



When It Comes to Security, a Historic Greek Orthodox School and Church Go High-Tech

The Greek American Institute (GAI), located in Bronx, NY within NYC, is a Pre-K through Eighth grade private school that honors the ancient and embraces the modern. The oldest continuously run Greek Orthodox School in the United States, offering a curriculum heavily influenced by the great Hellenic thinkers of 2,500 year ago, it is home to a new, technologically advanced video security system from Vicon that leverages state-of-the-art cameras and software. Demos Lorentzos, President of GAI's School Board, explains, "The previous system we had in place only covered a minimum of locations, was slow to use and made it difficult to search for recorded video. Parents were requesting something more comprehensive. It was time to upgrade." For that, GAI turned to the Hauppauge, NY offices of ITsavvy, a Chicago-based IT products and technology solutions provider.

Installing Valerus

Greg Montgomery, Director of Project Management at ITsavvy, recommended a solution based on Vicon's new Valerus video management platform. He says, "GAI did extensive research. They looked at upgrading the system they had, but it was as expensive, if not more, than a new Vicon system."

The Valerus installation encompasses the entire property, which is located on the busy service road for the Bruckner Expressway, one of the major arteries through The Bronx. This includes both the four-story school building and the Greek Orthodox Church of Zoodohos Peghe next door. About 35 Vicon cameras have been installed throughout these buildings and around their exterior.

Unlike the older security system, which Greg describes as having focused more on protecting the buildings rather than the students, faculty and members of the community who use them, the new system does it all. Demos adds, "Before, we were focused more on entrances and exits, but our new system has expanded coverage to monitor corridors, the gym, the cafeteria and all publicly accessible areas."

Organization

Greek American Institute



Challenges

- Provide a user-friendly, affordable means to provide security surveillance of a private school, church and community center located in a busy urban neighborhood
- Identify camera placement to maximize coverage of all indoor and outdoor publicly accessible areas
- Customize the monitoring interface for different users based upon areas of responsibility
- Make it easy to search recorded video to quickly find and review incidents

Solution

The GAI replaced its older system with Vicon cameras and Valerus software. Collaboration with representatives from the school's systems integrator, ITsavvy, and the Vicon support team ensured that cameras perform as needed and software is configured to meet the schools operational and safety requirements.

Results

The school's administrators can easily monitor the entire school and church buildings and grounds, as well as search and call up recorded video as needed. Parents are satisfied that the safety of students has been enhanced. Tools are now available to investigate and prosecute any future criminal activity that occurs on the property.

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~ Demos Lorentzos, School Board President, The Greek American Institute

ITsavvy installed the Valerus Applications Server in the same server room that already supports the school’s main data network. All other floors had IDFs (*intermediate distribution frames*) in place, into which ITsavvy installed its own switching equipment to control the camera system, keeping it separate from the data network. The two networks can talk to each other, which is required when viewing cameras through the Valerus web-based thin client.

Up and Running

The system is primarily monitored from the school’s administration office on the main floor, where a 55-inch monitor has been installed for easy viewing by both the school secretary and the church secretary. From there, the women buzz in visitors through the front doors. Demos says, “There was already a small monitor integrated with the front door intercom and buzzer system, but that doesn’t compare to seeing visitors on the large screen with the Vicon system.” For heightened security, visitors must be buzzed through two sets of front doors with a “mantrap” in the middle. A new camera mounted within the mantrap provides an additional opportunity for administrators to carefully observe visitors before granting them access to the building.

Greg says that one of the features he likes best about Valerus is that he can establish separate views and tours for each user. He explains, “The school secretary is more interested in looking at the school cameras, while the church secretary wants to see what’s happening at the church. Depending on who logs in, the system displays the appropriate views and tours.”

As a system administrator, both Demos and the school’s head of IT have made use of the system’s web-based interface to log in and check cameras from home, and Demos describes the user interface as excellent. “It’s simple to use but it is very advanced. Someone who isn’t technically savvy can easily navigate through it.”



Demos has been particularly pleased with how easy it is to search for recorded events. He says, “There are multiple ways of finding something, which I like, because every situation is different. One of the best features is being able to go back to the same point in time with multiple cameras and synchronize their playback. You can see something happening from different angles all at once. That can be very helpful.”





A high-resolution camera provides school administrators with a clear view of the lobby.

The Right Cameras

A VMS system is only as good as its cameras, and Demos gives high marks to the quality of video from all the Vicon cameras installed throughout the school and church. His favorites are two 360° cameras installed in the cafeteria and in the vestibule outside the gym. These had been recommended by Greg because of their ability to provide cost-effective coverage of large, open areas, but Demos had initially been skeptical; "I was concerned that the video would look like a fisheye and that there would be blind spots," he says. "Greg demonstrated how the Valerus software gets rid of any distortion from the fisheye lens and lets you view the camera in multiple ways. I could also see that once the cameras were up, there were no blind spots. The placement was perfect. Out of all the cameras, those are a home run."

Just as cameras can make or break a system, so can the quality of service and support. Demos gives both ITsavvy and Vicon "five stars across the board." In working with ITsavvy, he says, "I may be School Board President, but that's a voluntary position. I'm an engineer by profession. I deal with construction all the time. I have a good understanding of people who know what they're doing, and Greg has all those qualities. We've purchased products from ITsavvy before, but this was the first time we've used their services. We'll definitely use them again."

He is also appreciative of the value Vicon support professionals brought to the project. "Vicon insisted that we do a walk-through before anything was implemented, so they could get a better idea of what was going on. They sent an engineer, the sales rep and anyone else who would be part of the process. It really made me feel comfortable with what we were going to have done."

Vicon was also exceptionally accommodating when Demo decided, after the project was completed, that he would prefer IR cameras in a few locations where they had not originally been specified. Greg says, "Vicon provided a full refund on the non-IR cameras and sold him five IR cameras for just the cost difference. I've been in business a long time and that's pretty unique – to swap out cameras like that without any restocking fee or anything."

"The Valerus software gets rid of any distortion from the fisheye lens (of the Vicon 360°) camera and lets you view the camera in multiple ways. Out of all the cameras, those are a home run."

*~ Demos Lorentzos, School Board President,
The Greek American Institute*

Feeling Safe and Satisfied

The system has been operational since November 2017, and so far, Demo reports that the only incident he's needed to investigate with Valerus is a dispute between two kids playing during gym class. "One kid claimed one thing happened and the other claimed something else. The video confirmed what really did happen. With the Valerus system in place, and cameras serving as deterrents," Demos says "knock on wood...let's hope that those are the worst problems we'll need our new security system to solve!"



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