I came to Penn National race track 23 immediately became friends as I came from out west and was a cowboy and Joe was a cowboy too galloped horses together at pennplayed many a game of basketball at the “barn” in Lebanon, swapped many a story about life in general, Joe was a good man and fried RIP MY FRIEND AND GO REST HIGH ON THAT MOUNTAIN

vernon rings - December 31, 2025 at 11:07 AM

TF

“ Three Hills Rodeo Family...Moreheads purchased the Emerald Garden Basket for the family of Joseph O. Crane, Jr..



Three Hills Rodeo Family...Moreheads - December 30, 2025 at 10:23 PM