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40 Under 40 2018

Lindsey Graves readies Sunset Transportation for more growth

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Lindsey Graves has helped streamline operations and update technology at her family's business, logistics company Sunset Transportation, which reached \$117.6 million in revenue last year, up 29 percent from 2016.

Graves, now chief operating officer, helped out at Sunset after school through high school, doing filing or writing deposits. But she pursued a bachelor's in communication at College of Charleston in South Carolina, planning on a marketing career. After graduating in 2005, she did a year-long stint in Las Vegas helping plan a horse show event ("I rode horses all through college, Division 1, NCAA," she said).

In 2006, she returned to St. Louis planning to look for a job, and her father, Sunset CEO Jim Williams, asked her to help with billing. Starting as a billing administrator, she "dug in to figure out how we could do things better," she said.



DILIP VISHWANAT | SLBJ

Lindsey Graves

“My dad said, from day one, you have to learn the business from start to finish, so that means starting at the bottom, and if you really like it, you can keep working through it,” Graves said.

Graves said she enjoyed, and found her niche in, “building out the organization to support its growth.” After billing, she moved to the brokerage department and eventually, “worked through every single role” in the organization, she said. Graves moved up to vice president of operations in 2013, then her current post, COO, in January this year.

Among her contributions to Sunset’s organization have been the year-long process of selecting and implementing its transportation management software system; expanding the company’s agent program; establishing Sunset’s business operations and pricing departments; and standardizing hiring and training, as well as employee recruitment.

Sunset’s CFO, Mark Cammarata, who has worked closely with Graves for the past dozen years, said she’s completed a lot of large-scale projects that have brought Sunset both value and consistency. “She’s very self-motivated, driven to improve processes and show people the path, and then let people get in and experience success,” he said.

Graves said she’ll be increasing her focus on Sunset’s strategic plan, helping transition acquired companies and looking for a larger headquarters building. The south St. Louis County-based third-party logistics provider, which now has six branches and 25 agent offices across the U.S., last month completed an acquisition of Snowland Freight Services, with offices in Wisconsin and Minnesota, for an undisclosed amount.

Graves serves on the board of the Boy Scouts of America, Greater St. Louis Area Council, and oversees Sunset’s 14-year partnership providing logistics for the annual Scouting for Food drive. She also serves on Enterprise Bank & Trust’s Business Leadership Forum Board and is a member of Truckstop.com customer advisory board.

Graves and her husband, Justin, have three daughters: McKenzie, who will be 7 in March, and Harper and Sadie, 3.

College? B.A. in communication, College of Charleston in Charleston, South Carolina

Best leadership advice? Lead by example. Period.

What are you currently reading? “Mastering the Rockefeller Habits” by Verne Harnish

What’s the best part about your job? I love having the ability to make an impact on the lives of the people I work with. From helping them grow in their career to taking care of their family or being available for when their family needs them — I have the ability to create that culture. I truly believe if you take care of your team — they will go above and beyond to contribute to the company.

What would you go back and tell your 20-year-old self? Don’t stress about the small stuff or worry about what people think of you. YOU are in control of your life and image and that’s all that matters.

Who would be your dream mentor? I honestly can’t think of anyone...

What’s one thing that everyone needs to do or try in St. Louis? Go to Hidden Valley and go tubing during the winter! It’s easy to name all the fun stuff to do around St. Louis in the summer. The winter is when it is truly a challenge especially with small kids. We went this past weekend and it was a blast! Even my twin 3-year-olds went and loved it. It was a great way to enjoy some fresh air, get some exercise and have some fun as a family.

Favorite restaurant? Right now it is Katie's Pizza & Pasta. They cater to the kids by giving them pizza dough, which keeps them pleasantly occupied until the food comes out (which is always quick). And of course the food is fantastic!

Favorite app? Instacart to order my groceries for delivery! Wow, what a game changer it is to be able to quickly and easily reorder all your go-to groceries delivered! I wish it was available when my twins were born!

Diana Barr

Associate Editor

St. Louis Business Journal

