



Victoria guards get course on 'predictive profiling'

By Sandra McCulloch, Times Colonist October 23, 2010

Security professionals are to be trained in "predictive profiling" by a veteran of the Israeli Defense Forces in Victoria next week.

Amotz Brandes is holding classes for 30 professionals from here and across Canada Tuesday and Wednesday. Brandes began his career as a security agent for El-Al Israel Airlines in Los Angeles and is now managing partner of Chameleon Associates, according to the company's website.

The website said the professionals would be shown how to "enhance security programs by proactively identifying criminal or terrorist operations in the planning, surveillance and rehearsal stages."

The focus is not racial profiling, said Stan Verran, CEO of the security firm Commissionaires Victoria, the Islands and Yukon.

"We're hoping to improve our security skills," Verran said. The course "is all about profiling threat-actors, whether they be criminals or terrorists," he said.

"The training focuses on recognizing patterns of crime by individuals and assessing what is detected by simple questions."

The course includes sessions on the nature of terrorism, bomb configurations and concealment methods, suicide bombers, principles of questioning and the psychology of threat assessment and decision making.

Most of the work of commissionaires involves security, Verran said. Many of his staff are former military members or have experience as RCMP or municipal police officers.

Commissionaires work in key positions across Greater Victoria. They guard all military installations, including CFB Esquimalt and the Rocky Point ammunitions depot, as well as Victoria and Nanaimo airports.

Verran served 36 years in the navy and was base commander at CFB Esquimalt from 1995 to 1997.

Security guards may notice potential criminals because "there are patterns that can be recognized that you can deal with," Verran said.

A guard might notice "someone who has dressed differently, is looking in a different direction than anyone else," he said. "They stand out because their behaviour is suspicious compared to everyone else's behaviour."

But Micheal Vonn, spokeswoman for the B.C. Civil Liberties Association, said there is a danger in singling out people who are different.

"We're looking for people who are different -- different than what?" she said.

The security field uses methods of identifying potential criminals that it does not make public, Vonn said. "If we let everybody know, then the bad guys can use it against you -- that's security logic.

"That's deeply problematic from a rights perspective. Of course, we need to know what [the methods are] to find out if they're applying profiling in a discriminatory manner."

A person could be deemed suspicious just by not answering questions and keeping their information private, she said. "There's a propensity in the [police] culture that if you know your rights, you must be a little fishy."

But Verran said the best technique he has learned for disarming suspicious people is to ask them: How may I help you?

"When you say that to a bad guy, it really knocks them off their feet," he said. "They're not expecting that question."

Threats could appear innocuous, like a white van with darkened windows parked outside CFB Esquimalt, he said.

"Why not go over and just ask a question?" said Verran. "It's just a matter of being observant and knowing what to look for."