

The Miami Herald

A virtual tripwire: Drawing the line -- on water

Port Everglades has signed a deal to install software that will let cameras monitor an area and determine whether someone -- or something -- poses a threat.

By Dale K. DuPont

June 2, 2004

Port Everglades is installing smart video cameras that can detect bad guys moving alongside a ship or a suitcase left unattended at a cruise terminal.

The patented, multimilliondollar system sets up a virtual tripwire and alerts port security when something's awry, in case it had been missed during the constant scanning of monitors.

Security, a focus of seaports and airports since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, is especially critical now as ports rush to meet the July 1 deadline for implementation of new international security regulations.

"It really is something that adds a lot to our security system, an additional level that's hard to replicate with a human being looking at a video camera," said Mel Becena, Port Everglade's security administrator. "The fact that the U.S. Border Patrol selected ObjectVideo for the northern border makes me feel pretty good."

ObjectVideo is a Reston, Va.-based company headed by Raul J. Fernandez, who made more than \$200 million after founding Proxicom, a designer and manager of websites for large companies. He took Proxicom public in 1999 and sold it to Dimension Data in 2001 for \$448 million. (Proxicom was sold again in March, to Gores Technology Group, a Los Angeles-based buyout firm.)

Fernandez, 37, is quick to note that he has family and other ties to South Florida. He's had a home on Fisher Island since 1999 and had several discussions in 2000 with H. Wayne Huizenga about the possibility of Fernandez's buying into the Dolphins.

As is, Fernandez is one of the owners of the Washington Wizards pro basketball team and the Washington Capitals pro hockey team.

He has invested more than \$2 million in ObjectVideo, which was founded in 1998.

"The war on terrorism is going to be won with the use of technology," he said.

ObjectVideo has built a base of government customers and just this year started adding such commercial clients as chemical plants and petroleum facilities, in the United States and abroad.

Fernandez figures that the private company, which has 65 employees, has about a half-dozen serious competitors. He declined to disclose revenue but said he expected ObjectVideo to be profitable in the next quarter.

Port Everglades, a large cruise and container port as well as the largest refined-petroleum storage facility on the East Coast, will be the fourth port to have the system. The others are Houston, Jacksonville and one that Fernandez said he wasn't at liberty to name.

He added that he'd also approached the Port of Miami-Dade but that no deal had been reached.

"I was looking at something to protect the water side of the port," Becena said.

The port will have more than 100 cameras with the software once the system has been fully installed by August. Retail price on the software is \$4,000 per camera, so that will take up nearly half of the \$9 million the port had budgeted for technology.

The port can create virtual perimeters on land and water by drawing a video tripwire on a computer snapshot of the camera's view, the company said. Changes can be made instantaneously to respond to specific threats.

Say a small boat is spotted loitering next to a ship. The software notifies port security by phone, pager or e-mail or on an alert console.

"This," Becena said, ``adds a different layer of security."