

# India native finds U.S. dream is alive and well

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BY SHERRY WHITTEMORE

NEWARK, N.J.—From security guard to CEO, in an 18-year career with Gateway Security, Kurus Elavia worked his way up from a \$6.50-hour guard job in a train station to leader of the privately held, Newark-based security guard and services company.



Kurus Elavia

The company itself has also done some growing, too, from an \$11-million enterprise to its current \$70 million in annual revenues — a feat the company's founder partially attributes to Elavia.

Born in Bombay, India, Elavia, 41, moved to the United States at age 23. In his homeland, Elavia trained as a martial arts professional fighter and graduated from Bombay University with a bachelor's degree in accounting and business. For a short while, Elavia taught martial arts to police officers in India, but when he moved to the states the guard job at

Gateway became the first full-time gig he'd ever had.

"This is all I have ever done," Elavia said.

Elavia quickly moved up the company ladder from guard to supervisor, assistant manager, manager, and in 1999, he was named chief operating officer.

Lou Dell'Ermo, Gateway Security chairman and founder, said it was easy to promote Elavia based on his work ethic and people skills.

"Dedication. That's what comes to mind when I think of Kurus," Dell'Ermo said. "He has everything needed

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to succeed in our business, which is managing people."

In an interview with *Security Director News*, Dell'Ermo rattled off a list of Elavia's strengths, which include: a good sense of right and wrong, "a mission to obtain as much knowledge as he possibly can," sensitivity to customer needs, an understanding of people's needs in a diverse world, an ability to lead by example, and, above all else, a deep understanding of the human element.

"He took us from physical security to customer service because of his understanding of how to care for people," Dell'Ermo said.

Gateway Security incorporated customer service in 1998 as part of its offerings, providing employees to staff sky cabs and concierge desks, parking lots, and other prominent posts within office buildings and public facilities.

The New Jersey company is a family owned business, Dell'Ermo said, that started out with 35 employees in 1979 and has since grown to more than 3,400. Dell'Ermo said he and his two sons, company president James and executive vice president Gregory, who also work for the company, feel Elavia is another member of their family.

In turn, Elavia said the Dell'Ermo family is what has made him a successful businessman, noting that the family's dedication has helped the company grow organically. The company has never made an acquisition and still provides the largest customer service and security guard staff to the New York and New Jersey aviation sector, and Elavia's five-year plan as CEO includes expanding the company's services to neighboring states.

Elavia was named one of the NJBiz's under 40 in 2004, and was awarded the Asian American Leadership Award this year. He is a member of the advisory board of the Rothman Institute for Entrepreneurial studies at Farleigh Dickenson University and the American Association of Airport Executives Training and Diversity Board. **SDN**