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City requires security guard licenses

Background check needed to carry firearm in Lawrence despite lack of statewide standard

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Zac Marrs doesn't subscribe to the bumbling stereotype of "rent-a-cop" security guards.

"The old days of just sticking the Barney Fife guy out there who was breathing and trying to stay upright, those days are gone," said Marrs, owner of Mil-Spec Security Group in Lawrence. "It has to be someone with qualifications now."

That's not true everywhere.

The Associated Press this week reported its findings that private security guards are, nationwide, poorly paid and lacking experience, creating a "weak link" in national defense. Kansas was singled out as one of 10 states that lacks licensing, training or background checks for security guards.

In Lawrence, however, City Hall has required all security guards to be licensed since 1980 - subjecting guards to a full background check if they want to carry a firearm.

"The only time a full background check is done is if they're requesting to carry a firearm," said Lawrence police Sgt. Paul Fellers. "If they're not going to carry a firearm, then it's just a matter of processing the paperwork and the license."

The paperwork is a two-page application that includes questions about the applicant's criminal history, gun ownership and work history. The applicant must pay \$50 for the license - with a \$25 annual renewal fee - and provide a "letter of intent" from his or her employer.

A prospective security guard must pay an additional \$28 and complete a firearms proficiency program in order to carry a gun on the job.

Marrs - who employs 25 of Lawrence's 67 licensed guards - started his business in 1995. The Mil-Spec guards and cars are a familiar weekend sight at some Lawrence nightclubs.

"You'd be surprised how many people require security for different reasons," he said.

Marrs doesn't mind making his employees jump through the hoops. He says the state should institute stricter standards for the industry, including now nonexistent training requirements.

"That's not mandatory by any means, which is scary," he said. "It would be nice if the state did some sort of across-the-board specifications; it would really weed out the agencies that put such a dark shadow on security.

"I think it's in everyone's best interest," he said. "It's scary if you want to go into this line of work."

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