

# At full throttle

## LinkAmerica expands workforce, replaces aging fleet

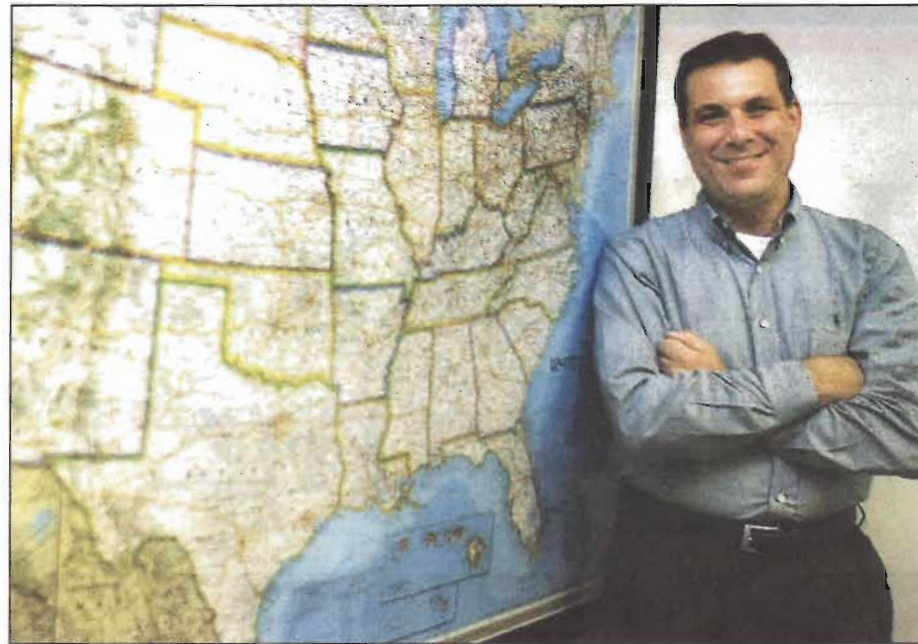
BY D. RAY TUTTLE  
THE JOURNAL RECORD

TULSA - Regional truck line LinkAmerica Corp. is expanding, looking to add 70 drivers while replacing an aging fleet of tractors and trailers, said newly appointed President and CEO John Simone.

The transportation and logistics provider, founded in 1996, has a fleet of 850 tractors and 2,700 trailers. The company employs 200 people in Tulsa and 1,000 companywide. Through a number of acquisitions, it grew its revenues to more than \$140 million annually.

Since the acquisition by Tenex Capital Management was complete in July, LinkAmerica has moved to improve its products and services, said Joe Cottone, managing director and principal of New York City-based Tenex Capital Management.

"There is a strong commitment to operational excellence, as demonstrated by the investments LinkAmerica is making in safety, new tractors and trailers," Cottone said. "Employees are benefiting from working for a much better capitalized (company)."



John Simone, president and CEO of LinkAmerica. PHOTO BY RIP STELL

LinkAmerica provides traditional over-the-road logistics service, Simone said. LinkAmerica operates primarily in the south-central and southeastern U.S. With corporate headquarters in Tulsa, the company operates facilities in Dallas, Houston and Lakeland, Fla.

"We are hiring," said Simone, who has more than 20 years of experience in transportation and logistics. "We have to hire an additional 70 drivers across the nation.

Simone said LinkAmerica has to not

only replace drivers, but add capacity.

LinkAmerica, like many trucking companies, has suffered through the recession that began in October 2008.

"Companies went out of business and other carriers simply delayed decisions to replace equipment, or simply decided to not replace aging fleets," Cottone said.

As the recession deepened, companies sold assets to tighten capacity, he said.

"Companies did not replace equip-

ment, but operated it (tractors and trailers) longer," Simone said. "Going forward, we are starting to replace assets."

Over the next decade, it is estimated that the trucking industry will need to replace more than 100,000 drivers to fill vacancies nationwide, said Dan Case, executive director of the Oklahoma Trucking Association.

"We do not have a quantity problem today as much as we have a quality problem," Case said.

Case said that industrywide there are an estimated 2,000 truck driving vacancies in Oklahoma alone.

"If you are a quality-type person, you can work anywhere," Case said. "No one will hire you now, unless you are a quality driver."

"Quality" means everything from having a clean driving record to being drug-free to having no felony convictions, Case said.

LinkAmerica will purchase 175 trucks and 400 trailers through the end of the year, Simone said.

"We'll look at the fleet and replace - based on mileage - that number annually," Simone said.

Going forward, Simone and Cottone expect LinkAmerica's value to grow.

Before LinkAmerica, Simone was president and chief operating officer of the \$1 billion Greatwide Logistics Services Co. Simone has also served as senior vice president of the truckload division at UPS Freight.