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As boy, Greg Norred avidly watched his TV hero, Mannix, leap into action week after week, catching the bad guys in dramatic shootouts. He decided then that he wanted to be a private eye, intrigued by what he perceived as a glamorous, exciting job. "I was wrong about the glamour," says Norred, president and founder of Norred & Associates, a corporate security and investigative firm. But Norred has made many right moves since establishing his company a decade ago. Revenues have grown from \$100,000 in 1981 to nearly \$6 million in 1990. Glamour isn't everything.

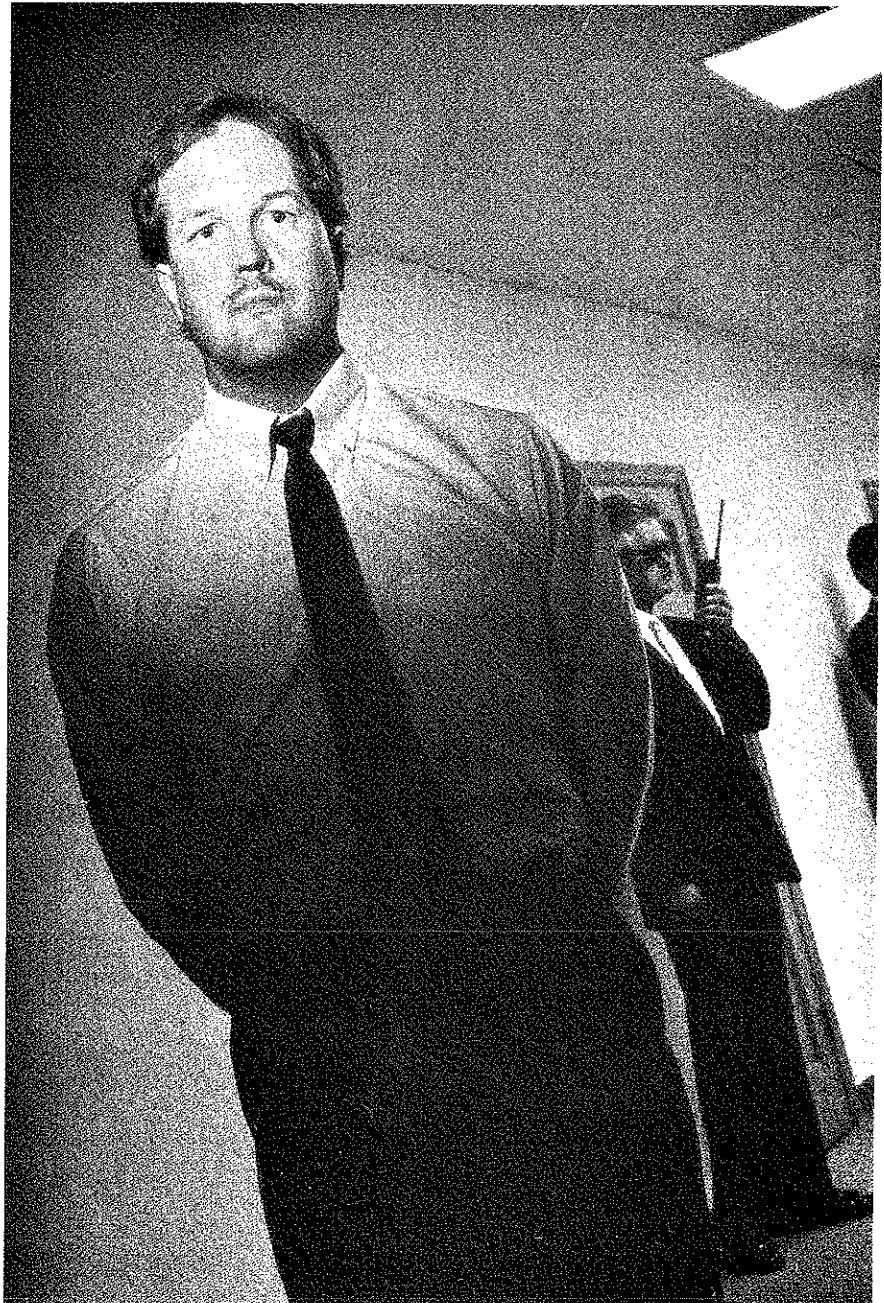
Norred acknowledges his firm's steady growth has nothing to do with any unique management procedure or service that his company exclusively offers. Rather, he "credits" a pervasive societal ill: increasing crime and drug use. He says the two go hand in hand, and he has seen a direct correlation between his company's revenues and crime and drug statistics. Norred recalls that when he first went into business, only 4 percent of all felony convictions in Fulton County were drug cases; by 1989, more than 40 percent involved drugs. He estimates about half of the other 60 percent of felonies also were drug-related.

"Drugs cause a lot of crime, which is bad for society, but good for us," Norred says candidly.

Norred & Associates started out as a one-man operation to assist major corporations with internal theft and drug abuse. Almost from the beginning, Norred hired staff and expanded services to meet the demand from clients for additional security needs. Today, the company has 325 employees and five divisions: employee-dishonesty and drug-abuse investigation; pre-employment background investigations; uniformed security; electronic security for homes and businesses; and special operations, such as labor strikes and executive protection.

Unlike much of the firm's competition, Norred & Associates specializes in drug and theft investigations, which, according to Norred, "brings us closer to the client." Either he or his vice president, Earl Taylor, are intimately involved in every investigation to assist CEOs in confronting sensitive employee issues.

When a company has a drug or theft problem, Norred's first step is to determine the best approach to ferret out the guilty. Norred may place a surveillance team at the building or send in an undercover agent as an employee, depending on the client's wishes and situation. Often, at the con-



Photographs by David Hill

NO-GLAMOUR PRIVATE EYE

Norred & Associates started as a one-man operation in 1981. Last year, the security and investigative firm billed nearly \$6 million for its services.

clusion of an investigation, Norred recommends specific action: treatment, discipline or termination. If the company wants to prosecute, Norred handles that as the company's agent.

Norred says virtually every company has drug usage and nearly every company he investigates also has drug dealers. "It's not like TV where you meet someone in a trench coat on the street corner and you buy a gram of cocaine," he says. "People don't buy the stuff on the street, they buy it at work from folks they know. So the problem is two-way — drug use and drug sales."

Norred justifies busting or prosecuting a company's drug-using employees easily. He disagrees with those who argue that what employees do on their own time is their business and no one else's. He says statistics show people still are under the influence up to a day after smoking just one joint of marijuana and that drug users have higher absenteeism, lower productivity and claim medical-insurance benefits three times more often than non-users. "It's critical for companies to control the drug problem in their environment," Norred maintains.

For a man immersed in corporate espionage, Norred has some uncomplicated roots. He is a native of tiny Lanett, Ala., a rural, cotton-mill town where the residents consider Auburn, Ala., "big time." He began his career in investigative work during a four-year stint as a law-enforcement specialist in the armed services. After his discharge in 1974, he came to Atlanta and worked as vice president of BFA Security and Investigative Agency, where for seven years he supervised agents, conducted criminal investigations and trained security personnel.

The management team at Norred & Associates includes three former police chiefs and a retired federal agent. Norred deliberately surrounded himself "with guys who are better than me," and he attributes most of the company's success to them. Sharing a common work ethic also helps. "If we're at a ballgame on Friday night

and get a call from a client who wants us in California in the morning, we're on the next plane," he says. "I've got the easiest job here because those guys are so good."


Indeed, the lion's share of the special-operations work entails traveling out of town — often out of the country. The company provides security for high-profile executives who do business with foreign nationals that some groups oppose. Norred also provides services to several politicians, including members of the Georgia Republican Party, and undoubtedly the firm's most notorious client is Oliver North. Although North's appearances have diminished significantly since the heady days of the Iran-Contra affair, Norred continues to provide security as needed, setting up local arrangements, checking out hotels and monitoring crowd control.

Although most of the ongoing work at Norred & Associates is void of high-speed chases and bloody encounters, security and investigative activity have their moments of excitement. Drug busts and labor strikes are fertile ground for heated disagreements. Emotions can be explosive and the threat of violence often hovers. Norred says his company has not been accused of any civil-rights abuses, but he realizes it is easy to become overzealous and that it takes careful handling to defuse many situations. "We don't go in as cowboys and we don't carry guns or handcuffs," says Norred, who maintains a regular caseload in special operations and investigations. "We're all licensed to carry weapons if we need to, but we have a no-weapons policy. Anyone who carries a weapon must get prior approval."

The product sold by a Norred client often determines the type of criminal activity that exists — and the manner of investigation Norred conducts. For instance, at major food retailers, such as Kroger and Big Star, attention is focused more on cashiers who may be underringing groceries or taking money from the register. For a client such as National Distributing Co., a large

liquor distributor, it is reasonable to suspect collusion between truckers and loaders or shippers and receivers. "Any time you have a product that's easily sold on the street, such as liquor and cigarettes, a lot of mom-and-pop stores will readily buy that merchandise at half price," Norred says, "and usually there's a warehousing problem."

Until April, Norred & Associates did not have a sales force (there now is one sales rep) so most of its growth has been referral-based. Norred has no wild expectations about plastering his name on office doors throughout the United States, although he opened an office in Savannah in 1988 because the opportunity became available at the right price. He also acquired four small alarm companies when he established the electronic-security division ("I thought it made sense to buy rather than build from scratch."), but does not envision an aggressive expansion or acquisition plan in the near future. "We want to focus on our five divisions here," he says, "and continue to do what we do best."

With more than 20 years of investigative experience, Norred has gained a new appreciation for business — not only his own, but also his clients'. He says each investigation for a corporate client requires learning about that client's business — almost like performing a background or pre-screening before the real undercover work begins. Norred says a good corporate investigator must love the business across the board; even at its stripped down, unglamorous core. 



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