

THE STAR
BUSINESS

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Star photos by Art Vesley

Security guards, including Paul Ganier at Pullman Bank in Dolton, monitor activities at sites and look to make employees such as Regina Myers feel safer.

TIME TO CALL IN THE REINFORCEMENTS

By John K. Ryan
THE STAR

NEW AGE COPS: Some south suburban officers prefer working the night shift. See News, Page A-1

When the terrorism alert flags elevate to a higher risk category, telephones at private security firms in the South Suburbs begin to ring.

On the other end are companies, particularly those considered high risk, wanting more security personnel brought to the work site.

"Businesses in the area such as refineries go to 24-hour coverage in such circumstances," said Vince Ruffolo, president of A&R Security Services Inc. in Blue Island.

"It is often augmented with heavier patrols by local police who check with our personnel more often than usual — three or four times a day, minimal."

Karen Hunt, who along with her husband, Richard, runs Hunt & Hunt Ltd., a private investigative business in Chicago Heights, said companies hire the investigative firm to monitor buildings and employees.

"The increase in alertness surprises me when an increase occurs," Hunt said.

"With that recent incident in New Jersey (an arms dealer attempting to smuggle a surface-to-air missile into the country), many think the threat is not being taken seriously. My experience is that local companies do take it serious."

Hunt said she has consulted with businesses to instruct on how to secure a workplace against terrorist activity.

She said the trucking industry has been particularly vigilant about being sure its equipment is not hijacked for nefarious activities.

"One trucking official told me he'd heard terrorists may rent a truck, load it with explosives and crash it into a building," Hunt said. "He did not want his vehicles being used for any Oklahoma City-type scenario."

Such private security firms do not cater strictly to terrorism threats nor sit around biding their time while waiting for an increase in terrorism alerts.

Businesses throughout the region, as well as private individuals, keep such firms busy monitoring work sites or doing investigative work for threats not stemming from foreign intruders.

Hunt said her firm does undercover work to discover theft on the job or even shoddy work practices.

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Ganier is actually employed by American Heritage Protective Services Inc. in Worth, a private security firm that employs as many as 600 security personnel doing work in the public and private sectors.

Call

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"We go into retail sites as shoppers to discover if employees are selling items cheaper to friends," she said.

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On-the-job violence has become a common problem, according to Art Hannus, president and chief executive officer of American Heritage Protective Services Inc. in Worth.

"The violence can come down to threats being made through e-mail," he said.

"Because police departments don't have the necessary manpower, they only become involved if the threat is carried out. Before that, we will talk with whoever has made the threat."

For the most part, security firms provide personnel to discourage any possible criminal activity.

A uniformed security guard often acts as a deterrent in itself.

"It keeps the bad guys away," Ruffolo said. "It also makes customers feel more secure."

For many security firms, the percentage of armed security personnel employed has decreased significantly in the last few decades.

According to Ruffolo, only about 12 percent of the security force his company sends out is armed.



Star photo by Art Vassay

Those working for security firms, including Paul Ganier, who was hired out of a Worth firm to work as a security guard at Pullman Bank in Dolton, must go through extensive background checks and complete 20 hours of classes to gain a certificate.

"When we started in 1967, 90 percent were armed," he said. "Now, because of regulations that require training for firearms use, it is more costly and is not really needed in many businesses."

"Security guards are trained to call police in situations that require firearms."

Part of good security work is being able to avoid confrontations through communication.

While warehouses and truck depots can get by with those with only security guard training, locations such as museums require more astute knowledge.

That is why Hannus, a former Chicago police officer, hires former police officers for security

jobs that require dealing with the public.

"Warehouse workers and such know the rules and know their jobs depend on following them, so there is less of a chance of problems," he said.

"When it is the general public, you need someone adept at dealing with a lot of people."

"Security guards only need 20 hours of training, where police personnel need 400 hours. They have more experience in situations that can arise."

Even unarmed security guards receive training in an array of law enforcement issues before earning a certificate.

Ruffolo said his business, which employs more than 950 security personnel, staffs its own certified instructors.

"We make sure the trainees learn everything from communication techniques to report writing, patrolling and an individual's legal rights," he said.

Ruffolo said anybody looking to become a security guard in Illinois needs to be cleared of any past criminal activity by both the state police and the FBI.

"Only a few states do this," said Ruffolo, who is part of the National Council of Investigation and Security Services.

"There is an effort to pass a bill that gives the other states a right to access FBI records to see if candidates have committed a crime anywhere in the United States."

This also applies for the criminal background checks requested by companies in industries

such as child care and nursing homes.

"We get a lot of calls from such places who want to be sure of who they are hiring," Hunt said.

"It does no good if we can't check crimes throughout the U.S. Many criminals move from state to state, and we need to monitor the whole country."

Not all the security work involves the business community.

For some firms, the bulk of investigative work in the pri-

vate sector revolves around checking on the fidelity of a spouse.

Hunt cautions such clients on the viability of hiring a firm to investigate this because infidelity is not admissible in court as grounds for divorce.

"I tell them to talk to an attorney first to be sure there is a legal reason for having the information," she said. "Otherwise, it's a lot of money for information that can't be used."

As for spending time staking

out somebody to see if they may be cheating on a spouse, Hunt said it is not the best way to spend a day.

"That kind of surveillance can be boring," she said. "Most of the time it's a lot of hours of just sitting around doing nothing, while waiting for someone else to finish their fooling around."

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