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SPECIAL SECTION: ROOFING TECHNOLOGIES

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Construction Connections

How three young friends created success from a common history

By Kelly Plummer/Keeney Home Services

How many of us can say the high school summer job where we worked with our buddies turned into the business we own and operate today? Three friends, Andy Lindus, Joe Smith, and Josh Keeney, run very successful home improvement companies serving three different states, and are connected by those summer memories. To this day, they continue to build their businesses, lean on each other during the pandemic, and even promote a little healthy competition from time to time.

Andy Lindus: Lindus Construction

It all started with Andy Lindus. Lindus' parents, Emily and Kevin of Baldwin, Wisconsin, started Lindus Construction back in 1982 after Kevin, a hog farmer, fell out of a tree he was trimming and broke his back. "We were broke," Andy Lindus recalled. "My dad was already doing handyman jobs here and there. So he ended up leaning on that." Within a year, Kevin was bringing in more money than he ever made with hog farming.



Andy Lindus

Soon Lindus Construction was born and, while it served mostly western Wisconsin in those early years, the company quickly began its expansion into the Twin Cities of Minnesota. By 1995, Lindus Construction started opening franchises throughout the Midwest, which brings us back to the story of the three friends. More specifically, Lindus' friend Joe.

Joe Smith: Home Solutions of Iowa

Back in the 1990s, Lindus Construction focused primarily on roof construction and a new type of gutter called LeafGuard®. As a teenager, Lindus worked on a roofing and gutter installation crew with his cousin (and best bud), Joe Smith. The two recall long days. "I was staying at Lindus' parents' place back then," Smith remembered. "We worked so hard that first year. I remember at the end of the day, one of us would shower and the other one would fall asleep while waiting for his turn. We were the first ones



Joe Smith

out on the job and the last ones in," he added. Lindus said it was about 70 to 80 hours of work per week. Not only did they work hard, but Smith and Lindus also created some of the terms, checklists, and processes still in use today by their companies, top LeafGuard installers in Des Moines, Iowa, and the Twin Cities of Minnesota, respectively.

Throughout their college years, Smith and Lindus began dabbling in the sales side of the business. When Smith was a junior in college, Lindus' parents offered him the opportunity to open a franchise of Lindus Construction in Rochester, Minnesota. Smith, only 21 years old at the time, accepted. "It was a great opportunity. But, I did learn quickly (after about a year) that Rochester wasn't my gig," said Smith. "I needed a bigger city, a bigger opportunity." So he did his own research and asked Emily and Kevin Lindus if he could start his own franchise in Des Moines, Iowa. They agreed and, after setting up a booth for the company at the Iowa State Fair in 2003, business began to boom. "When we moved to Des Moines, my wife Liz and I didn't know a soul," Smith shared, adding, "I built the business and enough equity to buy [the franchise] outright from Emily and Kevin in 2007." At the time, Smith was just 29 years old. Today, he considers Des Moines home. His company, Home Solutions of Iowa, has served more than 27,000 homeowners and is a local leader in gutter systems, roofing, insulation, rain barrels, windows, doors, siding, and more. Smith said he learned so much from the Lindus family, including the simple concept of hard work. "Kevin is probably the hardest working human I have ever met."

Josh Keeney: Keeney Home Services

Another friend in the group, Josh Keeney, has a similar success story. He and Lindus were good friends outside of work and eventually, Lindus recognized a drive and work ethic in Keeney. He decided to hire him on as a sales rep, despite his mom Emily's concerns. "At the time, Keeney was young but had a lot of experience. He was my third interview for the sales job and was so nervous he was stuttering through it. I remember my mom asking, 'Are you sure you want to hire this guy?'"



Josh Keeney

Lindus admitted. "I was sure and hired him. Little did we all know what a performer he would become." In fact, Lindus recalls a couple months after hiring Keeney, his parents drove

PEAK PERFORMERS



From left: Josh Keeney, Nick Huebner, Rich Haring, Amy Keeney, Darlene Pluger, Emma Niemi, Ronnie Evans, and Jeff Peters. Photo by Mitch Zehr.

past Lindus Construction at 3 a.m. in the morning on the way to the airport, only to find Keeney's vehicle in the lot.

It was about that time that Kevin wanted to move Lindus Construction away from roofing. Andy Lindus and Keeney stepped in and asked if they could take on that part of the business. They did, and with great success. Eventually the two were installing eight asphalt and two metal roofs every single day, and had catapulted Lindus Construction to the status of #1 GAF distributor nationwide.

By the year 2000, Lindus Construction was pulling in \$6 million in revenue. The company opened offices in Des Moines, Iowa; Omaha, Nebraska; Green Bay, Madison, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Grand Rapids, Michigan; and Cincinnati, Ohio. Emily and Kevin wanted to allow key employees to become business owners and essentially duplicated the franchise opportunity offered to Joe Smith.

Keeney had worked with Smith, too, and had seen the success Smith had in both the Rochester and Des Moines markets. While he wanted to stay on at Lindus, he needed to return to Green Bay, Wisconsin. That's where his parents had lived, both tragically passing away at just 50 and 52 years old from heart attacks. Once he returned to northeastern Wisconsin, Keeney decided he wanted to stay and try to replicate the success of Lindus in the Green Bay, Appleton, and Neenah, Wisconsin, market. So, in 2008, he opened a Neenah-based franchise, Keeney Home Services. Today, the company is a GAF Master Elite® Roofer and also provides LeafGuard® gutters and Dr. Energy Saver Services. Keeney remembered one quote from Emily Lindus that always rang true for him: Do what works and don't do what



From left: Josh Keeney, Chad Williams, and Amy Keeney.

doesn't. "It seems so simple, but it's powerfully effective and overlooked by too many businesses," said Keeney. "I'm so grateful to have learned that lesson and to be able to apply it every day."

Meanwhile, Andy Lindus continued to build Lindus Construction. He and his brothers, Adam and Alex, were given the opportunity to expand and eventually run the family business. The brothers purchased Lindus Construction outright from their parents in 2016.

For the Lindus family, some things never change. That couldn't be more true of the respect and value placed on the company's employees. "I love what I get to do," Lindus said. "I'm only afforded that because of our employees. They're our great-



The entire Lindus family, including Lindus Construction founders Kevin and Emily.

PEAK PERFORMERS



(ABOVE) Company photo of Joe Smith's Home Solutions of Iowa.

(RIGHT) An example of "the Lindus picnic," a portable table brought to client meetings to facilitate social distancing.

est asset. I learned that fact from my parents."

Lindus is also a big proponent of millennials. "I'm so tired of people talking poorly about millennials. They're no different. Give them direction and a chance to be on a team that wins," Lindus explained. "They're not as motivated monetarily as previous generations. But they *are* motivated. In fact, I've employed kids who I once coached in high school."

Getting By With a Little Help From Their Friends

Today, years into running their own businesses, Lindus, Smith, and Keeney remain friends. They even vacation together with their spouses and children. "It's really one big family," said Lindus with a smile.

That's why when COVID-19 hit in 2020, the men didn't hesitate to lean on each other. "Call it a support group or whatever," said Keeney, "But we were on nightly Zoom calls just counseling each other and brainstorming on how to keep our businesses alive."

Together the group came up with safety protocol and procedures to implement during the pandemic, including what Lindus called "the Lindus picnic," which was a portable table sales personnel brought to homes to socially distance with customers while discussing a project and reviewing materials.

"We're constantly bouncing ideas off of each other," shared Keeney. "Not being in the same markets means we don't compete with each other. It's really made us a great team." The constant



communication has helped all three buy in bulk, hone best practices, and learn from failures. "One of us decides to hire a human resources representative or an IT specialist and then we share whether the hire was beneficial with the other two," said Keeney.

The friends also engage in healthy competition away from work from time to time. For example, the men and some of their wives, along with staff, have started CrossFit. The group collectively lost 400 pounds.

Lindus, Smith, and Keeney also all reported exceptional sales for the spring and summer months of 2020, not at all what they expected when the pandemic hit. One thing that *is* expected is the constant support the ongoing friendship offers the men in business and in life, no matter what comes their way. "Through the highs and the lows and the worst of the worst, these are the people I know are going to be there," said Lindus. **MR**