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## Offering a first line of defense

Companies take proactive view toward personal safety

BY TRACY CARBASHO

Local business people are taking matters into their own hands when it comes to protecting themselves and their co-workers against violence.

The Sept. 11 terrorist attacks have made individuals more aware of how vulnerable they are not only at work, but also in their homes and on the streets. While corporations throughout the country continue to implement new security measures, employees and executives are realizing greater peace of mind by learning violence intervention strategies and basic defensive tactics.

"People who may have walked by our office before are now inquiring and following through," said Kevin Pegnato, president of Executive Defensive Tactics, Downtown.

"The Sept. 11 attack is the first subject people bring up after they get information about our training, so it would appear there's a connection. People now realize it is possible to be a victim of crime or a target of terrorism at home or abroad and they're preparing themselves to take back control."

EDT was founded in 1990 to provide corporate workplace violence intervention, personal security and defensive tactics training, as well as firearms instruction. The company provides individuals with communication skills for recognizing and defusing potentially dangerous situations and physical countermeasures to use when negotiation fails.

The terrorism threat has given Dave Tobin and Valerie Milum, both pilots at US Airways, an appreciation for the skills they learned at EDT. They say peace of mind is the biggest benefit of taking any type of self-defense, violence prevention or street smarts training.

"A lot of people are nervous and I think we're going to see many more people, especially those in the airlines industry, taking classes," said Mr. Tobin. "Physical skills would

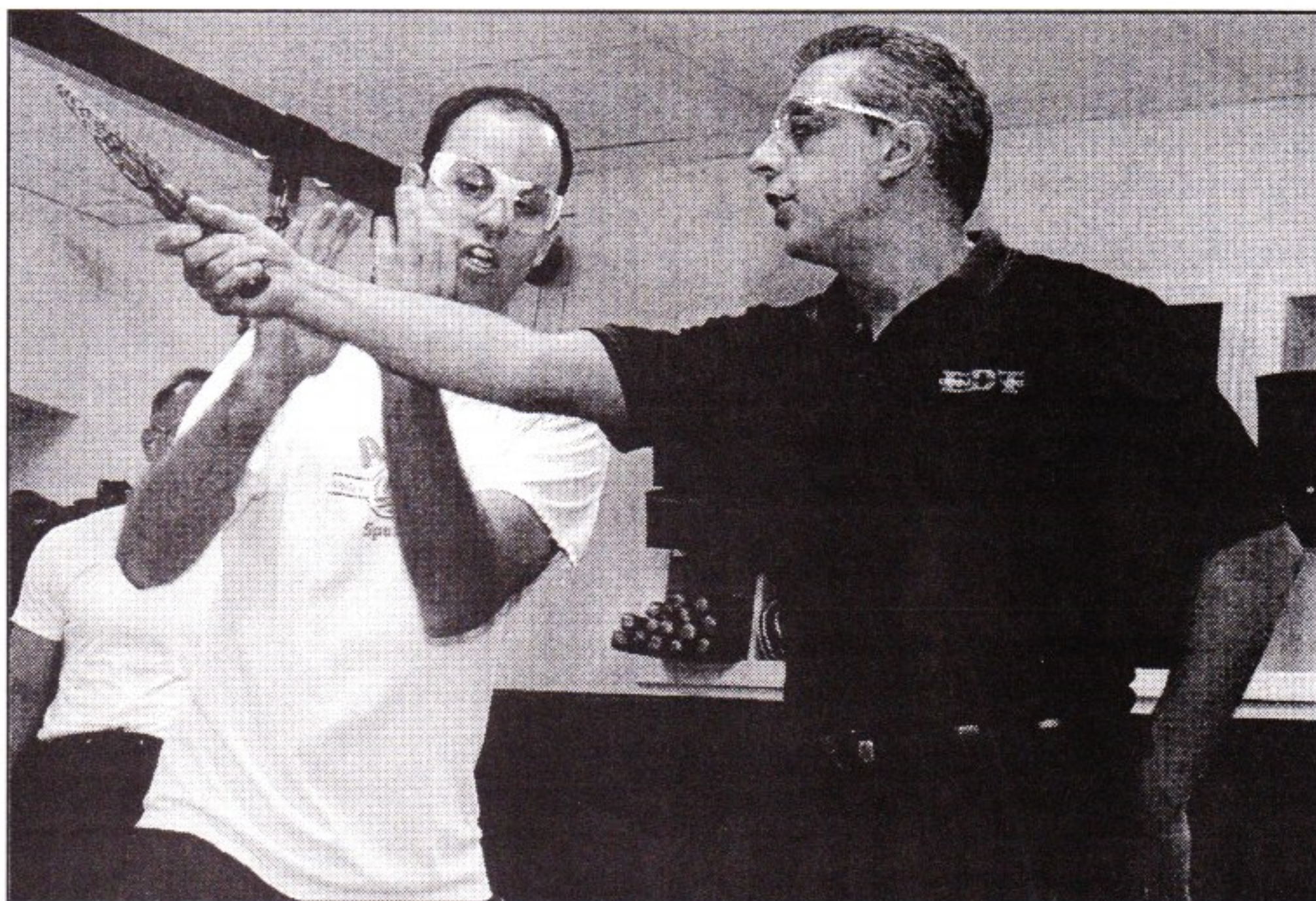


Photo by D. M. Scott

**ON THE DEFENSE:** Kevin Pegnato, right, president of Executive Defense Tactics, instructs Dan Heckman. Mr. Pegnato says more people are interested in learning how to protect themselves as a result of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

be extremely beneficial to flight attendants, but I don't know if it would be practical for the airlines to pay for ongoing training."

Ms. Milum is thankful she has never had to exercise any of the physical moves she has learned, but feels confident she could defend herself long enough to get away from a threatening situation.

"I never imagined I would ever need these skills in the cockpit, but certain scenarios tend to cross your mind. Empowering yourself with knowledge makes you feel like you can handle situations instead of being helpless," she said. "Being prepared for any situation increases your odds of being able to survive a dangerous incident."

### SECURITY MATTERS

Alfred Schnur Jr., owner of PCI Assessments in O'Hara Township, said company executives can provide a first line of defense for their existing employees and possibly avoid a dangerous incident by properly screening potential workers.

PCI, located in the RIDC Park, provides

a battery of tests and interviews by licensed psychologists to help employers screen applicants.

"The economy is slow and some companies have downsized so there are a lot of resumes out there. An individual with a potential problem could come knocking on your door," said Mr. Schnur. "A screening and assessment process should be part of corporate security programs to determine a potential employee's likelihood for success and likelihood for derailment."

Mr. Schnur said screening tools, such as the Step One Survey, can accurately predict a person's reliability, integrity, attitude toward drug use and level of honesty. He said the test asks individuals questions to determine if they believe it's OK to commit minor infractions at work, such as stealing small items valued at less than \$50 or giving discounts to friends and family members.

"The first employees who benefit when a company does this type of screening are the human resources people and hiring

## **DEFENSIVE:** *Experts say screening, assessment process needed in corporate security programs*

managers because they don't have to waste their time interviewing candidates who are not qualified according to the results of the test," said Mr. Schnur.

"All of the other existing employees benefit because you will be bringing more reliable people into the company and this will cut down on turnover, improve productivity and enhance customer service."

Mr. Schnur said screening tools provided by companies can be valuable in weeding out individuals who would be likely to breach security or be susceptible to a breach by someone who approaches them. The testing can also gauge a person's ability to assess risk and make important decisions under duress.

### **A NEW LEVEL OF AWARENESS**

Mark Tapling, president of ServiceWare Technologies Inc. in Oakmont, knows firsthand how important it is to make the right

security decision to protect employees.

He had contacted Mr. Pagnato's company to assist with security earlier this year when ServiceWare significantly reduced its staff. The day after the reduction was announced, the company received a phone call from an individual who stated, "There is a bomb in the building and you're all going to blow."

EDT officials directed the evacuation of the building and coordinated efforts with the local police and fire departments.

"The events of Sept. 11 were a wake-up call for our country," said Mr. Tapling. "For those in business who had not had that call earlier, they are certainly more aware now. Fortunately or unfortunately, for us, the bomb scare already had us in a heightened level of awareness."

Mr. Tapling said ServiceWare has implemented additional security measures since Sept. 11. They range from increasing secu-

rity issues pertaining to how visitors are checked, how mail is handled and how company employees deal with outside contractors, as well as specific enhancements at particular building entrances.

"Our employees have been extremely encouraged by the security measures," said Mr. Tapling. "Fundamental, intelligent security measures show a commitment to a level of professionalism and personal concern that enables employees to feel good about their workplace."

EDT's Mr. Pagnato added that "Americans generally operate under the belief that there are systems in place to protect them. Unfortunately, police and other protective organizations are usually not there until after the fact," he noted.

"The average person is now realizing the need for these new life skills."

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