

To advertise here, contact your PBN account manager
advertising@pbn.com



Posted Jan. 28, 2008

MAIN STREET

Valentine's Day a boon for P.I.

By Kevin Shalvey
PBN Staff Writer

For many people, Valentine's Day is a time for buying flowers and cuddling with sweethearts, husbands or wives.

But for Vic Pichette, owner of Genesis Investigations, it's a prime day to catch canoodling cheaters.

In fact, February is the busiest month for domestic cases for the North Kingstown-based private investigation company. As the big day for lovers nears, Pichette sees about a third of his annual domestic investigations.

"Valentine's Day is one of those days when people who have a suspicion that their spouse might be having an affair usually call a P.I.," Pichette told Providence Business News in an interview. "We'll probably do 15 cases just in that month."

It is one of the only days during the year when a cheater has to please two people at the same time, which sometimes leads to a guilty party letting their guard down and being sloppy, Pichette said.

If a husband is cheating, "he has to please his wife on Valentine's Day, but he also has somebody else he has to please," Pichette said. "And she wants to see him, too. It's one of those situations where there's a lot of activity."

And domestic cases are more labor intensive than workers' compensation cases, of which Genesis does about 100 each year.

A domestic case could require 10 hours a day or weekend and nighttime surveillance. At about \$75 per hour plus expenses, a domestic investigation usually costs about \$1,000 for between 8 to 10 hours, Pichette said. With a workers' compensation investigation, though, that rate can drop as low as \$45 per hour.

For customers, either is a big investment. "That's why you need to hire good people who aren't going to waste your money and who are going to be honest, tell you what the facts are," Pichette said.

Pichette opened Genesis in 1986 after three years of work in the industry. (Rhode Island's requirement for licensed private investigators has since been raised to five years of training.) He is hired by lawyers and businesses to conduct criminal, personal injury and financial investigations and he helps locate people and property.

Although he doesn't have any full-time employees, Pichette can't do all the work himself. He has seven independent contractors who work with him. But it's still difficult to bring in business, he said, especially in a small market. "In Rhode Island, it's very tough to do well in this business and survive," Pichette said. "You've got to be around for a long time and know your stuff."



PBN PHOTO/MATTHEW HEALEY

PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR Vic Pichette holds up a button cam, which is a small video camera hidden in a button that he uses while working in the field. The camera is just one of many new high-tech devices that investigators like Pichette use.

CLICK HERE

During the past 22 years, Pichette's business has changed dramatically because of evolving technology. Instead of the stationary surveillance techniques he used to use, Pichette can now follow and record video of those he's investigating.

"In the old days, what would happen is we'd see them arrive and my investigative report would say, 'Subject arrived with a female at 9 p.m.,' and then I'd sit and observe them and write, '2 a.m., they left,'" Pichette said. "But today, you can go in and record whatever they're doing. So it basically speaks for itself."

For that, Pichette has to have the right equipment, and a high-quality recorder can range from \$800 to \$2,000.

"That's the expensive part, the digital video camera. It's a little square box that looks like a pack of cigarettes and it records the information onto a smart card," Pichette said. "It's a relatively new technology. In the old days, we had to record onto a Sony 8 mm recorder, which is huge."

He was also an entrepreneur in the state, owning the first spy store – Security Services – in the Ocean State. "I was the only one who ever owned a spy store in Rhode Island," Pichette said. Although he still deals electronics, he now works from his home in North Kingstown. Through his Web site, amateur investigators can buy computer keystroke loggers, motion-sensing cameras and telephone recorders.

What makes Genesis Investigations, and businesses like it, necessary is that they are uninvolved third-parties. With new technology, like a tie-camera and small digital video recorders, a spouse could potentially do much of the work Pichette does. But, along with a lack of experience, they wouldn't be clear-headed about finding answers, he said.

"For instance, if I go out and follow somebody and I don't see something, what goes in my report is that I didn't see anything," Pichette said. "When you hire a private investigator, you're hiring somebody who's unbiased. And that's the key. If you go to court, and you have to take the stand, you're not getting demolished by a defense attorney." •

company profile: Genesis Investigations

OWNER: Vic Pichette

TYPE OF BUSINESS: private investigations

LOCATION: 125 Georgia Avenue,
North Kingstown

EMPLOYEES: 1 (includes owner)

YEAR ESTABLISHED: 1986

ANNUAL REVENUE: WND

