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40 Under 40 Class of 2007

Joe Naert, 36

President, Naert Cos.

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Joe Naert has the entrepreneurial spirit in his genes.

His grandfather and his father both founded successful businesses, and Naert said that from a very early age, he was comfortable with the idea of earning his own money.

He remembers one telling example from his first "company," Joe's Snow Removal: "When I was about 10, I used to shovel snow off people's sidewalks and driveways to make some money. I can remember watching the weather forecast, and if there was snow coming, my dad would make me get out the night before, knock on doors and lock up the deal."

That kind of forward thinking has helped Naert, 36, build a successful real estate company and run a successful offset commercial printing company, both housed at 5326 Southwest Ave.

The two businesses might seem an unlikely match, but not for Naert, who has followed in two sets of footsteps.

"My grandfather had a real estate company, and my dad started the printing business in 1964," he said.

Naert bought **Naert Printing** from his father 10 years ago.

Naert Realty, which Naert founded in 2000, has 17 agents selling residential property throughout the St. Louis metro area. Naert anticipates the sales force will grow to 25 or 30 agents in the near future.

One enticement for potential agents is the company's split on sales -- 70 percent for the agent and only 30 percent for the company. Naert said a 50-50 split is more typical of the industry.

He said that as a manager, he tries to "shut up and listen" to people. "I try to treat everyone like they need to be treated and recognize that everyone is different."

Jeff Fuelling, a vice president of Naert Realty, described Joe Naert as "easygoing, down-to-earth. He's different from the other bosses I've had. And around here, things get done; decisions are made quickly. He's a doer."

Naert said he is "cautiously optimistic/humble" about his career. "I truly enjoy and love what I do. I work a lot of hours, but it feels like I've never worked a day in my life. I'm motivated by challenge."

He declined to disclose his companies' annual revenue.

Naert's wife, Jennifer, is a vice president of Naert Realty. They have one daughter, Lily.

Gil Stuenkel is a St. Louis freelance writer.

