

Top Guard Security Is The Best In Hampton Roads

Couple's dedication to service excellence equates to bright future for local security firm

By Jack Armistead
Downtowner Editor

If you're looking for the best private security company in Hampton Roads, look no further.

Top Guard Security has proven over the past 10 years that it is Hampton Roads' leading security service provider. With over 550 employees, Top Guard is the largest firm in its industry and is Hampton Roads region's largest woman-owned business. This award winning company has shown that through a dedication to service excellence, growth is possible even in tough times. Having already grown from 140 security officers in 2001 to over 550+ on staff today, this year Top Guard management forecasts continued growth and plans to add to its security force.

Top Guard's clients are found virtually everywhere you look in Hampton Roads. Go almost anywhere and you will see a Top Guard security officer or Top Guard mobile patrol vehicle. Over the last decade, Top Guard has been chosen to replace international, national and super-regional competitors at virtually all Downtown Norfolk commercial buildings. In addition to its Downtown commercial clients, Top Guard counts the City of Norfolk and Tidewater Community College among its premier clients. Other clientele include the area's top academic settings, premier shopping centers, manufacturing plants, distribution facilities and City, State & Federal contracts.

The couple that manages the firm, Chris & Nicole Stuart, are high school sweethearts who never imagined they would one day own one of the area's most successful local businesses. The two met on a blind date that coincidentally developed out of the business-oriented extracurricular activity called Junior Achievement. Nicole and Chris are both graduates of Old Dominion University, with each earning undergraduate and graduate degrees. Nicole holds a Bachelor's degree in political science with a criminal justice concentration and a Master's degree in public administration. Chris has a Bachelor and Master's degree in history. Both have also done post graduate studies in business and contracting.

During their time in college, Nicole and Chris worked in the private security industry. "I wanted a college degree, which meant that in addition to going to school full-time, it would be necessary to work full-time to pay for that degree" Chris remembers. "Being a security officer throughout my six years of undergraduate and graduate school provided me with all the insight necessary to ensure we never forget what it is like to do the job day to day. Many managers only see their sub-

ordinates from a 'behind the desk' perspective. It is interesting that there is now a television show out about the boss doing a front line individual's work. I actually came to my current position with all the knowledge of what it is like to do the work of those I now supervise. With this experience, I can certainly value the hard work that each of our employees provides and how important their role is to our company's success."

Nicole was never too far from the business either. Throughout college she worked in the accounting and financial departments of the security business. She assisted the operations department as well and gained a thorough understanding of all the business aspects of the security industry. Coupled with Chris's front line experience, the duo found they really enjoyed everything the security industry had to offer and decided to make it a career.

What followed is a fairly classic tale for entrepreneurs. The two found themselves immersed in the security business and working around the clock managing 140 employees. For the next 4-5 years the couple worked hard to build Top Guard's stellar reputation for attention to detail and unmatched client service. They were selective about the clients they took and even more selective in who they let wear the Top Guard uniform. Their hours were long but the two knew their clients counted on them to ensure Top Guard provided the best security service. "The running joke at the time was that our only friends during those years were other workaholics, and they all thought we were nuts." Chris recalls of their 20-hour days. "One of our neighbors lived across the street from us for three years and thought our home wasn't occupied because of the late hours we kept. We simply loved what we did and dedicated every waking moment to making sure our services were the finest." Eventually, the hard work began to pay off in large contract awards and Top Guard's reputation for quality services began to take on a life of its own. Chris and Nicole added the support staff that allowed them to grow the business, while still retaining the attention to each individual client that they had become known for.

These days the organizational chart begins with Nicole and Chris in their executive roles and includes the firm's General Manager Jerry Jackson. Jerry has a comprehensive background that includes the military service and the corporate world. Jerry is a retired veteran of the Armed Services, an NRA Certified Instructor and a Certified NRA Range Consultant. His previous management positions include Blackwater USA, Trader Publishing Company and Cavalier Telephone; He



Dudley on patrol.

holds a Bachelor's degree and MBA from Saint Leos College. With such a diverse background, Jerry brings a well rounded method of training, security experience, and management tools to Top Guard Security. "What struck me immediately upon joining the team was the commitment to doing the job right" Jerry Jackson notes, "and the pride with which we seek to offer more, be it more support or simply more of what the client is looking for in their security team."

This commitment to support has proven to be a difference maker. The firm currently has four Operations Managers, each tasked with a geographically defined portfolio, that span the Southside and the Peninsula. With recruitment and effective hiring being essential to a service firm's success, the company has an HR team that includes a departmental manager and staffing specialist. Other support staff positions reinforce the firm's commitment to properly training its officers. "Clients expect their security officers to be knowledgeable from the moment they complete OJT" notes Nicole. Thus the firm has chosen to have a full-time Training Director on staff as well. "It is part of our commitment to excellence," says Chris.

Top Guard's dedication to service excellence has certainly become its hallmark. Well known for its professionalism, Top Guard management welcomes an opportunity to resolve your security challenges.

Should you have an interest in the firm or its services, please feel free to contact Chris Stuart at (757) 592-2308 or cstuart@topguardinc.com and please tell them The Downtowner sent you.
