

Widener University

SILENT KNIGHT HELPS WIDENER UNIVERSITY TEACH VALUABLE LESSON ABOUT FIRE SAFETY

Michael Gaffney is not a professor. Yet as the life safety and compliance officer at Widener University in Chester, Pennsylvania – which puts him in charge of fire alarms, sprinklers, burglar alarms, and all OSHA compliance and environmental issues - he teaches many of the visitors a very valuable lesson.

“When parents and their kids come to visit Widener, we have them attend an orientation in which we review the university’s various safety features,” said Gaffney, who has been at the school for 13 years. “Inevitably, someone always asks whether we have sprinkler systems in the dormitories.

“While most of our residence hall rooms have sprinklers, I stress that any residential fire is far more likely to be of a smoky, smoldering nature rather than a flash. By the time the sprinkler system activates in a fire, the residents should already be outside looking at the building. That’s why, as important as sprinklers are, it’s the fire alarms and smoke detectors that parents should really be concerned about. I tell them, ‘A sprinkler system will save property; smoke detectors and fire alarms will save your child’s life.’”

With such a premium placed on the fire-detection equipment, it’s no surprise that Gaffney would want the school to have the best available. He achieved that goal through the installation of systems from Silent Knight, part of Honeywell’s (NYSE: HON) Fire Group and a provider of industry-wide compatible fire alarm solutions.

Since 1998, the year Gaffney added the oversight of fire and sprinkler systems to his life safety responsibilities, 26 new Silent Knight addressable fire panels have been installed on the university’s three campuses (Chester, Wilmington, Delaware and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania), protecting a total of 1,723 beds in the school’s residence halls, as well as all of the fraternity and sorority houses (unlike most



Widener University protected by the IntelliKnight 5820XL panel.

colleges, Widener actually owns these properties). What’s more, Silent Knight equipment is utilized throughout the majority of the university’s academic and administrative facilities, as well as being specified in all building renovations.

While concern for its student body has always been a top priority at Widener, years ago, the school was equipped with an “eclectic” mixture of systems from eight to ten different manufacturers. Silent Knight was actually one of those manufacturers, having supplied Widener with several of its Model 5207 Fire Alarm Control/Communicators, a fuseless local fire evacuation control panel and digital communicator.

Armed with a desire to upgrade the school’s fire equipment – and convinced that procuring it all from one manufacturer would translate to more efficient performance - Mike Gaffney enlisted the expertise of the Fire Commissioner serving

the City of Chester at that time. His recommendation? Silent Knight should be the single system in use campus-wide. Gaffney had actually been considering systems from a competing manufacturer, but those companies were unable to offer a panel that would provide enough points for the building that was currently under renovation. So Silent Knight became the university’s system of choice, and Gaffney has never looked back.

“Silent Knight systems are now our standard,” said Gaffney, who had come to Widener from a local volunteer fire unit. “They are the only systems we specify anymore. This allows us to stay uniform and ensure that all the systems work together seamlessly. Every building is set up exactly the same, and the detectors are all the same.”

When a new addressable system is installed, it is invariably Silent Knight’s IntelliKnight Model 5820XL addressable panel. With up to 508

addressable points, the 5820XL features a modular design and an easy-to-use interface that simplifies programming procedures. The panel also offers a built-in dual line fire communicator that allows for reporting of all system activity to a remote monitoring location. Additionally, the intelligence of the system enables it to differentiate between smoke and dust particles, while also pinpointing the exact source of the problem. The built-in RS-232 and USB, Version 9 interfaces also enables programming via PC.

The Chester campus now features a total of 26 IntelliKnight 5820XL panels, along with three IFP-1000 panels, two 5808, and six of the older 5207 panels; the Delaware campus is equipped with five of the 5820 models. Since the IFP-1000's and 5808's are not only addressable panels but continue to remain very effective, there are no immediate plans to replace them. However, the 5207's, which are not addressable, will soon be exchanged for their addressable 5820 counterparts.

While the new systems are not being added at a "regular" rate, there is a definite strategy governing their installation.

"Every year, I put into my projected budget the cost of replacing two panels," Gaffney said. "That's in addition to any other renovations that take place on campus.

For example, this past summer we put in five panels because we were doing building renovations anyway. When all is said and done, we'll have between 35 and 40 of the Model 5820's between the two campuses."

The systems are accompanied by an abundance of auxiliary devices, including heat detectors, smoke detectors, pull stations, strobes, tampers, and modules that monitor sprinkler workflow. Widener does all of its own system monitoring on campus through satellite receivers. With three Silent Knight 9800 receivers already in place in the dispatch office, Gaffney is looking at the possibility of switching completely to the company's specialized software package.

Gaffney points to the non-proprietary aspect of the IntelliKnight 5820XL as a major advantage.

"Most of the systems we've used from other manufacturers are proprietary," he said. "If something happens tomorrow and we decide not to use our current service provider, I can go to another Silent Knight authorized company for service. I am not locked into one service company. And having a small cabinet full of parts compared to having a cabinet for each manu-

facturer was a far more attractive scenario. Ultimately, we wanted to go with a product that any reputable alarm company could service.

"Switching out systems would also not cause any compatibility problems," he added. "If we needed a system that could provide more capabilities than the 5820 can offer, we could drop an IFP-1000 in its place and continue using the same auxiliary devices. So even if the heart of the system is changed, the rest of the system would remain intact and completely functional."

Joe Cliffe is the service manager and project coordinator for Delco Alarm Systems, the installer that Widener used for all its systems. Cliffe says that while his company does not specify Silent Knight all the time, it is close to 98 percent. Performance is a primary reason, but the ease of installation cannot be overstated.

"Last year we did a particularly interesting setup, where we had one 5820 for 12 townhouses, one three-story dormitory, and a small office building," he continued. "It was a bit of a challenge figuring out how to map and program everything so as not to disrupt people who didn't need to be disrupted. Still, it was far easier than it would have been with another system."

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Michael Gaffney — Life Safety and Compliance Officer at Widener

There were other challenges as well.

"On the Delaware campus, we were swapping out old systems and replacing them with Silent Knight while the library remained active. In that case, we were also taking part of the new addressable panel and merging it with the older conventional panel. And of course, all appropriate building and fire codes had to be observed."

Have any of the systems been put to the ultimate test?

"We did have one minor problem awhile ago," recalled Gaffney. "One young lady got into bed — she was on the top bunk — and knocked some clothes off her bed onto a toaster, which pushed the plunger down and created a small fire in the room. However, the system responded and alerted us immediately. We contained the fire and it was basically a non-event. Students were back in the facility within an hour.



"The fact that we had hard-wired a smoke detector, protecting each and every bed on campus, was critical," he said. "We just felt it was best for the overall safety of the students."

The presence of a detector in each room could present a problem with a different system. However, the fact that this is an addressable system is a huge advantage.

"Through the years, we found that students were taking detectors out of their place," said Gaffney. "With the older systems, we didn't know right away the location of the trouble; you might know there was a problem but by the time you located it, the student might have already put the detector back. Now if a detector is out, you know where it is immediately."

Silent Knight's penchant for responsive customer service, even under the most stressful conditions, is something Gaffney does not take for granted.

"Two years ago, just two days before spring break, we had a major flood." He recalled. "One of our residence halls was completely flooded out. Within 10 days, Delco had ripped out the old system and had a new system installed, soup to nuts. This included tearing out all of the ceilings and floors to get the new system up and running. Silent Knight's availability to work with us, helping us get all the parts and pieces, along with Delco's quick install capabilities, was the only way we could have gotten this done before the students returned from break."

Sure, Gaffney might not be a professor. But based on his decision to employ Silent Knight systems throughout Widener University, it's clear he can teach us all a little something about fire safety.



by Honeywell

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