

## Investor's advice: Don't get greedy

He was born Jonathan James Lindsay, but everyone called him J.J. Over the years, he stripped the name down even further, and today it's just J.

The founder of the Minnetonka-based Lindsay Group, J. likes to keep things simple, whether it's in his personal life or as the owner of a portfolio of small commercial properties worth more than \$25 million, or as president of the Certified Commercial Investment Members (CCIM) Minnesota-Dakotas Chapter. His advice to others heading into the commercial real estate game is simple as well: Get as much training as you can. And don't be greedy.

"I believe in servant leadership," he says. "I treat tenants as clients. I expect everyone to be treated fairly by my staff. I try to be proactive to avoid problems." It sounds little corny, but the effort pays off nicely:

"I have an occupancy close to 100 percent," he says.

And while people today often focus on flipping properties to make money on a sale, Lindsay says the real fun is in building value over the long haul. That means developing strong tenant relationships and creating a sustainable cash flow. "There are buildings being purchased on future rent assumptions that make no sense," he says. "These things need to make money to be worth something."

Lindsay says he started his first business, a lawn service, while in college. "I loved working, but I didn't love sitting in the classroom," he says. He got into commercial real estate because his brother went to medical school and asked him to

buy two buildings he owned in St. Paul. He did, then worked hard to learn about being a landlord through experience and by talking to as many people as he could. He brought in partners on some buildings, and soon things were getting complicated.

Eventually he tackled new markets and new projects, from Minnesota to California. And he learned that while a deal may look good on paper, the best resource is someone who knows the market and can put it in perspective.

"I think the information is out there if you look for it and that's helpful, but having relationships with people is the key to success," he says.

Lindsay says life has been tough at times, when he was juggling a growing family, building his portfolio and working for others. Gradually, he was able to buy out his partners, strengthen his own financial position and begin growing. He says a big part of that strength came after Keith Sturm, principal in Upland Capital Management, urged him to join CCIM, take the training and earn his certification. "There's no better way to learn the business," he says. "You can't fake it on the tests."

Today Lindsay is president of the chapter and its strongest supporter. He also is a busy man. He has built his portfolio to more than \$25 million in commercial properties in 10 states. They range from banks to warehouse space to retail and offices. The list includes Minnehaven Square in Minnetonka, University Corners in Tampa, Fla., Rialto Plaza in Venice, Fla., and the Loring Building in Minneapolis.



CREG FILE PHOTO

### J. Lindsay

When it came time to build a new office for himself, he chose the second floor of a building he was remodeling near the intersection of Hwy. 101 and Minnetonka Boulevard – in back, facing the parking lot. Of course it also lets him keep an eye on one of his retail centers, Minnehaven.

While the building is simple, the details are high end and perfectly executed.

Even better, it's right above one of his favorite tenants, Caribou Coffee, so he can walk downstairs for coffee or to meet clients.

Simple.