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CARLETON SECURITY SYSTEMS Small, independent company gives hands-on service Sally Smith Kourier-Standard

They're there. They want you to know that. They're not big, they're not loud but when they set your home up with a security system, it's installed properly, professionally and if there's an equipment-related false alarm they pay the bill. That's not a brag, or a boast, or a come-on to get business that's because they stand behind their installers and equipment 100 per cent. Elaine Burt and Peter McLean, president and vice-president of Carleton Security Systems, have grown their company into one of the largest independent security businesses in Ottawa. Burt took the initiative in the late 80s to move from house sitting to house security. Clients in her first business, Double Check, frequently asked to buy security systems from her. She saw a security niche there and jumped in to fill it. Carleton Security Systems was the result, founded in October 1990. "I started slowly. I wanted to learn by doing," she remembers. And she learned from the ground up, going out on business calls, talking to clients, understanding their concerns and wishes. She translated this knowledge into good equipment choices, hiring experienced installers and providing excellent customer service. Lois Andoff has known Burt for 11 years, the length of time she and her husband have had a security system. "She's like a daughter to me," Andoff laughs. "We started looking in '89/90 and gave up. We were confused with all the highly recommended firms who wanted to fit us out like Fort Knox. We ran into Elaine, she came to see us, and we were impressed. We went ahead and installed a system in 1991, and we've had no problems. The installers were great. It means a lot." A typical first time call goes something like this: "We always ask how they heard about us," Burt says, "because if it's one of our customers, they get a referral fee. Then we take a look at their house. We don't do this over the phone. We check the type of windows they have (crank style is less vulnerable than sliders); we ask about their lifestyle (whether they have children or pets. Motion detectors can be pet proof to ignore pets); we look at the vulnerabilities of the house, for instance if there's an L-shape at the back with no windows and lots of trees around; we look at the basement windows. We ask what they want to protect. Some want a 24-hour alarm on a gun case, and we can do that. We ask what their concerns are; do they want to protect those inside, or do they want to protect the house while away? We ask if they've had a security system before and what they liked or disliked about it. And we get to the bottom of their fears about using a system." Burt tells older people if they can use a phone, they can use their system. "We always bring a sample to show them how it works and we do a training session with them until they get it," she grins. Carleton Security Systems deals throughout Ottawa. Most people today can afford a system and it provides peace of mind. It may even give a discount on insurance, McLean suggests. He says it's a fallacy that neighbors watch over your house. It only takes 10 seconds to kick a door open. If neighbors have the air conditioner on, or the furnace has just kicked in, a split-second thump is hard to hear. This is how they do it. They ring the doorbell and if nobody answers, they ring again. If nobody comes, they kick the door in. And some houses are really vandalized. Vandals can be malicious, maybe on drugs; they can set your house on fire. With an alarm, vandals have, at the least, two minutes to do damage. The crook doesn't know how long it will take police to arrive. Most small break-ins cost the homeowner between \$5000 and \$10,000. "A system is a preventative measure," McLean says. "With a system you're 12 times less likely to be broken into; even if you are, the value taken is 90 per cent less. And vandals do know if a home is wired; there are decals on most windows. In Ottawa-Carleton, if a police officer is dispatched to a house, and it's a false alarm, the cost to the homeowner is \$60. With Carleton Security Systems, if the alarm was caused by equipment failure, we pay the fine. "But our equipment is so well installed, it doesn't happen

often,” Burt says. “We stand behind our product. Our installers have 15-20 years of experience and with that kind of experience, you’re not going to get false alarms. They’re amazingly meticulous,” she says of the crews who install 35-45 security systems a month. Chris Voisin, a Kanata business owner agrees. He recently had a system installed in his home. "Their installation far exceeded my expectations. We knew we were in good hands when the installers wanted to know where to put a drop sheet to put their tools on. The overall care and respect of our home was exceptional." Along with security systems, the crews of Carleton Security have begun to smart wire houses. “That’s structured wiring,” McLean explains, “so, for instance, you can network all the computers in the house to print from one printer. Or you can install a camera at the front door so you can see who’s there from the kitchen. Or you can have an intercom system so you can call everyone for dinner at the same time, or monitor the baby’s room. “Our guys are so good they can do it all and it’s hidden,” Burt grins. “We want to be seen as experts at wiring.” Above and beyond all else, because the business is independently owned and still small, Burt and McLean cater to their clients’ needs. They don’t sell them any more than they need. A basic system is \$99, monitoring is \$24.95 a month and the monitoring is done locally on Woodward Avenue in Ottawa. “The system includes a full warranty, a false alarm warranty and customers get the benefit of hand-picked installers,” Burt says. They also have a flexible pay structure that fits the budget. Burt wants present, and future, customers to know we’re going to be successful, because we do it right. Carleton Security Systems, 795 March Road, across from March House Restaurant, 831-0216