

Rapid response gives Hawaii guard agency an edge

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Chief Operations Officer Robin Medeiros says the current job market has allowed Star Protection Agency to be more selective in its hiring and more efficient in its use of overtime.

When a client calls with a security concern, **Star Protection Agency** doesn't just take a message — it goes right to work.

“All of our managers know that we have to respond immediately,” said Robin Medeiros, the agency's chief operations officer. “There is zero delay. We respond as soon as possible.”

The prompt action is a big reason why Star Protection Agency has enjoyed 20 percent annual growth since 2001.

Although Star is primarily a guard patrol service, with workers at 125 different sites throughout the state, it also offers communication systems, safety and security seminars, investigative services, consultation and pre-litigation advice.

Star protects a wide range of facilities, from shopping malls to industrial sites to gated residences to government buildings such as Honolulu Hale, the Frank F. Fasi Municipal Building and the University of Hawaii John A. Burns School of Medicine.

Its customers praise it for its proactive posture.

“They work seven days a week, 24 hours a day,” said a local businessman who has worked with several landlords that hired Star Protection. “They’re licensed and bonded. You have a problem, call them, they call you, and it gets handled.”

The businessman, who asked for anonymity to protect his own client, also praised Star employees for their courteous manner no matter how difficult the job.

“One property in particular that was super-high maintenance was in the downtown area, and it had a huge amount of homeless,” he said. “Without being rude or insensitive to them, they managed to stabilize the area so that there may be seven to 10 of them [homeless] at any one time in the area, but they never set foot on the property.”

Star Protection Agency was founded in 1991 by Larry Ignus, a former Chicago police officer. Jim Tilley, a former Seattle resident with a background in education and security, took over in 2001 and merged it with another business called **Allied Security Services**.

Medeiros credits Tilley with taking Star Protection in a new direction, one that stressed customer service. Today, the company employs 500 people.

Through Tilley’s Washington state connections, a second agency was launched four years ago in Bellevue. Since Tilley’s death in 2007, the agencies have been managed separately, though they share the starprotectionagency.com site.

Former Chief Operations Officer Edward Lynd, now president, bought the company in 2007.

Star’s growth has been helped by a rising Hawaii unemployment rate. For the past two years a steady stream of job applicants has flowed through the agency’s doors at Honolulu’s Airport Industrial Park.

The new hires mean the agency no longer has to depend on local and Mainland searches to meet client needs, and can cut back significantly on paying overtime.

Star Protection employees come from all walks of life, but many have a law enforcement and military background.

(The 6-foot, 4-inch Medeiros is a Navy veteran — the word “Hawaii” and a rose are tattooed on his right forearm — and former **Honolulu Police Department** officer.)

With the influx of applicants, Medeiros said the company has become more selective in its hires, requiring higher scores on its math and English skills exams.

The guards in no way resemble Paul Blart in the movie “Mall Cop.”

“It was a hilarious movie — and absurdly not true,” Medeiros said.

Rather, Star Protection’s employees make appearance, attitude and training top priorities. Its consultants carry a Certified Protection Professional designation — the industry standard by ASIS International, a Virginia-based professional organization for security managers.

“It is our job to not make mistakes and to minimize liability,” Medeiros said. “If clients are not happy, if we don’t appease them, that business can go away.”

Star’s chief competitor is **Securitas Security Services USA**, the world’s largest security company, with Hawaii offices.

The charge for Star services varies considerably depending on a client’s needs.

A single guard walking the grounds of a parking lot could cost \$15 to \$17 an hour, while another working as part of a team in a hotel will cost around \$20 an hour.

Investigative services, which call on former law enforcement personnel with experience in homicides, sex crimes, theft, abductions, arson or workplace violence, can cost hundreds of dollars an hour.

The security business is changing rapidly with the introduction of new technology such as remote viewing cameras.

Roger Lau, the agency’s senior security director, calls the cameras “the face of security’s future. Electronic technology is growing as we speak.”

Lau described a bank of 30 security cameras, common in malls and other large complexes. When motion-detection sensors are set off, a camera’s pixelation changes, alerting not just the human monitor and patrols, but panning the camera itself to follow the intruder.

As sensors become more sophisticated, security may one day be able to identify the intruder by name, a la the Tom Cruise-Steven Spielberg film “Minority Report.”

“Security is a growth industry,” Medeiros said.