

Report on **Business**

Cranking up the hiring machine

Security company has the herculean task of hiring 5,000 people before the Olympic Games

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Jane Greene isn't a household name, but after years of dreaming and hard work, the Toronto resident has big ambitions for next year's Olympics.

You won't find her rocketing down the ski slopes in Whistler, or sprinting around the speed skating track in Vancouver. In fact, if everything goes according to plan, she will stay out of the spotlight altogether.

Ms. Greene is chief executive officer of Aeroguard Group, one of three companies that will together provide crucial security services at the Winter Games. She believes a safe and well-run security operation, not unlike an athlete's gold-medal performance, will attract worldwide attention, helping her firm expand into new markets such as the United States and Europe.

"Five years ago when I came in I had my eye set on doing Olympic security," Ms. Greene explained in a recent interview.

"It's an important stamp of approval for what was several years ago a relatively small Canadian company. Now we're on the world stage. I really see us leveraging this opportunity to have more of a global focus."

It sounds promising, but that payoff hinges on a rather challenging test. Aeroguard and its partners will be in charge of recruiting and training an army of 5,000 temporary security workers before the Games start in February. Those employees, who will operate the metal detectors and scour bags for banned items, will shoulder a tremendous responsibility: the safety of thousands of athletes, VIPs and visitors who attend each event.

Aeroguard itself is an Olympic rookie. Ms. Greene's father founded the privately held company with a partner in 1986 to provide security services at airports in the wake of the Air India bombing. Then the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States made security the top priority in airports. Since then, Aeroguard's growth has taken off and its employee count has skyrocketed from 500 in 1999 to its current 2,000. Annual revenue now tops \$100-million.

With no background in providing security for large events, Aeroguard needed a skilled partner if it wanted a shot at the Winter Olympics contract. Ms. Greene wooed U.S.-based security company Contemporary Group, whose résumé includes a handful of previous Games and other high-profile events such as the Sundance Film Festival. Joined by Western Canada-based United Protection Security Group Inc., the trio dubbed Contemporary Security Canada won the security screening contract in April, a deal valued at up to \$97.4-million. That's driving a 55-per-cent increase in Aeroguard's revenue in the current fiscal year ending in March.

"I've been told it's one of the largest security contracts ever tendered in North America," Ms. Greene notes.

She packed her bags in July and moved from corporate headquarters in Toronto to Vancouver in order to

oversee the Games preparations. The first task is getting its “hiring machine” up and running in order to sign 5,000 employees. Finding good workers isn't easy at any time, Ms. Greene admits.

A security background is desirable, but not a requirement. Olympic employees must be able to pass a criminal background check, and meet certain physical criteria; those who can't stand longer than five minutes need not apply.

While Ms. Greene is interested in retaining some of these employees after the Olympics, most will have no job security. Their contracts will range anywhere from a few weeks to three months, making it attractive for groups such as students and stay-at-home moms but less so for experienced security guards.

Another big recruiting focus is aboriginals. The company recently held an aboriginal hiring day in Vancouver. Todd Severson, project director for Contemporary Security Canada, explains that it gives an opportunity to a group that is left out at times, and showcases Canada's multicultural society.

“What's in our favour is that so many people are excited to be part of the Olympics,” Ms. Greene says.

Contemporary Security Canada won't say how many people it has hired, though Mr. Severson says it's meeting targets and has signed up hundreds of employees on some days. The company is reaching out to potential recruits through the Internet, including its website, www.hireme2010.com, and via social media outlets such as Twitter. It's also pursuing more traditional venues such as job fairs and colleges.

In addition to these private employees, 5,200 RCMP officers, 1,800 police officers and members of the military will be in charge of watching over the Winter Games.

After the huge hiring spree, the next chapter will be preparing the new employees for their Olympic odyssey. Training for the would-be security guards started recently in Vancouver. The curriculum, which the RCMP has approved, isn't just about security. The employees will also learn about the Olympic operations, along with leadership skills such as conflict resolution and motivation techniques.

One security expert believes it will be “quite a challenging task” to find and train 5,000 security personnel. Mark Rohlehr, CEO of Corporate Safety and Security Services and a professor at Seneca College's School of Public Safety and Police Studies, said the key will be to give them a narrow, concise task and make sure they know when to quickly call RCMP backup if things go awry.

The goal will be “making sure people are trained adequately, understand their role, and are able to function in the limitations set by the RCMP, who are their ringmaster,” Mr. Rohlehr said.

If Aeroguard and its partners meet that mandate and deliver a safe and secure Olympic Games, Ms. Greene can continue to dream big. She already has her sights set on winning the security contract for next summer's G8 Summit in Ontario's Muskoka cottage region.

“We would definitely want to be pursuing that as a business opportunity,” she said.

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