

Local company creates comprehensive security packages

The industry is booming now, said Joe Freeman, president of Newtown, Connecticut-based consulting company J.P. Freeman Co. and Technology J.P. Freeman Laboratories.

Corporate giants like General Electric and Honeywell are making greater investments in security systems, while foreign companies are doing the same.

"Security is on our minds and, because of that, the investment in security programs and products will rise," said Freeman, a former president of Wells Fargo. "Unfortunately for all of us, it is a business that is growing."

The electronic security products and services industry has grown from a \$13.2 billion business in 1996 to \$22.3 billion last year, according to Security, Distribution and Marketing magazine. This year it's expected to grow another 9.7 percent.

While interest in security may be increasing, not many businesses are ready to offer companies what they are seeking these days: a broad array of security services. Instead, they specialize in guard services or a single item like alarms.

Michael Barnes, president of St. Louis-based Barnes Associates, an investment banking and consulting firm, estimated that only 2 percent of security companies are full-service like Kent.

"Companies that can offer new solutions like Kent are the more progressive companies," Barnes said. "I think that they are going to be very well positioned."

Today Kent, which has 1,100 employees, boasts hundreds of clients, includ-

ing the Four Ambassadors, L'Hermitage (both in Coconut Grove and Fort Lauderdale), the Bal Harbour Civic Association, American Capital Partners and the Courthouse Tower. It has offices throughout Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach, Collier and Lee counties.

Among the satisfied customers are the Naples Philharmonic and the Naples Museum of Art.

Stephen Pistner, a board member of both, described the Kent-installed system as one with "many sophisticated cameras and all kinds of layers of alarm systems. You have to know your business, and there is no question he [Neuman] knew what he was doing."

"The secret is not to sell one thing," Neuman said, "The secret is to come in as a problem solver and package everything together. We have many competitors in one thing, but none that do everything we do."

By 1992 Neuman, an engineer, had figured out that the future of the security industry and the company was in advanced technology. So he pushed Kent in the direction of electronics and gadgetry — although he says the first items Kent handled were really more security conveniences.

Kent teamed up with Nashville-based TransCor America in 1992 to offer the SunPass, a scannable sticker that enables cars to enter garages quickly and easily. (It shares a name with the device used to automatically deduct tolls on Florida's turnpike and other toll roads.) Also in the early 1990s Kent became the South Florida representative of CardKey, which offers a convenient



MARICE COHN BAND/HERALD STAFF

EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION: For the company's 20th anniversary, CEO Gil Neuman gave his employees a lasting gift: their own gym. Oak Hammock employee Ralph Souffrant, left, lifts weights at the facility while field supervisor Stanley Jones works out in the background.

'The secret is to come in as a problem solver and package everything together. We have many competitors in one thing, but none that do everything we do.'

- Gil Neuman, Kent Security Services CEO

and quick alternative to using regular keys, Neuman said.

While these moves were profitable, Neuman once again felt the need to add more services. So Kent started marketing security devices ranging from nanny cams and dome cameras, which are used in department stores; to retinal and hand scan machines that are used to

control access to buildings.

Diversification became the key to Kent's success. The company has grown from a \$10-million business in 1998 to an \$18-million business today. Neuman hopes to hit the \$20 million to \$21 million mark this year.

Profit margins are higher on the electronic gadgetry side than the

guard side of the business (20 percent versus 8 percent), but Kent still wants to offer customers one-stop shopping.

"You have to see who your clients are," Neuman said. "You have to do your homework. A product is not enough. You need to build up the technology and put it into users' minds."