

Security firm born at Lions Club meeting

December 20, 2007

By Ashley Saluga | STAFF WRITER



Clarendon Hills residents Dan Bellich and Keith Chval enjoy themselves at their company's holiday party Dec. 8. (Photo for The Doings by Herb Shenkin)

Dan Bellich wanted to be an FBI agent when he was 8.

"It was the excitement and mystery," the Clarendon Hills resident said.

He even remembers writing a letter to J. Edgar Hoover, asking him how he could become an FBI agent.

It was the investigative process and the drive to solve every case that kept Bellich in the FBI for 27 years.

He has worked as an agent on many cases and as a supervisor on various units, including the Mexican drug trafficking squad, the criminal intelligence squad, the fugitive squad and the Chicago FBI Regional Firearms training facility.

Chasing heroin chain

His most favorite case, code name Whitemare, was also his hardest and most involved.

For two years, Bellich developed information from an informant and traveled to Singapore, the Philippines and other places, to gain information and evidence.

"We were able to gain a lot of cooperation from the law enforcement agencies around the world," Bellich said.

The case ended in New York, where the largest seizure of heroin in U.S. history at the time occurred.

"I was very satisfied," Bellich said.

For Bellich, the years in the FBI flew by.

In 1996, he supervised special deployments of the Chicago Division's SWAT team at the Republican and National Conventions, the late Pope John Paul II's 1999 visit to St. Louis, and the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympic Games.

In 2004, he decided to retire. The timing couldn't have been better for him. At a Clarendon Hills Lions Club meeting, Bellich and fellow village resident Keith Chval decided to combine their talents: Bellich's FBI knowledge and experience, with Chval's legal and technology expertise.

High-tech crime grows

Chval spent 13 years working as a prosecutor and seven years leading the Illinois Attorney General's unit on high-tech crimes. He created the unit in the mid-1990s, after seeing the growing convergence of technology and crime. It was one of the first such multidisciplinary units in the country.

He said his team of prosecutors, computer forensic examiners and investigators had a 100 percent conviction rate in more than 100 cases.

Now, he runs Protek International Inc. with Bellich. The company uses computer forensics, investigative services and digital evidence to provide litigation and advisory support.

A growing trend in the courts is the introduction of electronic evidence discovery.

"Attorneys are recognizing more and more (the importance of electronic evidence)," Bellich said.

Discovery includes data

Electronic evidence discovery is every piece of electronic data regarding a file, from its creation to any changes to the file. The data even includes when it's been printed out, Bellich added.

To make the data admissible in court, attorneys must provide documentation that the chain of evidence was handled correctly. That's what Protek's professionals do.

They also know when there's insufficient evidence to pursue a case.

Computer tells the tale

For example, a company may think a former employee has stolen its trade secrets. Protek professionals will examine the former employee's computer if available and perform the computer forensics needed to determine if a criminal act occurred.

Protek's staff will take a forensic image of all of the computer's components. Chval said they can even find out when a computer was plugged into an electrical outlet.

Bellich said such cases are a majority of what they work on.

Based on the evidence, Protek will recommend whether criminal prosecution should be pursued, and also advise the company on what it can do to make sure a security breakdown doesn't happen again.

Protek has "strategic partners" -- independent contractors -- with many different specialties, including forensic experts, retired police chiefs, polygraph specialists, retired FBI agents and computer forensic examiners.

"We understand what it takes to win a case," Bellich added.