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## CENTERPIECE



Jon Crowe, a senior vice president at Mellon Bank Corp., (right) practices self-defense moves with Kevin Pagnato (middle), owner of Executive Defensive Tactics, and Sam Rosenberg, a trainer. Mr. Pagnato's business is growing rapidly as companies start to take security seriously.

Photo by Keith Hodan

## Secure but unseen

### At local companies, protecting executives is a big concern — and a big business for security experts

By ELIZABETH RAFFAELE

DOWNTOWN — Looking like typical executives, outfitted in suits, ties and briefcases, the five sat in the audience of the shareholders' meeting held at a major local hotel.

The meeting, held two years ago, was the culmination of several weeks of planning, during which the undercover security experts had orchestrated a plan to ensure the safety of top

executives who were planning to announce massive layoffs and a corporate restructuring.

While the security measures went unnoticed, they offer a glimpse into why and how local companies use executive security and security training.

Even in what many consider to be a relatively safe town, the business of executive security is growing, mirroring national trends. In fact, two local executive security firms say

they have doubled their revenue and client roster in just a few years.

Experts suggest that more Pittsburgh companies are seeking executive security services because of liability concerns, increased foreign travel by executives and fears of workplace violence.

But they also say this growing business remains largely unseen because Pittsburgh companies prefer to keep their executive security measures low-key.

At the shareholders' meeting, for example, the board of directors elected not to use more obvious measures, such as metal detectors.

Most Pittsburgh companies can keep their security efforts low-key, because doing business in Pittsburgh poses less of a threat than in other U.S. cities, said Regis Becker, chairman of the American Society of Industrial Security.

Mr. Becker ought to know. He's director of corporate security for PPG Industries Inc., Downtown, as well as head of the national trade group of corporate security professionals.

Generally, Pittsburgh "is not like New York, where you have superstar business profiles," he said.

Though Pittsburgh execs may lack celebrity status, local security firms say their services are in growing demand.

"This is a need-generated type of business," said Kevin Pagnato, the principal of Executive Defensive Tactics, a Downtown firm that trains executives in physical defense and workplace violence issues.

Company revenue has grown 40 to 50 percent each year since it opened seven years ago, Mr. Pagnato said.

Executive Defensive Tactics offers a program called Street Smartz, a single 90-minute program for executives. It also consults with other security professionals for events such as the shareholder meeting described above.

Mr. Pagnato, who has a background in the martial arts, now trains executives from Mellon Bank Corp., The Hillman Co. and PPG, among others.

His clients "used to be just high-level executives who frequently traveled and felt vulnerable," he said. Now, Mr. Pagnato's business has broadened to include executives who

don't travel extensively and an increasing number of women (see sidebar).

Mr. Pagnato is just one of several experts in the low-profile local executive security business. Those who ply the trade boast backgrounds ranging from police officers to professional fighters and management consultants.

Adding to their mystique, these professionals grow their businesses by referral, not by advertisement. Their work is usually known only to the top echelons of a corporation. And that's the way client companies like it.

"In many cases, CEOs are reluctant to call in law enforcement" when there is some threat or incident of violence, for fear of negative publicity, said Edward Vogler. Mr. Vogler, a former Pennsylvania state trooper, operates Specialized Training Associates, based in Glenshaw, and frequently works with Mr. Pagnato. He charges \$125 an hour for his services.

Since 1994, when Mr. Vogler started his firm, revenue has grown 200 percent. Part of reason for his success, he said, is a willingness to handle corporate security as sensitively and confidentially as possible.

"Almost everybody in the security business can keep the CEO from getting his nose bloody," Mr. Vogler said, "but the trick is to keep the CEO from being embarrassed."

To accomplish this, Mr. Vogler said security professionals must be almost invisible as they do their job. "Ideally, we should look like another suit."

They also keep a low profile so as not to be associated with less qualified practitioners.

"There are a lot of charlatans" who claim to be in the business, said Mr. Vogler.

Neal Holmes Jr., manager of investigations for Allied Security Inc., said pop culture stereotypes miss the true nature of the profession.

"We are not wearing an overcoat, the beat-up fedora and packing a .45," he said.

Allied, for example, doesn't do any work that involves firearms. The Castle Shannon firm is one of the city's largest security operations, best known for providing uniformed guards.

Providing executive security protection is "one of the most profitable parts of our business," said Mr. Holmes.

Part of the reason the business has grown is that more employers are concerned about liability for violent incidents in the workplace.

"You have to be fully cognizant of the downside liability," said Mr. Holmes.

Companies also seek Allied's services due to the personal problems of top executives.

For example, if a chairman or a chief executive is in the midst of a divorce or conflict with a spouse or an unpredictable child, that may pose a threat to the executive or company.

Most clients who seek these kinds of services tend to be males in upper-level positions. Most of Mr. Pagnato's clients, for example, are male executives age 38 to 58.

One local chief executive officer sought defensive training from Mr. Pagnato's firm after he was beaten by another man while skiing on the slopes of Aspen, Colo.

"The people that they (executives) run into are going to be younger, stronger and accustomed to more violence," said Mr. Pagnato.

Another Pagnato client, Robert Fragasso, president of The Fragasso Group Inc., a Downtown financial planning firm, said the security training gives him a "greater awareness of my options and how to use them."

That feeling of confidence, he said, "also translates into everyday business dealings."

The type of personal security training that an executive seeks often depends on personality.

"It's the individual or the advice of their attorneys" that determines an executive's security, said Mary Hostert, a former state trooper who investigates security and incidents of violence involving Allegheny Power, one of the area's largest utilities.

Ms. Hostert is also the treasurer of the local chapter of the American Society of Industrial Security, which she said has about 250 members.

While Pittsburgh seems relatively safe, security experts say that, behind the scenes, local firms are no different than those elsewhere.

They're trying to better protect their executives and their businesses from liability or potential harm. Security experts, who obviously benefit from the increased business, say it's a wise investment.

"I have told every executive that I have sat down with — either trying to talk to them or sell them — 'You can't just assume because you are in Pittsburgh, there isn't a threat,'" said Mr. Holmes.

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## Women executives bring new issues to security challenges

As more women reach the top ranks at local companies, work longer hours and travel more on business, they are bringing new challenges to the corporate security industry.

For example, one local high-ranking female executive was recently assaulted and robbed while on a business trip to Paris.

To avoid such scenarios and to offer some defense should they arise, women executives are seeking security help.

Women have a "whole different set of issues," said Kevin Pagnato, principal of Executive Defensive Tactics, a Downtown company that teaches executives security training.

Women have "to be one of the guys ... to be able to do business," he said, yet because they are women still operating in an environment dominated by men, they must be careful to avoid threatening situations.

With security training, female executives say they are better prepared to deal with the unknown.

Taylor McGown, an information technology consultant for Medrad Inc., said longer hours and frequent travel prompted her to take defense training.

As a result, "I think I size up situations a little bit differently," she said.

"There is something (to be gained) in terms of confidence in knowing that you could handle just about any situation if you had to," Ms. McGown said.

Ms. McGown echoed Mr. Pagnato's concern that women, given today's business environment, also must be prepared for social situations that might take an unwanted detour or become sexually threatening.

"Once you work fairly intensely and cut loose, those (situations) can involve alcohol,

etc., and can be physically threatening from time to time," she said.

Regis Becker, director of corporate security for PPG Industries Inc., Downtown, said PPG and other local companies are "tailoring more executive travel briefings to women executives" because of their growing numbers.

Mr. Pagnato said he is assisting more human resources executives. In many cases, they are female — and they are often the ones who carry the responsibility for hiring and firing.

When it comes to corporate security, he said, "Human resources people are effected personally. They are the ones that might be effected by the violence, and professionally, are expected to have a plan to deal with it when it happens."

— by Elizabeth Raffaele