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# A founding father of cyber security strikes out on his own

San Antonio Business Journal - by Mike W. Thomas

As the founder of the Air Force Computer Emergency Response Team (AFCERT), Fred Ramirez has a strong reputation in the world of cyber security that he hopes to build on with his new company, **Cyber Net Force**.

After spending 25 years in the information technology and security field, first with the Air Force and then in private industry, Ramirez is finally setting off on his own to fulfill a dream of running his own company.

"I've always wanted to start my own business and be in control of my own destiny," Ramirez says.

Ramirez now faces the challenges all new entrepreneurs face when striking out on their own, but he is far from being a novice in his field.

For years Ramirez was the director of a team of cutting-edge computer gurus who blazed new trails in the cyber security world.

Cyber Net Force was incorporated in December of last year and has already received 8(a) status from the U.S. Small Business Administration, meaning it has been certified as a minority-owned business.

Ramirez says his new business has taken off faster than he expected. He says he was pleasantly surprised to receive his 8(a) status after just eight months considering that it sometimes takes as long as two years. He says he is also expecting to meet his goal of $150,000 in revenues for this year.

One of the main services that Cyber Net Force will provide is helping large companies to merge complicated security products with their existing computer systems.

**Leading edge**

While at AFCERT, Ramirez was at the helm during the development of many of the basic tools of the computer security industry, including one of the first virus protection programs and the first enterprise intrusion detection system. He oversaw the growth of AFCERT as it expanded from three employees in 1990 to more than 80 when he left in 1997.

But while many of his former AFCERT colleagues left the Air Force to launch successful technology companies, Ramirez has for the most part remained behind the scenes, working first as a consultant and then as an executive for **SecureInfo Corp.** SecureInfo was founded in 1994 by Keith Frederick, another graduate of "security hill," the name for the home of the Air Intelligence Agency at Lackland Air Force Base.

Ramirez helped place AFCERT at the leading edge of cyber security while he was there, Frederick says.

"He did great work at AFCERT and I'm glad to see that the Air Force was smart enough to stick with his plan after he left," he says. "It is what it is today because of him."

At SecureInfo, Ramirez helped set up a similar program for one of the company's largest clients, the Veterans Administration. The program is known as the Computer Incident Response Center, or CIRC.

Frederick says Ramirez was instrumental in setting up the VA's security operation.

"We depended on him a great deal and he always came through for us," he says. He adds that SecureInfo was privileged to have Ramirez on its team for nearly five years.

While Ramirez was with SecureInfo, the company experienced explosive growth. For the five-year period ending in 2004, SecureInfo recorded revenue growth of more than 2,200 percent, ranking it as the 14th fastest-growing private company in the United States, according to Inc. magazine. In 2000, SecureInfo had revenues of about $1.5 million and by the end of 2004 it had grown to $42 million.

**Stellar reputation**

Michael Garcia, vice president of marketing for **MDI Security Systems Inc.**, worked with Ramirez at SecureInfo and says he is a visionary who has a stellar reputation in the world of cyber security.

"Fred (Ramirez) is absolutely a man of his word," Garcia says. "He would do more for his customers and for the people who work for him than he would do for himself. He has a reputation for making sure that every promise is delivered."

Garcia says when Ramirez came to work at SecureInfo, he helped to attract a lot of his former AFCERT colleagues to join the company as well.

"When he needed help setting up the CIRC program for the VA, he called up some of his old contacts and they dropped what they were doing and went to work for SecureInfo," he says. "I believe most of them would do the same thing again.

Garcia notes that many of the people who worked under Ramirez at AFCERT are today running successful technology companies like SecureLogix Inc. or are working in key positions in the security world, such as chief security officer at Bank of America and McAfee Inc.

"The stars of the security world came out of AFCERT," Garcia says. "If you have that on your resume, you can pretty much write your own ticket in the cyber security industry."

**Filling a niche**

With his new company, Ramirez says he plans to focus on the San Antonio community and hopes to fill a niche by providing security services for companies and by partnering with information technology providers.

"There are already a lot of security companies in town," he notes. "I think what I bring is a lot of experience with what it takes to put a tool to work in a large environment."

Ramirez says he believes that in the same way the Air Force provides security in the air, the country needs a cyber force to protect its online assets. As new technologies such as wireless Internet continue to spring up and expand, there will be new vulnerabilities for hackers and computer viruses to exploit, he says.

"I hope that I will be here to help companies deal with these new threats," he says.

Ramirez says Cyber Force has secured three contracts so far and has four more proposals on the table.

"If any one of those hits I will be in a good position," he says. "If all four hit I will be in trouble, but it is a good problem."

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