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Protection experts use many skills

Work may include driving, first-aid and travel planning

By Craig Wolf
Poughkeepsie Journal

It's hard to get away from the term "bodyguard," given this is the word people recognize and use to describe the guy trailing the celebrity, corporate chieftain or other person who may be someone's target.

Those in the trade prefer "personal protection specialist."

There apparently is a market for this service in the Hudson Valley, if a New York City-based firm is right.

International Protection Group, or IPG, has set up shop in Poughkeepsie, which principal Jerry Heying considers to be the center of a broad area between Albany and New York City. Erin Clancy is operations manager for the Hudson Valley region.

The firm also has a subsidiary, International Protective Service Agency, that provides guards for building protection and events.

The company has been chosen as the Business of the Month for March by the Dutchess County Regional Chamber of Commerce, which plans a ribbon-cutting ceremony April 24.

"We try to avoid the use of the word, 'bodyguard,'" Heying said.

Practically anyone can call themselves that, but Heying, who founded his firm 20 years ago and has been in the field for about 30 years, said growing professionalism in the business has left the popular image behind.

Also, Heying said, "We try to bring an added value."

That typically includes driving, but may also cover speaking other languages, providing first aid and travel planning.

"I realized early on," Heying said, "that if you name 100 celebrities, probably less than 15 of them might have a bodyguard with them. But almost all of them will need transportation."

So the firm's people are "security drivers," which is like a chauffeur but with a focus on preventing trouble, identifying it and escaping from it.

The trained driver asks, "Is anyone following?" Careful planning of the route, or routes, is done to minimize the potential for trouble.

"We're not looking necessarily at the most direct route, but the safest route," Heying said.

And, movie scripts to the contrary, actual physical fights are rare.

"The fight that you don't have to fight is a fight that you've won," Heying said.

What makes a good protection specialist is a combination of traits, only one of which is personal defense ability in some physical form.

They need good observation habits. "You're looking for people looking at you," Heying said.

For example, in a situation such as protecting a female rock star from a stalker, a sign of danger would be, "You keep seeing a familiar face in the crowd," said Chris Corcoran of Red

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Karl Rabe/Poughkeepsie Journal
 Jerry Heying, Erin Clancy and Chris Corcoran work for International Protection Groups.

Profile

Name: Jerry Heying.

Job: Personal protection specialist, often called bodyguard. Owner and CEO, International Protection Group, New York City, with branch office, Poughkeepsie.

Years in business: Thirty, with 20 in his own firm.

Credentials and training: Studied at and has taught for Executive Protection Institute. Certified Protection Professional, Personal Protection Specialist, instructor in firearms, security.

Job facts: Bodyguard

Work: Personal protection of people who may be subjected to threats, violence or annoyance, typically celebrities, corporate executives, wealthy families.

Qualifications and training: Good health, physical fitness, intelligence, personal defense ability, sense of ethics and discretion, good character, training at schools specializing in this trade, on-job experience with mentors.

Job outlook: While no governmental numbers are reported, the field is believed by practitioners to be growing and improving.

Earnings: Typical annual earnings for newcomers are around \$50,000 to \$55,000, with experienced well-qualified workers rising well above that to as much as \$200,000. People on corporate payrolls may earn \$85,000 to \$110,000 a year. Some high-threat areas, such as executive protection in Iraq, may command up to \$300,000 a year.

Sources: Journal research.

On the Web

- International Protection Group:
www.ipgcompany.com

Hook, an account manager for IPG who also does some field work for clients, or "principals," as they call them.

A person also needs "the social skills to move in fairly high circles and not make a lot of gaffes," Corcoran added.

Heying said candidates for this field need to know how to dress in a decent but not conspicuous way and know etiquette. They need to be in good health and physically fit. They must be willing to work long hours that are sometimes inconvenient. They need to be punctual and reliable, and have a firm sense of ethics. They need to go to a recognized school for learning the protection business.

"There's a lot of investment in training," Heying said.

Clients often famous

Celebrity appeal isn't the best reason for wanting to enter the field, though celebrities are commonly clients. Heying has done work for the Olsen twins, Mary-Kate and Ashley, for example. There are other names he can't drop.

"We're the keeper of the secrets," he said.

So the ability to keep quiet is another necessary job skill here.

Other clients are corporate executives and, commonly, those who have great wealth or who have recently come into it.

Bodyguards are not necessarily big guys, Heying said. They need to blend in, for one thing.

"When do you need to be big? If the principal is big, or if the threat level is higher," Heying said.

Are there women bodyguards?

"Absolutely," Heying said. "I try to encourage women to get into the field."

The outlook for jobs in this industry is good, said Brian Feser, a Maryland-based executive with Corporate Security Solutions and a teacher for the American Society for Industrial Security.

"It's an ever-increasing field, especially with this day and age that we live in now," Feser said.

Corporations, governments, families and others find need for protection, he said.

It's a job that can be boring, with long periods of watchfulness and, once in a while, some excitement or danger.

Heying offers one other qualification for this job: "You really have to have a passion for this."

Reach Craig Wolf at cwolf@poughkeepsiejournal.com or 845-437-4815.

- Executive Protection Institute:
www.personalprotection.com

- American Society for Industrial Security:
www.asisonline.org

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Local Contact Info:

International Protection Group, LLC
235 Main Street
Poughkeepsie, NY
12601

(845)485-4855

www.HudsonValleySecurity.com

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