

Date: Wed 09-Jul-2003

Publication: dh

Category: biz

Author: sluis

Illustration: p

Location: 1b

Keeping Secrets

Shredding service protects clients, customers alike

By Tom Sluis

Herald Staff Writer

Ilex Arribau noticed there was no company in Durango to offer shredding services for confidential documents, so she started one of her own.

Arribau is owner of Phoenix Data Protection, which provides on-site shredding for banks, lawyers, accountants and anyone else who wants to make sure the Social Security, credit card and driver's license numbers stay out of the hands of criminals.

The company has been in operation for six months. Her partner is Mark Thompson, her fiance who also owns Phoenix Recycling.

"It's peace of mind for business owners," but it's also environmentally friendly, Arribau said.

Friends told her that a shredding service was needed in Durango. "An accountant friend suggested the idea. I thought it was silly, but did some research anyway," she said. She talked to other shredding companies nationwide and asked what type of clients they served. She then cold-called about 20 companies in Durango, made her pitch, and started signing them up.

"Some of my clients have said 'I should have thought of that,'" she said.

Besides being the only shredding company in Durango, Phoenix Data Protection is also mobile. A 32-foot truck carries an industrial shredder. Paper is shredded on-site down to 5/16-inch strips and then donated to the Durango Recycling Center.

Some clients have cleaned out rooms filled with documents. One had two storage sheds of paper that weighed about 6,000 pounds, she said. Price ranges from \$50 to \$1,000, depending on volume and whether it is a one-time purge or regular shredding service. Regular service includes a locking container.

Documents that need to be shredded include anything with personal information: Social Security data, credit card, medical information, driver's license and passport -- "anything that can be connected to your name," she said.

There's a somewhat negative connotation to destroying documents in a post-Enron world, she said. But with identity theft increasing nationwide, shredding is one protection against a huge crime.

Nationwide, identity theft complaints lodged with the Federal Trade Commission increased 88 percent between 2001 and 2002, from 86,198 to 161,819. Colorado ranks 11th nationwide for the number of identity theft victims, at 62 victims per 100,000 population. Washington, D.C., has the most identity thefts; North Dakota has the fewest.

Identity theft is still relatively unheard of in Durango compared to large cities, but District Attorney Sarah Law expects the crime to rise locally. Statewide, credit card fraud is the most likely misuse of someone's information. Bank fraud is the second-highest misuse. And the elderly are not the most likely victims, either. Of 2,212 identity-theft complaints in 2002, 77 percent were from people ages 18-49.

Stealing mail and going through trash is a popular way of obtaining confidential data, but the Internet is the biggest factor behind identity theft, said Ken Lane, deputy attorney general for Colorado. "The technology explosion has aided and abetted identity theft," he said. "Someone can get a good quality program to make checks that look legitimate from anyone's standpoint,"

he said.

Trash in Dumpsters is also not considered private, Lane said. "There is no privacy expectation for anything you put into a Dumpster," he said. Trash inside a home or garage is private trash, and anyone who steals it may face trespassing or theft charges. Similar charges may be sought for Dumpsters at a business, but it is typically a tenuous claim, he said.

In short, Dumpster diving is legal in Colorado. "However, what someone does with the material, such as furthering illegal activity, is separate from taking the trash out of the Dumpster to begin with," he said.

Banks normally are liable for identity theft and misappropriated funds, said Ed McMillan, president of Bank of Durango. "People hate to write down all the personal data for various applications, but it is there for a reason, which is to protect the consumer," he said. The bank has only had the occasional minor fraud, but has prosecuted each time, he said.

The bank used to burn confidential data, then it switched to shredding with a small off-the-shelf machine. It now uses Arribau's services. "Our shredder was just too small," McMillan said. It also broke from heavy use. "We had three days of shredding in our basement we just couldn't get to," he said.

Arribau said some shredding companies will go through a Dumpster, find confidential documents, and then use them as a scare tactic to sign up customers.

"But this is Durango, you can't do that," she said.

Reach Staff Writer Tom Sluis at tsluis@durangoherald.com.

Identity theft

If you are a victim of identity theft, file a police report with the Durango Police Department listing what was taken or used without your authorization, and what credit, money or goods were established or purchased.

Get a copy of the police report for your records. Contact your credit card issuers and banks and notify them of the theft. They may ask for a copy of the police report. Ask that your current credit cards and/or bank account be closed and that new accounts be opened under a new number.

You may want to add a secret "code word" on the new accounts to ensure that only you may access them. Businesses may ask you to sign and complete an affidavit of forgery form that they provide.

Source: Colorado Attorney General's Office

JERRY McBRIDE/Herald

After confidential documents are shredded, Phoenix Data Protection donates the waste paper to the Durango Recycling Center.

JERRY McBRIDE/Herald

Alex Arribau, owner of Phoenix Data Protection, shreds Wells Fargo bank documents in the back of the company's truck last week in Durango.