



RELIANT
PARTNERS IN SECURITY

Property Security and Management
Solutions



SUCCESS STORY

RIVER PARK TOWERS BRONX, NY

Perched atop the Hudson River and the Major Deegan expressway in the Bronx, NY, the four-tower, 1,625-unit River Park Towers complex is home to around 5,000 tenants. Most of the tenants are low-income, eligible for housing vouchers through HUD (NY Department of Housing and Urban Development).

The first thing that comes to mind upon entering the River Park Towers complex is a sense of pleasant normalcy. The entire complex is very clean and well-maintained. This is a place where people want to live.

This, however, wasn't the case just a few years ago. When Reliant Safety assumed the task of securing the complex in January 2013 (as part of the complex's acquisition by Omni Realty, Reliant's parent company,) River Park Towers was known as a hotbed of lawlessness and criminal activity. Drugs were sold and consumed everywhere, and shootings and violent assaults were commonplace.

"The situation was so bad that when the police came in they had to come in with three or four units because of the crazy level of violence. Two of the buildings, especially, were dubbed 'The Wild Wild West,'" noted Jorge Figueroa, an ex-police officer who now co-leads the MRT (Management Response Team) at River Park Towers.



Company Profile

- Areas of Activity: provision of property security and management solutions
- Founded 2009
- Subsidiary of Omni New York LLC
- Main Offices: New York, NY
- Scope of Activity: 8,000 cameras across ten states, supporting around 14,000 residential units
- Visit www.reliantsafe.com

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The Challenges

The Reliant team faced a host of challenges upon taking over the security of the River Park complex:

- Gang violence and drug turf wars, that terrorized the law-abiding majority of tenants
- Vandalism, graffiti, and total disregard to the cleanliness of communal areas (hallways and exterior)
- Nonpayment of rent
- Residency violations: SROs (Single Room Occupancy)—tenants who sub-leased rooms in their apartments to non-eligible individuals; apartments merged into “McMansions;” and illegal “permanent guests.”

These conditions made River Park Towers an undesirable housing solution, so much so that around 500 of the 1625 units were vacant upon Reliant’s moving in.

Taking Over

“We knew the tenants’ mindset, and we didn’t expect them to respect us or cooperate with us when we came in. We weren’t the first security operation in the complex, and there was an expectation that we’d operate like the guys that were here before us, who used to fight the tenants without bringing any positive change,” said John Echevarria, also ex-police, who co-leads the MRT at River Park.

While the plan from the start was to install a large number of cameras for complete situational awareness, the MRT had to “hit the ground running” without effective camera coverage. The team was met with a great deal of opposition, mostly from the gangs that realized they were losing turf. Team members were constantly surrounded by suspicious tenants. A few physical clashes ensued, which required bringing in additional MRT teams, and the NYPD was often called to intervene.

It quickly became apparent that the Reliant MRTs operate differently than their predecessors. Along with a zero-tolerance policy toward violence, the Reliant teams worked with the tenants to peacefully diffuse volatile situations. “We are professionals. The tenants thought this would be another company that came and went and fail, they didn’t realize we came here to affect real change,” said Mr. Echevarria.

The Reliant MRT’s respectful approach eventually created trust and cooperation. Tenants began reporting crimes and violations, once they realized it was in their best interest. . In time, and in no small part thanks to the tens of millions of dollars invested in infrastructure and tenant services, the opposition to the MRT all but disappeared.

The Power of Full Camera Coverage

Only thirty cameras, all exterior, were in place when Reliant took over securing River Park Towers. Two years later there were 1,600 cameras, covering every possible non-residential location in the complex.

The new cameras were deployed gradually. “Every building we installed cameras in, the drug dealers would move to a building that had no cameras. The dealers saw the “writing on the wall” and never came back,” said Mr. Figueroa.

Video from all cameras is constantly recorded and can be retrieved as evidence, both locally and remotely, from Reliant’s main offices. In addition, a dedicated team member scrolls through all cameras on a regular basis to detect violations like graffiti, garbage left in hallways or loitering.

When a crime is reported, the MRT video operator can track him through multiple video feeds. “Some time after we took over, we held a joint operation with the NYPD. Two undercover officers moved in. We could see who entered certain apartments, that now became part of the investigation,” said Mr. Echevarria. “The more cameras we had, we were able to issue more violations and revoke a troublemakers’ resident status.”

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Now, when a crime takes place police are hardly ever needed. The MRT provide the police footage of the crime as well as information about the suspects.

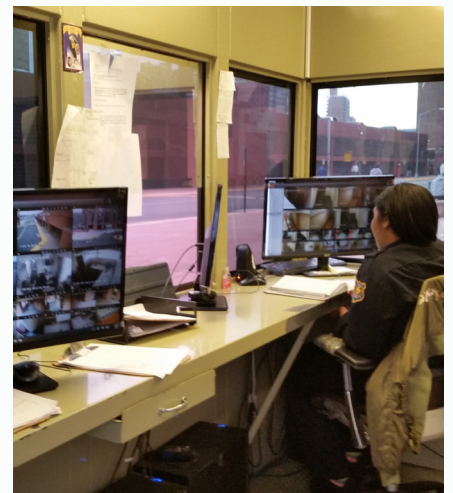
A good example for how full camera coverage improves the residents’ quality of life is a 2015 hallway shooting incident. Within five minutes the shooter was tracked to the apartment he ended up in. This eliminated the need to put the entire complex on lockdown. Instead of inconveniencing thousands of people, only the floors above and below the shooter were put on lockdown.

Success through Cooperation

The Reliant MRT staff at River Park Tower work very closely with the superintendents and the maintenance staff. “The maintenance employees inspect the buildings every day, and they’d report to us, for example, that someone left garbage in the hallway, or they’d report an illegal subletter,” says Mr. Echevarria. “We’d review the video, inform management and they’d issue a violation. But we also need to protect the superintendents, so we’d never say that we got the initial tip from them.”



Two of the 1,600 cameras installed in River Park Towers



Local video monitoring at River Park Towers



Main promenade at River Park Towers



The cooperation also boosts the moral of the maintenance employees. The recognition of their work helps them to know that the MRT guys are there for them, to help make the situation better and make their lives easier. At the same time, video is used to both supervise the work of the maintenance staff, and protect them against complaints by tenants.

The MRT also cooperates tightly with law enforcement. When a person is charged, MRT members go to court to testify, which was unheard of prior to Reliant taking over security at the complex.

Outcomes: River Park Towers Today

While the number of reported incidents has remained more or less the same as before Reliant came to River Park Towers, the project is considered a great success and a model for technology-driven residential security.

- Occupancy has increased by 50%, from around 1100 to 1600, so the number of incidents per unit/capita has gone down dramatically. Today there's a waiting list for apartments at River Park Towers.
- The types of incidents have changed. While up until 2012 there were shootings and violence on a regular basis, now reported incidents are usually low level crimes and violations, like selling marijuana or tagging.
- The number of reported crimes has shot up. Whereas in the past most crimes were not even reported due to fear and mistrust, now tenants feel much more comfortable to report crimes.
- Over the past three years, around 70 tenants were de-certified. Most de-certifications in the first year were for criminal activity; today almost all evictions are for non-payment of rent.

"In time, people in the industry, including HUD, realized we were doing something different, something good," said Neil Nappi, Director of Security for Reliant. "We were known as the 'camera guys' at conventions. We started meeting with building owners, to learn about their problems. A lot of times we were met with skepticism, that we could do the job of cleaning up and securing a property by covering the place with cameras, but the results speak for themselves."