

## Home Cookin'



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Linnemann team's Midwestern work ethic delights St. Louis-area clients

### **Linneman Lawn Care & Landscaping**

**Founder and owner:** Adam Linnemann

**Founded:** 1994

**Headquarters:** Columbia, Ill.

**Markets:** St. Louis County and Illinois suburbs of Columbia, Waterloo, Belleville, Red Bud and Chester

**Services:** Commercial services, design & consulting, landscape installations, lawn maintenance, chemical lawn care, hardscapes, water features, night lighting and irrigation systems

**Employees:** 17 full time

**Website:** [www.linnemannlawncare.com](http://www.linnemannlawncare.com)

Adam Linnemann, president and operator of Linnemann Lawn Care & Landscaping, grew up and went to school in Columbia, Ill., a quiet town with a population of about 9,000 just south of St. Louis and on the Illinois side of the Mississippi River. His roots run deep there; Linnemann Fuel and Oil, which is celebrating 75 years in business, is run by his grandmother.

Headquarters for the 18-year-old Linnemann Lawn Care & Landscaping is a 2-acre location on a rural road midway between Columbia and Waterloo, Ill. These are just two of more than a half-dozen small, rural communities where you'll find Linnemann's bright red service trucks.

### **Growth by acquisition**

Linnemann continues to expand his firm's service area. These past several years he's acquired three smaller operations and incorporated them into his company. One of them, a small lawn care operation, extended his service area

an hour from his headquarters.

Gaining the 350 new lawn care customers boosted company revenues by about \$100,000. "We can touch them now and let them know that we provide a full range of landscape services, including landscape lighting," says Linnemann. By mid May clients had responded requesting an extra \$10,000 worth of services.



Adam Linnemann stays active in local community affairs, maintaining close ties to the region he has known his whole life.

PHOTOS BY RON HALL.

Linnemann, who has been diligent in serving the communities near his hometown, sees opportunity elsewhere, especially across the river into St. Louis County, but he's content to grow his company step by step.

"Yes, I have a vision of where I want my company to go. I wish I could grow a little bit faster sometimes. But growing too fast can hurt you, too," he says.

Even so, he remains on the lookout for other small operations he can acquire to grow his firm. With a budgeting revenue of \$800,000 this year, he sees growth to \$1 million in the next couple of years as a real possibility. And this in spite of an economy that's dried up most of the large construction/install projects his firm offered just a few years ago. Company revenues are split pretty evenly between landscape installations and lawn care/lawn maintenance.

"For us, landscape installations are more profitable than our other services, but lawn care and mowing generate recurring revenue, and they also give us an opportunity to sell installations," says Linnemann.

## **Multifaceted marketing**

His company uses a variety of techniques to get the word out to customers and prospects, including direct mail, social media and Constant Contact. Most recently, using a professional production company, he put together a message to air on local cable television. His marketing stresses his ties the region and his firm's highly personal and responsive service.

He also heavily promotes "The Linnemann Difference," which is prominent on his company's website and other marketing materials. That "difference" reminds his market that his company is fully insured, employs state-certified technicians and provides weekly employee training. Also, if a customer has a question or concern, they can call and talk to a "real person" and get their particular issue resolved promptly rather than leaving a message at a call center.

"No other company of our size in our market can say these things," says Linnemann, who continues to add to and upgrade his team.

In 2010 he hired Stefanie Tyberendt as the company account manager, and in

2011 brought on Ken Settle for sales and to lead the firm's production. Late this winter he hired Mark Walz, an experienced lawn technician, as the company's senior technician.

It turned out to be the right move at the right time, as this spring was a tough one for all lawn care operations in the St. Louis regional market due to the incredibly mild winter and very early spring.

"We got warm and we got warm quick," says Walz. "We got started in late February. We didn't have much snow or rain this past winter. Some of the yards didn't look good when I got to them, and some of them looked great."

Using a Ground Logic spreader/sprayer unit he hustled to get herbicides down to stay ahead of the weeds that got a head start this season. He admits that he's received a few calls from customers because of weeds.

While the company competes against national firms, such as TruGreen and Scotts Lawn Care, it's not much of a concern (not yet anyway) for Linnemann or Walz, who's been in the industry for 16 years.

"I feel that what we're offering customers is more of a personal service. If you need something or have a problem, we'll get it resolved right away," says Walz.



Sixteen-year lawn care veteran Mark Walz joined the Linnemann team this past spring as a result of the Columbia, Ill.,-based company acquiring 350 new lawn care clients through a recent acquisition.

Apart from these "differences," Linnemann remains active in local communities, as evidenced by the green industry column he writes in a local newspaper and his involvement in the Columbia Rotary Club – he becomes president in July.

"Rotary has changed my life," says Linnemann. "I joined for the networking and for the service work. We meet, about 30 of us each week, and we get involved in a lot of projects. A lot of them are small, but they're always positive."

Linnemann is a product of the rural region where he grew up.

He's come a long way in terms of business from when, as a youngster, he knocked out more than a dozen neighborhood lawns each week behind his red Murray walk-behind mower. As a high school student he replaced the Murray with a riding mower, which he kept in his parent's carport, covering it with a barbecue cover when it wasn't being used. When he turned 16, he bought his first "service" vehicle, a 1987 Chevy S-10. By the time he was a high school grad, he had earned enough from mowing lawns to buy a new Ford F-350 service vehicle.

Even though Columbia is one of the fastest growing suburbs of St. Louis, its downtown appears to have changed little over the years. Most storefronts still display the pride of shopkeepers and middays are busy with commerce.

The outskirts of the city sport a modern middle school and a spattering of the usual fast-food joints. Most of this newer development hugs busy Route 3 that parallels the eastern side of the slow-moving Mississippi. It's just one of a half-dozen or more similarly prim, rural towns just across the Mississippi from St. Louis. And, Linnemann is intimately familiar with them all.

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