

COMPLIMENTARY

ACCENT

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AKAL SECURITY'S
DAYA SINGH
KHALSA

THE MILLION DOLLAR LADY
TERI BAIRD

LADY LOBOS BASKETBALL COACH
DON FLANAGAN

AND COLUMNIST DENNIS DOMRZALSKI

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Akal Company Profile

In Albuquerque, Akal is probably best known as "State Fair security." Since 1987, the company has been the only security contractor selected in unrestricted bidding for the New Mexico State Fair. Annually in September, Akal provides more than 10,000 hours of security and law enforcement officers per week for the Albuquerque Expo New Mexico venue that is one of the largest state fairs in the United States.

Throughout the year, Akal provides 24-hour coverage at the fairgrounds with roving foot and vehicle patrols and provides security for all events that take place in the 12,000-seat Tingley Coliseum. During large events such as rock concerts, rodeos and wrestling matches, Akal utilizes its "Peer Level" division, in concert with uniformed officers, to provide a core crew of event security staff especially trained in handling the unique security demands for large crowds at public events.

Following rapid expansion that, for two consecutive years, elevated the company to Inc. Magazine's list of the 500 fastest-growing companies in the United States, Akal now boasts a diverse portfolio of national clients that depend on its management of critical protection programs, including:

- State, county and city government facilities
- International and regional airports
- Warehouses and industrial complexes
- Office buildings
- Financial institutions
- Universities and school districts
- Research and development facilities or "clean environments"
- Health care facilities

The company's client list also includes multinational corporations, premium office properties, and financial facilities like:

- Baltimore-Washington International Airport
- City of El Paso, El Paso International Airport
- State of Arizona Department of Revenue
- Los Angeles County Medical Centers
- Arrowhead Regional Medical Center
- Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad
- EXPO New Mexico, home of the New Mexico State Fair

ACCENT COVER STORY

Home State Security

by Paul Ross

It started with a personal goal, became part of a national obsession and then turned into a worldwide cause. And it all began in Española, N.M.

In 1980, Gurtej Khalsa, a member of northern New Mexico's Sikh community, was denied his chosen profession because of his appearance. He had trained rigorously as a police officer and was head of security for Saint John's College, yet the turban and beard required by his religion prevented his acceptance in the thin blue line. So he started his own security business: Akal. (Upon hearing this announcement, the late Yogi Bhaajan, founder of America's Sikhs, said to him that his idea was a good one. "That way you can hire the police!" the yogi said.)

Both the name of the security company and its guiding principles are rooted in Sikhism; Akal is an acronym for a Sanskrit battle cry meaning "deathless or infinite" and signifies a deep personal commitment to the defense of values.

But a philosophy alone isn't enough to support a business and this is where Daya Singh Khalsa (no relation; 'khalsa' is an honorary appellation), current senior vice president of Akal Security, enters the picture...and continues the story.

"I had business experience...owning a small food manufacturing company," he said, adding with a laugh, "but I knew nothing about security."

Gurtej Khalsa and Daya Singh Khalsa learned the security business quickly and now head one of the largest and fastest-growing concerns of its kind in the nation.

"We have more than 14,000 employees, are in 15 major cities and have a presence in 47 states," said Daya Singh Khalsa. "And we're looking to grow the business to include a lot of overseas contracts."

The biggest boost to the security industry came on the heels of the 9/11 disaster and shows no signs of abating. U.S. buildings are vulnerable and many American and international businesses need top-of-the-line protection.

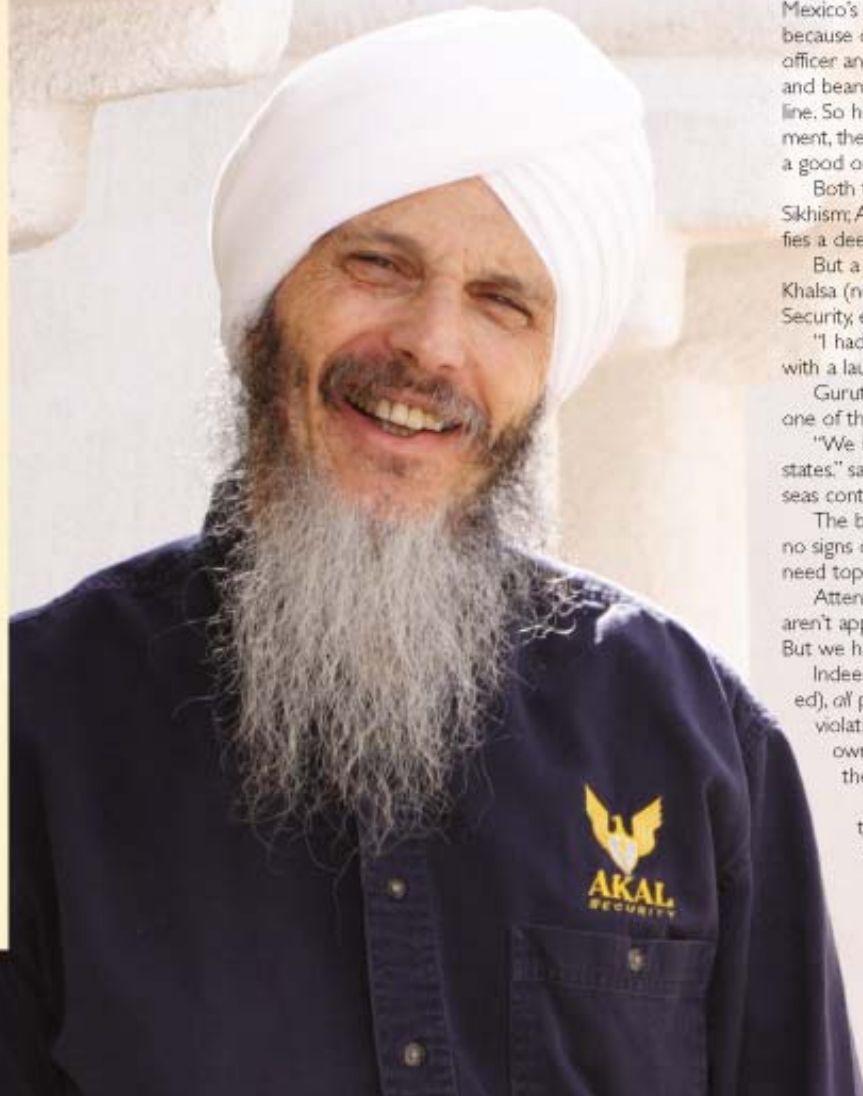
Attention is on the security sector for other reasons as well. "Not a week goes by that we aren't approached by someone interested in acquiring a successful business in a 'hot industry.' But we have never been just about money," says Khalsa.

Indeed, in accordance with tenets of the Sikh religion (after operating expenses are deducted), all profits go back into the business. The church receives no monies, as that would be a violation of its tax-exempt status. Akal is the nation's only security company that is wholly owned by a not-for-profit religious organization. That unique corporate position (along with the Sikh "look") makes the company memorable in competitive bidding situations.

Daya Singh Khalsa also credits his company's success in obtaining federal contracts to the U.S. government's official non-discriminatory buying policies, which level the field. "We did have some (prejudicial) perception problems immediately after 9/11," he admits, "but our (good) record overcame that."

And it doesn't hurt that Sikh philosophy creates an atmosphere where management salaries are kept in line and thus allows for lower overhead and price-competitiveness that frequently sets rival security firms to grumbling.

Akal's main headquarters are still in tiny Española — a town which even native New Mexicans have made the butt of jokes about unsophisticated rurals and their



lack of a work ethic. According to Khalsa, the jokes are patently untrue and the company's chosen location alone "dispels myths about New Mexico's labor force." He concedes that, in general, the state has "a smaller base of management-level personnel. But we've been lucky."

It's more than luck that has made Akal the premiere supplier of security to America's federal courthouses (over 400). Among its other prestigious accounts, Akal lists contracts with the Department of Homeland Security, the DEA and a number of airports and various military facilities, which include the White Sands Missile Range. The company's training techniques are so valued in the industry that Akal is now co-partner in a facility that advises and schools both the military and police departments.

Khalsa also attributes Akal's continuing success to "our level of commitment (and) a sense of mission beyond economics." Further defining the marriage of corporate and religious beliefs, Khalsa cites a spiritual tenet held by the Sikhs and known as the "warrior saint." In a front-page interview that he gave to *The New York Times*, Khalsa was quoted as stating "...you fight to defend the defenseless. It's not a belief in turning the other cheek (nor)...in aggression." As a daily reminder, many Sikh devotees carry a small, ceremonial dagger with a double-edge to remind them of "the fine line walked between heaven and earth."

Belief in the core religious philosophies is important to Akal, but membership in the church is not mandatory for employment. Of the entire international Akal organizational staff, only 50 of its top managers are Sikhs. The emphasis, Khalsa asserts, is on the best people for the job, as in any successful company.

Cultural sensitivity is also a contributing factor in the flourishing company's growth. Because they have been the recipients of stereotyping and exclusion, Akal management is aware and responsive to cultural needs in

their home community of Española (where the organization prides itself on being "both multicultural and multi-lingual") and in their foreign ventures. Balancing the necessities of business with cultural considerations could be construed as yet another example of "walking a fine line."

Culture of another sort is likewise a factor in Akal's private sector work in Santa Fe. There have been a number of instances where security guards provided a curious public with detailed information about an art exhibit in the galleries that they were protecting.

As the old saying goes, "success breeds success," and that's what appears to be happening with Akal. As this issue of *ACCENT Albuquerque* goes to press, Akal's past performance ratings and high recommendations from internal governmental sources have won the company a large contract with the U.S. Air Force.

Less frequently mentioned but certainly not hidden is the organization's excellent standing with elected state and federal officials. In Khalsa's office, prominently displayed photos show him shaking hands with New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson as well as President George W. Bush and former President Bill Clinton. Hefty political contributions to candidates from both parties help raise the profile, and the possibilities, for Akal Security. The funds given to candidates demonstrate the company's political commitments and business savvy. Although it's impossible to track exactly how such contributions pay off, it's public information that Akal already bills more than \$1 billion in federal contracts, including "a small amount of work with intelligence agencies." Not bad for what was once "a little New Mexico company."

What began as one man's frustration has become a realization of the American dream. Ironically however, due to strictly enforced uniform codes, traditional Sikhs still cannot be employed in certain security positions. 🙏