FAKE BLOOD REAL LESSONS

Peak

The Halo County Tourism Summit demonstrated some cutting-edge training efforts used in various exercises.

GOVERNMENT: Firms Give Terrorism Exercises a Double Dose of Realism

BY MARIAN WEBB

While many San Diegans were trick-or-treating, representatives from the military, law enforcement, first responders and the intelligence community were treated to a private “Zombie-destroyer show” at San Diego’s Paradise Point Resort & Spa inland designed to simulate a threat of real epidemic proportions.

“The Zombie Apocalypse has a serious purpose,” said Kit Lessell, executive vice president of San Diego-based Strategic Operations Inc., which created the live-action training demonstration on behalf of San Diego-based security firm Halo Corp.

It is basically intended to train medical mass-casualty exercise and how to prepare and treat people in the aftermath of such an event.

The demonstration was one of several training exercises presented during the 7th Annual Halo Counter-Terrorism Summit, which took place recently at San Diego’s 44-acre Paradise Point Resort.

For the summit, Strategic Operations constructed an entire Mideast Eastern Village complete with medical simulation systems, special effects, including smoke-filled pop-up barricades, props, and even recruited actors to play the “good and bad guys.”

Some demonstrations feature representatives from the San Diego SWAT team and La Mesa Police Department, he said.

To re-create the feel of a foreign culture and its unique environment, Strategic Operations went back to its Hollywood-creating roots. Lessell said the film’s penchant for making up a system, a mobile structure, takes merely a few hours to assemble.

Lessell formed the structure to a “Loge kit” that can be built in any number of configurations — including houses built of East Asia, Southeast Asia’s bamboo and Adriatic’s sand cubes. The price tag per unit is about $34,000, he said.

Sold or rented to military branches and government entities, the manufacturing and construction of these structures make up roughly half of Strategic Operations’ business today.

Lessell declined to give revenue since the firm has been purchased, but said that hundreds of structures have been sold to clients.

He regarded the memorial as the perfect venue to showcase how the firm’s mobile training modules and structures can be used to better prepare the nation’s military for combat.

“The experience will help us get our products and services out to the people who need the electronics about saving lives for the basic, federal and local government,” Lessell said. “We hope to make decision-makers and instructors who can influence those decision-makers.”

Lessell said Strategic Operations was the summit’s title sponsor.

Other sponsors, according to Baker, included UTN/Phoenix RFID Solutions, a training/simulation company, and various local and national firms offering products and services for defense, law enforcement and security industries.

Said Burch, “We did not give away any military secrets.”

This was the type of training where you learn the relevant techniques,” Lessell said. “We will not discuss current tactics, techniques and procedures that would be disclosing information that the public should not see,” Burch said. “We are doing this so they can look to the various types of things we can do.”

The “Zombie Apocalypse” theme, while appropriate for Halloween, also follows a “bad news/bad news” campaign put forth by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention about the importance of emergency preparedness.

With 364 rooms sold out at Paradise Point Resort & Spa, the invasion certainly proved to be financially rewarding for several local entities. Burch expects this scenario to bring repeat business, benefits and visibility for San Diego’s summit, “importantly, for our national security and emergency preparedness.”