

Small Business Profile

HE'S THE PFOODMAN

Pfremmer shifts his lifestyle, company into high gear after a bout of pneumonia

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James Evans has worked in academia for almost 40 years. And in the last few, he's noticed something out of the ordinary for students: They speak flatteringly about their meals at Lindenwood University in St. Charles.

"I've had a lot of university food experiences, most of them not worth mentioning," said Evans, the acting president of Lindenwood. "Our students often compliment the food, which is unusual for college."

Evans echoes the students, comparing special event meals from Lindenwood's campus caterer, Pfoodman LLC, to five-star restaurants. The university liked Ralph Pfremmer, the president and principal owner of Pfoodman, well enough to hire him three times — most recently with Pfoodman after his stints with national competitors in the food service business.

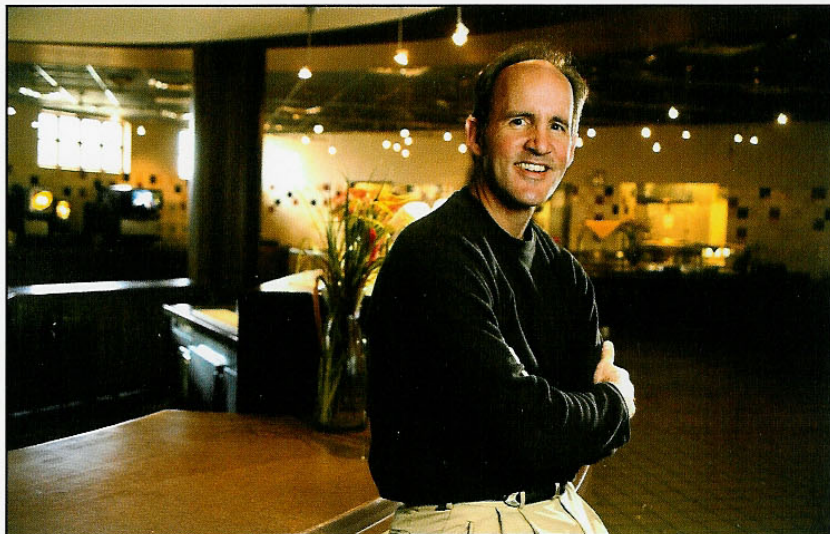
National food service giants such as Aramark Corp., Sodexo USA and one of Pfremmer's former employers, Bon Appetit Management Co., dominate the food service industry. But more institutions such as Lindenwood want to work with smaller companies such as Pfoodman, Pfremmer said.

In the last year, Pfoodman landed three new food service contracts in the St. Louis area — with St. Louis College of Pharmacy and senior living centers Park Place in WingHaven and The Rockwood in Webster Groves.

The growth in the St. Louis area, plus consulting work for Pfoodman's existing clients, helped push the six-year-old company to \$7.3 million in revenue for its fiscal year that ended June 30. Pfremmer said the business is on track to generate more than \$10 million in revenue for its current fiscal year.

The growth in St. Louis also prompted Pfoodman to relocate its corporate operations from Columbia, Mo., to St. Louis in June.

Pfremmer joined Pfoodman in 2001. He received a 20 percent stake in the business, then known as Campus Hospitality Inc., in part for bringing in contracts with Lindenwood and Missouri Valley College in Marshall, Mo. A year later he borrowed \$200,000 from First National Bank in St. Louis to buy out the interest of Tim Neilsen, one of the company founders. Pfrem-



SEAN GALLAGHER

Ralph Pfremmer expects Pfoodman to generate more than \$10 million in revenue for this fiscal year.

mer became president and now owns 65 percent of the company. His partner and the company's co-founder, Brian Dittmer of Columbia, owns 35 percent.

The company initially changed its name to Hospitality Services Inc. It expanded into food service for senior living homes and later started calling on country clubs. Last year it started providing food service for Four Seasons Country Club in Chesterfield, and this month it renewed its contract for another year.

The Pfoodman name came shortly after Pfremmer joined the business and had his own epiphany in the wake of a bout of pneumonia. "I used to be a smoker. I weighed about 240 pounds," said Pfremmer, who now weighs 180. He gave up tobacco and started exercising seriously and watching his diet.

Pfremmer managed to blend his new lifestyle with his business. He took up bicycling and started providing food at bicycle races and other cycling events to promote his company. He became known as the Pfoodman, and the name stuck. "I started marketing (with the cycling groups) because it was the audience I knew."

Pfremmer became serious enough about the sport that he started racing in amateur road and

off-road events throughout the Midwest. He is a member of Team Velo Force.

Pfoodman now has nine contract food service sites and 218 full-time employees. Of those, about 150 are in the St. Louis area. Another 300 people work part time for the company.

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"There's not many times a person can jump on top of an organization this size," he said, adding that he believes the company can triple its revenue in the next several years. "I can't go backwards now."

Professional services: Jeff Causey, commercial lending officer of First National Bank in St. Louis, is Pfoodman's banker. The company uses two law firms: Dale Rawlings of Rawlings & Associates in St. Charles and Blumenfeld, Kaplan & Sandweiss in Clayton. Dave Wiggins of Davis, Keller & Wiggins in Maryland Heights is the company's accountant.