
Eyes on the future

Local security
firms adapt to
the times



by Kimberly Mathisen and Greg Houghton

Back in the days of yore, city and village residents heard the familiar, "Ten o'clock and all's well" on a nightly basis, and usually on the hour.

Referred to as town criers, those bell tollers were the forerunners of modern-day security guards. Today's private security companies constitute a solid industry segment in the Chicagoland area and throughout the nation.

Industry experts report the security business to be a \$10 billion a year industry with more than 10,000 firms in the United States.

According to the Illinois Department of Employment Security, annual openings for security officers are expected to be in excess of 1,600 jobs during calendar year 2005.

Starting salaries can range from \$7.64 to about \$9 per hour at entry level, while experienced personnel can expect to earn in the upwards of \$12 per hour.

Skills needed for the work include speaking, social perceptiveness and active listening. And security companies today find themselves training their staff in those social skills in response to higher demands for professionalism at all levels of security.

Who are today's security guards? Unarmed guards are specially trained individuals - those who serve as armed guards are often police officers, either retired or active-duty who work part-time.

According to wikipedia.com, the first security guards were vigiles, or soldiers assigned to guard the city of Rome. Night watchmen have been employed since the Middle Ages - vigilant against attacks, fires and a host of possible emergency situations.

Moving forward to today's world of security companies, many of which operate on a global level, the industry employs thousands of guards, agents, private investigators and night watchmen.

Security firms wanting to remain competitive in today's marketplace had better offer a wide range of services. An example of the trend is Alsip-based American Heritage Protective Services.

“Uniformed security guards are the bulk of our dollar volume,” said Art Hannus, American Heritage president. “We offer that service to big clients, Fortune 500 companies, hospitals, big schools and the like. But we have expertise in more specialized areas, too.”

One American Heritage specialty is handling of labor disorders. The company has on its staff two managers with experience in that arena. “Norman Lorvig worked on security matters during one of the largest strikes in Illinois during the 1980s, the Danley Machine strike. And our VP of Operations, Paul Stellato, worked as corporate security director for the Chicago Tribune for 20 years. During that time he handled the biggest strike of the 1990s, the New York Daily News,” Hannus said.

American Heritage offers a service it calls “executive protection.”

“We know the right ways to protect high-level people,” Hannus said. “We did security for Jack Welch (famed General Electric executive and business guru), Miss America, and movie stars like Julie Andrews.”

Hannus’ consultant for executive protection is Tim McCarthy, the Southtown resident who, as a Secret Service officer, took a bullet for President Reagan. “I have known Tim for years. He and I are from the same neighborhood,” Hannus said.

Other specialized services offered by American Heritage include confidential investigations, undercover operations, and advice on violence prevention in the workplace. The company employs 600, including off-duty police personnel.

According to Hannus, most of his managers offer 25 years or more of experience in their work. “That is a selling point for us,” he said. “Another strength is, I hire an auditing firm (Orland Park based The Condon Group) to come in every year and go through our records to make sure we are up-to-date with employee requirements and training. We want to be sure we are delivering what we promise to our customers.”



Art Hannus is president of American Heritage Protective Services, Inc., of Alsip.