Kentucky Alarm Company Steps Up for School Security by Donating Panic Buttons to 27 Facilities

By Bob Ogle

Mourners across the nation faced a flood of emotions last December after the Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings in Connecticut – shock, grief, an overwhelming sense of loss, and powerlessness. But there was also a question that hung like a cloud over every community: How can we make our schools more secure?

While attending a memorial service near his home in Somerset, Ky., David Morris, president of ESA member company Modern Systems Inc., quickly came up with an answer.

"It came to me in an instant," he said. "I'm in a position to do something that can make a difference. I knew I had to do it, and I knew I couldn't charge anything for it. If I did that, I'd just be somebody else with another proposal on the table, regardless of what the price was."

Before heading home after the service, he quietly mentioned to his pastor and to a local assistant principal that he wanted to put panic alarms in every school in the county. That low-key promise has had a high-profile impact on the safety of students and employees in 27 schools and educational facilities in Pulaski County, not to mention their families and the entire surrounding area.

"I knew immediately what I was going to do," he said. "There were going to be three panic buttons in every school, each one strategically located. I never wavered from that plan, other than adding some features. My only concern at that point was, how can I sell the idea to the superintendents?"

Facilities in the region range from city and county schools to administrative buildings and programs such as Head Start.

When David contacted the superintendents, he was prepared for some resistance, and possible questions about underlying motives.

In a time of tight budgets, with school security being an item that hadn't been a top priority for major expenditures, the offer was embraced. Within a few weeks,

This is what enhanced security looked like for 27 schools before it was installed by Modern Security, Inc.

27 systems were installed in what ultimately came to be known as "Operation Security Blanket."

There was no charge for installation, monitoring or equipment, David said, "directly or indirectly, now or in the

future." He won't be specific about how much the project ultimately cost in equipment and labor, including a huge chunk of time invested in training every school employee involved in the project.

The concept was relatively straightforward. When David studied the events at Sandy Hook, he saw

that by most standards, the facility had good security with cameras and access control. But they were of little use once the gunman shot his way through the door. What might have made a difference – a simple panic button, one of the most basic tools

in the business – wasn't part of the security scenario.

"It was a missing piece of the puzzle," he said. "It was a small piece, but it was a critical piece. Most threats are detected at the receptionist level in a school, and they have nothing. Panic buttons make perfect sense."

They make a difference because of their simplicity: Pressing the button for five seconds sends a silent alarm to a monitoring station, which contacts local law enforcement without the risk of call-back verification. That gets first responders rolling as quickly as possible. It doesn't have to be a SWAT team, David said, just someone who can quickly arrive at the scene and begin dealing with the situation when every second counts. The button also sends a text or e-mail message to faculty and staff members on lists that are managed by the school systems, quickly alerting them of the situation.

The system can be used in all types of scenarios, he said, not just when guns are involved. The buttons are for any situation that would normally cause someone to dial 911.

The positive feedback has been greater than David ever imagined. He's heard from security companies from Florida to Idaho looking for information and advice. He has been invited to meet with the mayor of Lexington, Ky., in mid-May, and also to travel to Philadelphia to speak with a group there.

Operation Security Blanket is far from complete. "Hopefully, it's going to continue to grow," he said. "When security companies call me, my role is simply to tell them what I've done, encourage them to do the same thing, and offer my assistance in any way, as long as they're going to do something for no charge."

David hasn't actively sought attention for the program. In fact, ESA learned of his efforts only by monitoring industry news on the Internet.

"This wasn't for publicity," he said. "I could never have come up with an ad campaign or marketing campaign that would have been this successful. But I've got stacks of cards and letters from people I don't know, that I've never met. I've been overwhelmed by the response."

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Learn More

To find out more about Operation Security Blanket, contact Modern Systems at 800-252-7664 or go to www.modernsystemsinc.com.

Tell Us Your Story

We'd like to hear more from member companies like Modern Systems who are doing good things in the community. Please contact ESA's communications staff at Bob.Ogle@ESAweb.org, or 972-807-6813; or Jeaneen.Bengtson@ESAweb.org, or 972-807-6811.

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