

# **COLUMBUS** **CEO**

**SMALL BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT: POWELL-  
BASED ARMADA HELPS CLIENTS PREPARE  
FOR THE WORST**



PHOTO BY TIM JOHNSON

## Thomas Foos

By Mary Sterenberg

From the August 2015 issue of Columbus CEO

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A simple siding and brick building in a Powell business park gives no indication of the global and often lifesaving work coordinated within its walls. Founded in 2005 by Thomas Foos and Jeff Podracky, ARMADA

ARMADA, Ltd.

23 Clairedan Drive,  
Powell, 43065

provides protection solutions for public, private and government organizations.

armadausa.com

ARMADA helped Franklin County create a plan to respond if Hoover Dam ever fails. Following the fatal Fort Hood shooting rampage, ARMADA staff trained military personnel to recognize warning signs of unstable individuals. It also prepares businesses for mass casualty events or safe termination of a hostile employee.

Founders: Thomas Foos and Jeff Podracky

Employees: 78

“We want to help organizations, no matter who they are, protect their people, their assets, their infrastructure, their reputations,” says Foos, president and CEO of the service-disabled veteran-owned small business. Podracky is chief operating officer.

Business: ARMADA offers comprehensive security solutions to help public, private and government organizations world-wide protect people, assets, infrastructure and reputations. A service-disabled veteran-owned small business, ARMADA serves clients in healthcare, government and military and also operates a training facility in Fredericktown.

With both military and private security experience, Foos and Podracky devised the ARMADA concept while working at Cardinal Health. Foos says they saw companies focused on security in specific areas — technology, asset protection, emergency preparedness — and wanted to offer a solution.

“Our original business plan was on a napkin. We started with zero clients. Now we have more than 70 people supporting clients across the world,” Foos says.

Franklin University became a client nine years ago. ARMADA crafted response plans for the university and conducts customized semi-annual crisis management exercises for 20-50 employees. Marvin Briskey, Franklin’s senior vice president and chief financial officer, says ARMADA serves as the university’s security quarterback, while university employees execute the plays it calls.

“We’re really good at higher ed and they’re really good at safety and security. These fields change daily, and we can rely on their knowledge base. It allows us to do what we do best: protect our students,” says Briskey.

ARMADA initially built its reputation as a subcontractor on larger contracts, such as working with FEMA on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The company then helped write a regional catastrophic plan for the city of Chicago and surrounding areas, preparing for anything from a nuclear weapon, to Lake Michigan rising, to a snowstorm. The company’s 78 full-time staff of former military, law enforcement, emergency management and corporate personnel supports 25-30 contracts, aided by 400 potential contract employees.

“We have a very diverse leadership and staff within different disciplines,” says Foos.

“Nobody is a theory person. They come with real-world experience,” says Sherry Mercurio, Franklin’s director of communication and public relations, noting that her previous position as civilian spokesperson for the Columbus Division of Police taught her the value of that experience.

Whether the client is AEP, the city of Boston or the Marine Corps, Foos says ARMADA starts each contract with a security, threat and vulnerability assessment to identify potential risks and then brings “a multitude of different security-related solutions to bear” to address critical vulnerabilities that the client may have.

“Not every organization is going to be Fort Knox. You can never 100 percent eliminate risk. But you can improve your ability to respond,” Foos says.

Foos anticipates ongoing growth in coming years.

“We’ve gone from the Jeff-and-Tom-show over the last 10 years to 70 people,” he says. “Now we have access to more relationships and networks and companies.”

On the company’s central Ohio location, Foos says, “We have it all here: corporate headquarters, strong local government. The defense industry is represented here. It’s a favorable place to run a business.” Additionally, the company has a training facility in Fredericktown.

*Mary Sterenberg is a freelance writer.*

# The Columbus Dispatch

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## Security company builds reputation on protecting organizations' credibility

**Armada Ltd.**

Address: 23 Clairedan Dr.,  
Powell






President and CEO:  
Thomas Foos

Employees: 78

Business: Armada offers comprehensive security solutions to help public, private and government organizations worldwide protect people, assets, infrastructure and reputations. A service veteran-owned small business, Armada serves clients in health care, government and military and also operates a training facility in Fredericktown, Ohio.

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By Mary Sterenberg

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Armada's headquarters building in a simple brick-and-siding structure north of downtown Powell doesn't portend the international and often lifesaving work being coordinated within its walls.

Founded by Ohio natives Thomas Foos and Jeff Podracky in 2005, Armada helped Franklin County create a plan to respond if Hoover Dam ever failed. Armada staff trained military personnel at Fort Hood in Texas to recognize the warning signs of unstable individuals following a fatal shooting.

The company also prepares businesses for natural and man-made disasters. Armada provides comprehensive security solutions to help public, private and government organizations in central Ohio and worldwide protect their people, infrastructure and reputations.

The company's 78 full-time employees — almost 20 in central Ohio — include former military, local/state/federal law enforcement, emergency management staff and others with corporate experience. This staff supports 25 to 30 contracts at any given time with the help of an online database with 300 to 400 potential contract employees.

Foos, president and CEO, talked about Armada with *Columbus CEO*:

**Q:** How did you come up with the concept for Armada?

**A:** Jeff and I met while working at Cardinal Health. How Cardinal mitigated risk really gave us the idea for our company. Our original business plan was on a napkin. We started with zero clients. Now we have more than 70 people supporting clients across the world. We want to help organizations, no matter who they are, to protect their people, their assets, their infrastructure, their reputations.

**Q:** What makes your company unique from others that provide similar services?

**A:** Our company is a turnkey solution, whereas many competitors are much more focused in one area. They may say, "All right, we're going to provide security guards, and that's kind of what we're going to do."

We start each contract with a security, threat, vulnerability assessment and come up with an idea of where a client's gaps are ... what their risk is. We then bring a multitude of different security-related solutions to bear to help them address their most likely risks.



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TIM JOHNSON | COLUMBUS CEO

Tom Foos, president of Armada, a Powell based business that provides a wide range of security and preparedness solutions for business.

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**Q:** How did your company really break into this business?

**A:** We proved ourselves by serving as subcontractors of larger organizations. One of the first major contracts was FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) with the residuals of (Hurricane) Katrina. We also helped write the regional catastrophic plan for the city of Chicago and the areas surrounding the city: nuclear weapon, Lake Michigan rising, snowstorm, whatever.

**Q:** When do clients tend to reach out to you?

**A:** For many of our clients, either something bad has happened or they anticipate that something could. Employers want to protect people, infrastructure, reputation and liability. The L-word — it's not *love*; it's *liability*. Not every organization is going to be Fort Knox. You can never 100 percent eliminate risk. But you can improve your ability to respond.

**Q:** Is it difficult to show return on investment when much of your business is about preventing problems?

**A:** Working in corporate America, we learned there isn't a bottomless pit of money to spend on security. Sometimes organizations, after we get done working with them, will go back to their insurance companies and say, "Hey listen, we put these different plans into place, here's some of the action steps we took after working with this company."

The (return on investment) a lot of times is peace of mind. They think, "I can sleep better at night knowing this is under control."

**Q:** Do projects come in and you find the right staff to address them, or do you bring staff in who then lead to contracts?

**A:** We have a very diverse leadership and staff within different disciplines: law enforcement, fire, corporate security, business continuity. What comes our way is often in one of those disciplines.

When we have to get a unique skill set, we use our networks and relationships to be able to find those people.

**Q:** Why did you base your company in central Ohio?

**A:** The central Ohio location started off for personal reasons. The Columbus area is a fantastic place to raise a family. We have it all here: corporate headquarters, strong local government. The defense industry is represented here. It's a favorable place to run a business.

**Q:** Do you foresee growth in the next five to 10 years?

**A:** We've gone from the Jeff and Tom Show over the last 10 years to 70 people. Now we have access to more relationships and networks and companies.

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# How Armada protects firms from workplace violence

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## Tom Knox

Reporter- Columbus Business First

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[Tom Foos](#) acknowledges the potential queasiness related to some of the interest in his company, Armada Ltd.

When a violent massacre happens – such as the Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings in 2012 – queries in his business pick up. Fearful school administrators may pick up the phone and ask how the company can help them secure their schools.

But the company can't afford to look like an ambulance-chasing attorney.

"It's a difficult balance," Foos said.

One way to achieve balance is to earn word-of-mouth recommendations for its workplace security training and services, which is where a good chunk of Armada's business comes from. Some business comes from old-fashioned hustling, Foos said.

Becoming active in chambers of commerce, letting executives know what Armada does so that if a company needs them it knows where to turn – that stays in potential customers' minds.

Companies will need Armada, Foos contends, even if there isn't yet a direct threat. Armada, true to its name, operates in a variety of fields – government, businesses, schools – anywhere that may need security of some sort.

That could mean making plans to deal with a disruptive employee before it gets to a more serious, potentially violent (and costly) state. Or it could mean helping to snuff out employee theft. There's myriad issues a company, especially a growing or big company, may need to address. For Armada, the problem is convincing profit-minded management why it's necessary.

"If you spend money on Armada it doesn't mean you're going to make \$1 million off of that,"

said Foos, a retired U.S. Marine Corps Reserve lieutenant colonel who worked with Fort Hood in Texas on a security plan after a mass shooting in 2009. "We're viewed as a cost center, almost like insurance."

Foos' background in government, including in the Ohio Attorney General's office and the governor's office, helps. So, too, does his private-sector experience. Foos met partner Jeff Podracky at Cardinal Health Inc., where both worked in security management for hundreds of facilities belonging to the Dublin-based health products company.

They took what they learned there to Armada. The credibility gleaned from Cardinal helped get some initial clients.

In the decade since, the company has notched some big clients, such as General Electric and OhioHealth Corp.

Another big name, New York University, used Armada to train its receptionists. As the front line to most offices, they can recognize potential workplace violence threats and, through a program Armada designed, receive training about what to do with that information.

Still, major workplace issues aren't an everyday occurrence. Foos points out that even decades-old incidents, such as the 1980s shootings at the U.S. Postal Service, still linger over companies' reputations.

Even though his services don't add to the bottom line, prevention, Foos said, is better than waiting until it's too late.