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SAN DIEGO — Tony Baechler has created an interesting niche for himself as part private investigator, part legal courier.

He operates perhaps the only business in Southern California that can locate a witness in the mountains of Mexico City, deliver a subpoena across town, scan a file cabinet's worth of paperwork onto a CD and provide a courtroom interpreter.

"There's probably nothing that any law firm could call us for that we could not deliver as far as support goes," Baechler said from his modest offices off El Cajon Boulevard in East County. "We can handle the messenger service, the court filings, process service, subpoena preparation, investigations to locate difficult (witnesses) and, with our affiliates, we can get a court reporter or interpreter if they need it."

His company, Baechler Investigative Services (BIS), became the do- it-all, one-stop shop for lawyers when it acquired June's Attorney Service last November.

"We're now the one place that any attorney can call to provide any type of legal support that is necessary," he said.

Baechler's background is in law enforcement. He worked for 16 years in large sheriff's and police departments, gaining valuable experience in undercover work and searches.

He opened BIS in 1988, specializing in fraud and white-collar crime. BIS began by providing surveillance and location services for hard-to-find individuals in multimillion-dollar lawsuits.

BIS has sent investigators as far away as Honduras and once placed men in the mountains above Mexico City for two weeks, Baechler said, They've tracked individuals in almost every state in America.

In 1991, the company went statewide and now has offices in Los Angeles, Sacramento, Orange

County, Riverside and the Bay Area.

Since many law firms were already using BIS to locate and interview witnesses and serving court papers, June's Attorney Service was a natural fit when it became available a year ago. June's had been in business for more than 35 years and earned a reputation as a reliable company.

Baechler recalled a conversation he had with a fellow investigator once June's went up for sale.

"His exact words to us were, 'If you run that as well as the investigation company, you're gonna always be swamped,'" Baechler said.

After the typical transitory bumps, the move has indeed been beneficial, according to Baechler. He revamped the training of June's process servers, giving them more investigative-type training.

"We have a higher demand for getting the job done than some companies do," he said. "We've always used the learn concept with all of our clients, so we're applying that to the June's clients also."

Baechler said June's was known especially for its digital photocopy work. BIS improved June's photocopy service even more with state-of-the-art equipment. BIS now can shrink the files of an entire doctor's office onto one CD.

The company lost some business in the early part of the decade when a lot of insurance carriers and large businesses left the state because of California's worker's compensation reform.

BIS adjusted accordingly, "reinventing" itself to serve more medium and small businesses and working with individual attorneys compared with giant law firms.

While he's a law enforcement officer by training, Baechler has quietly become a savvy businessman. The transition has been a step-by-step process.

"The only way you really learn about business is to be in it," he said. "I've seen the change over the last 20 years."

One of the biggest challenges of being in management is staying aware of legislation that affects businesses, especially new tax laws and dealing with the bureaucrats responsible, he said.

Baechler also is finding there's a lot of effort involved in selecting qualified employees.

"We're very picky," he said. "We won't hire just anybody, so we may spend three months selecting the right person for the right job."

As an example, Baechler said BIS interviewed more than 80 people for its June's Attorney Service management position before it found one that was a match.

But he really likes being an business executive.

"I've been really fortunate," he said. "I've always really enjoyed what I did. I enjoyed it when I was a rookie cop. I enjoyed it when I was an undercover cop."

"I've always enjoyed the challenge of fraud cases or even of finding some individual that we have to locate. So the business aspect was just another challenge to learn and stay on top of."

Baechler makes it a point to still go out in the field least 10 to 15 percent of the time to "keep the skills sharp."

"The last thing you need is someone who sits behind a desk who has no concept of the real world," he said.

Baechler does not have plans to expand BIS beyond California in the near future. While it only has offices in California, BIS does work with investigation associates throughout the country.

"My concern (with) some of the nationwide firms is that you see you lose touch with your clients," he

said. "So by staying just statewide, we can continue to use the team concept. We can work closely with our clients, and we can focus more on quality versus quantity (and) knocking a job out and going to the next one."

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