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Loyal clientele, employees help the company weather recession and position itself for the job

Mar 24, 2011 02:18 PM | By Tess Nacelewicz

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MOUNT DORA, Fla.—SmartWatch Security & Sound, a life-safety and security integrator based here, announced this month that it has won a \$1.5 million contract to install a fire alarm system, surveillance cameras and an emergency personal protection system (EPPS) at the new Orlando VA Medical Center.

“It is one of the largest construction projects going on in the United States today,” Dean Farrell, who is operations manager and one of the principals of SmartWatch, told *Security Systems News*.

That \$665 million, 1.2-million-square-foot facility is slated to open in the fall of 2012 on 65 acres in southeast Orange County, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Farrell said the project is also one of the largest that the company has undertaken in more than 10 years of being in business.

He said the 26-employee company is primed to take on such a big job because it didn’t cut staff or margins during the economic downturn. Farrell said 40 percent of SmartWatch’s business is fire, 40 percent is camera and access control and 20 percent involves other work such as sound systems.

Madelaine Lock, president and founder of the SmartWatch, said the business continued to grow during the recession because “we work very hard at what we do, we have high ethical standards and we believe in a high quality of work, and we treat our customers well.”

Most of the company’s work is with local, state and federal governments, and its projects include educational and government institutions and also theme parks. “We have done work for Disney, definitely, and we’re pretty much the sole security company for Universal (Studios in Orlando),” Lock said.

SmartWatch stands out because it has no sales staff, she said. "Everything we do is by referral and existing customers," Lock said.



Farrell said loyal clients helped the company continue to thrive during the recession. "I attribute a lot of that to our relationships with our clientele here in central Florida," he said.

Also, he said, "our employees I think are a big reason why when everyone was laying people off and struggling for work and cutting their margins, which in turn hurt them later, we didn't do those things."

"Our employees really stepped up and did whatever was asked of them," Farrell said. For example, he said, at times they agreed to work fewer hours per week.

"Whatever needed to be done, the team really held together and persevered through it. Then, when things started to pick back up we were in a great position to grab a lot of these projects, and were successful at them, so now we're in a great position to tackle a project the size of the VA hospital," Farrell said.

He said the company is working with two different electrical contractors on the job, both of whom SmartWatch has worked with previously and built strong relationships. "That's why we're there ... because of our performance and reputation on previous projects," Farrell said. Also, he said, a Notifier system with digital voice will be installed at the medical center "and we're regarded as one of the best-in-the-area Notifier dealerships, so that helps a lot."

Lock said the business may expand its staff as the project continues. "As the VA actually cranks up...we'll be hiring a couple people," she said.

Michael Cox, a SmartWatch employee who does systems design and support, said the \$177,000 EPPS that the company will install at the medical center is “several systems that kind of come together for staff safety. It’s panic buttons, a little bit of access control using intercoms, and what it does is it allows security in a few locations to be notified graphically if there’s an event.”

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