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Assured Information Security Selected By Inc. Magazine Among Top 500 Fastest Growing Companies In U.S.

By Pat Malin

Assured Information Security, Inc., has earned acclaim from Inc. magazine as one of the 500 fastest-growing companies in the U.S.

The homegrown Griffiss Business and Technology Park company is ranked No. 299 in the nation with an outstanding growth rate of 859 percent over the last four years. Thanks to a strong demand for its services, Assured Information Security can't slow down long enough to celebrate.

Dr. Leonard Popyack, president of AIS, admitted that the timing of

Inc.'s article is slightly ambiguous. "We're still growing, but not as fast," he pointed out. "We hired 26 people in 2006, but only 12 so far this year."

Nevertheless, Popyack doesn't see any deterrents to continued growth. "Next year, we're projecting hiring 10 to 30 people."

On Aug. 24, AIS received notice from Jane Berentson, editor of Inc., a monthly magazine for entrepreneurs and small businesses, that it was selected as a national honoree and would be recognized in its September issue. AIS is ranked 23 of 38 companies within the

Government Services sector. Even more significantly, it's the only New York State company chosen in that category.

On its website, Inc.com explained that the companies are ranked according to the percentage growth of sales for four years, Jan. 1, 2003 through Dec. 31, 2006. AIS reported a total of \$7.8 million in sales and had 62 employees at that time. Its 2007 revenue is expected to reach double figures.

AIS will accept the "Fastest 500" award at an Inc. ceremony in Chicago on Sept. 8.

Former President Bill Clinton will give the keynote address.

Popyack, who holds a Ph.D. in electrical engineering, and Charles Green, a computer scientist, co-founded AIS in 2001 after giving up their jobs at the Air Force

Research Laboratory (AFRL), Rome Research Site. Green is now AIS's vice-president.

"We had expertise in that area and we surrounded ourselves with experts," said Popyack. "The time was right (in 2001) for the government to be concerned about information security."

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GRIFF NEWS

Assured Information Security Selected By INC. Magazine Among Top 500 Fastest Growing Companies In U.S. (Continued From Page 1)

Assured Information has 74 employees (and counting) and six consultants at its corporate headquarters at 245 Hill Road, opposite AmeriCU. The company also leases facilities in Beaverton, OR, near Portland, where it has two additional employees.

AIS specializes in computer and network security technology research and development. The company provides information assurance, which basically means they supply software that guarantees the security of a client's computer data.

"When we started out, AFRL was our only client," Green said. "Now we have contracts with a dozen companies, strictly federal government agencies."

As Inc. explained in its article, "Digital threats from China and groups like Al Qaeda with their improved hacking capabilities urge the government to increase defense with new solutions that AIS inc. provides."

Ensuring the security of operations is just as essential for business, as well as the U.S. military.

AIS's growth hasn't gone unnoticed in regional business circles, either.

In 2006, AIS ranked number one among small businesses (under \$10 million) in the Central New York Fast 50, as determined by the Central New York Business Journal in Syracuse.

That spurred Popyack and Green to discuss their future options with The Griffiss Institute, an advisory board which helps local businesses and entrepreneurs accelerate their growth. AIS also worked with the Watervliet Innovation Center near Albany. Based on their suggestion, Popyack and Green submitted a detailed application for Inc.'s Fast 500 and Fast 5,000 honor.

All the companies on the Inc. 5,000 list are U.S.-based, privately held, and independent — not subsidiaries or divisions of other companies as of Dec. 31, 2006. Confirmation of the submitted material took the Inc. staff about six months to verify.

The top company on

Inc.'s Government Services sector is By Light Professional IT Services of Arlington, VA. It had revenues of \$13.3 million in four years and an astounding growth rate of 6,311.3 percent (yes, six thousand percent). Corporations like Microsoft Corp, Oracle and Timberland have previously dotted the list.

Though AIS looks very small in comparison to its 2006 competitors, its executives think it's a good start. "We're thrilled that we made the list," said Green. "We hope it will raise our visibility and hopefully improve our recruiting efforts."

AIS has felt hindered by a shortage of trained computer personnel and engineers. Its employees work on computer forensics investigations, incident responses, INFOSEC (information security) training and independent code analysis.

They must be U.S. citizens and need to obtain a top secret clearance. AIS has a goal of hiring at least two new employees a month and has immediate openings. Two lucky

college student interns were paid to work there this summer and are guaranteed a job there upon graduation. (For further information on job openings and qualifications, go to www.ainfos-ec.com.)

When Green and Popyack started AIS, they operated out of a small space leased at the Air Force Research Lab. In early 2006, they began their move to a separate building in the Griffiss Professional Business complex behind Costello Eye Surgeons on Avery Lane. AIS at first leased half the building. Now it has expanded three times and occupies the entire building.

Last October, AIS hired Steven Flint as its new chief operating officer. Flint is a former defense contractor who came to Rome in 1977 to work at AFRL. He also foresees unlimited growth for AIS. "Technology is continuously evolving," he said. "This industry is like the semi-conductor industry was in the 1960s. It could go a long way in the next 20 or 30 years."

Flint said the U.S. Air Force has recognized the magnitude of information assurance.

Last November, the USAF established a separate organization known as Cyber Space Command at Barksdale Air Force Base, LA. When it became operational in 2008, the Airmen at Cyber Command headquarters will work to protect both military and civilian areas of the Internet.

"I hope they hire us," Popyack said with a laugh. "We're right on target protecting classified systems and sensitive data through our techniques and software."

Popyack, 45, is a native of Jamestown, NY. He obtained a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from SUNY School of Technology (now SUNY Institute of Technology) in Marcy. He went on to earn his master's and PhD from Binghamton University. He worked at the Air Force's Rome Research Lab for 13 years.

Green, just 36, is a graduate of Sackett's Harbor High School near

Watertown. After attending Jefferson Community College in Watertown, he obtained his bachelor's degree from SUNY Tech in computer science. After his graduation in 1994, he was a systems administrator at SUNY and landed a job at AFRL in 1995. He is working on his master's degree at Syracuse University.

His ties to the area have convinced the AIS administrators that their business will continue to thrive by remaining at Griffiss Park. For one thing, Flint said that AIS has advantages from being in the New York State Empire Zone. In return for receiving limited tax benefits and other assistance, AIS has continually exceeded the program's mandatory employment goals.

"Our work is growing," Green said. "We want to be able to keep our opportunities in Central New York and we want to bring in a lot of new people."