

THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2002

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Local businesses still feel 9-11 effects

Security tightens as recession deepens

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Hundreds of miles from the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington last year, local businesses have nevertheless been affected. A number have tightened security. Others have seen the attacks deepen the effects of a recession.

Tech firms have been particularly concerned with security. Local digital archiving firm ProQuest has for years issued security badges to its 1,100 employees. However, on the recommendation of a security expert after Sept. 11, employees were issued photo ID badges.

Other new measures include fewer entry doors and new policies regarding visitors, who must sign in and be accompanied by an employee at all times, said ProQuest spokeswoman Tina Creguer.

Pfizer Inc., the Ann Arbor area's largest private employer, also has instituted several new security procedures.

"There now is a guard at the sidewalk," said spokeswoman Betsy Raymond. "It used to be you showed your ID at the lobby. That's an additional layer that wasn't there before."

The pharmaceutical company is wary of supplying details on the new procedures, but it has set up barriers at some vulnerable points at several top research spots. The company also has more frequent contact with law enforcement agencies, Raymond said.

Pfizer's global research and development infrastructure also is pushing for more stringent checks on intellectual property.



LARRY E. WRIGHT, THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Pfizer employee Corrie Thome passes a security station and swipes her company-issued photo ID through a turnstile after entering the building. Pfizer workers also have to flash their badges when they enter the parking lots.

"When you're making medicine with sensitive documents on how to combat infectious disease, it's definitely something you want locked up," Raymond said.

Steel manufacturer Ideal Steel and Builders' Supplies initiated background checks on new employees soon after the attacks. The company, which has a new plant in Howell, employs an agency that checks anything suspicious in a candidate's resume, said Sanjeev Shelar, vice president and general manager of Ideal's Howell manufacturing plant.

A year after the attacks, there are signs that employees remain edgy about the future, according to a study from eePulse, an Ann Arbor company that conducts employee surveys via e-mail questionnaires.

It polled 7,466 human resources employees through the Society for Human Resource Management, an industry group. Just a week after the attacks, 73 percent of those sur-

veyed hoped to return to "business as usual" to a large extent. About 41 percent still have that expectation, according to a similar poll last month.

eePulse CEO Theresa Welbourne said uncertainty may have persisted due to the economic slowdown. Bush administration threats to attack Iraq also may be fueling more anxiety and uncertainty among workers, she said.

Companies cut air travel severely after Sept. 11, which further damaged an industry already hit hard by the recession.

Mark Roisen, president of Aviation Center Inc., a flight school at Ann Arbor Airport, said that after the terrorist attacks, companies scheduled fewer charter flights and put more private planes up for sale, throwing a glut of planes into an already slow market.

Roisen also believes new flight-lesson screening has slowed his business. A Michigan law in effect since May 1 re-

quires anyone seeking flight lessons or upgrading a license to submit to a background check. The \$69 fee covers an application plus fingerprinting reviewed by local police and the FBI. Anyone with a felony record less than seven years old cannot apply for flight lessons.

Roisen acknowledged the need for security but wondered how many potential customers with clean records have stayed away, not wanting their fingerprints on file. "This puts terrorists in a winning mode," he said. "They're succeeding in disrupting our way of life."

Avfuel, the Ann Arbor company which supplies fuel and aviation services to 700 dealers around the country, bought Texaco's aviation business in 14 states only days before the World Trade Center disaster. Avfuel saw its commercial airline business drop after Sept. 11 as companies reduced flights.

But Avfuel President Craig Sincock said charter flight business increased as companies sought alternatives to commercial air travel.

Edwards Brothers, the short-run publisher on South State Street, published a number of titles related to Sept. 11, said its president, John Edwards.

It wasn't enough, however, to cover business lost because of the recession. Not until this summer did orders pick up. "We've had a very busy three months," said Edwards, whose workers planned to stop today for a moment of silence and the reading of a commemorative poem.

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