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EXPERT ADVICE

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Private investigators do most of their digging in the daylight

By Wayne M. Anderson

Special to the Rocky Mountain News

Expert Advice offers tips on how to get started or get ahead in a career. Each week the feature calls on a different Denver-area job expert.

The field: Private Investigator. Since Edgar Allan Poe first developed the literary concept of the detective, the profession of private investigation has captured imaginations with Sherlock Holmes, Dick Tracy and Jim Rockford. In this profession, life often can be more intriguing than fiction. For example, pursuing people and their financial assets around Switzerland and Zambia and doing counter corporate espionage is all part of the PI's job description. Beyond covert operations, investigators also offer armed protection for executives who worry about kidnapping or injury. Today, most private investigation is 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. spying, because that's when the banks are open, which allows investigators to dig around in people's financial business.

Today's expert: Robert W. Peterson, 46, is chief investigator for R.W. Peterson Investigative Agency. The agency, which has been in Denver since 1973, has been featured in local and national media. It also has offices in Los Angeles. Peterson is a former Chicago policeman, with an associate arts degree in criminal justice. His most celebrated media case was tracking down Roseanne Barr's daughter, whom the star had given away early in her adult life.

Education: There is nothing mandatory. But in most states they require several years experience in private or governmental investigation before they will issue a private investigator's license. Police science or criminal justice is a good educational base before entering the field. A common breakdown is: 60% is investigative financial background work; public relations amounts for 20%; the remaining 20% is self motivation.

Pay: Locally a flat rate ranges from \$35 to \$100 per hour for those owning their own business. Employees' salaries can range from \$8.50 to \$15 per hour, with expenses. The best town to do private investigation is Los Angeles because of the volume of work and the affluence.

Desirable personality traits: Someone who can fit in and mingle with corporate executives. A person who enjoys researching information, especially from financial institutions. A propensity for acting and sales work works nice in this field.

Outlook: New businesses experience a large failure rate in Denver, as this is a very competitive market. Most of the business incurred locally is from the federal government in tracking savings and loan debts and debtors.

Sources of information: California Association of Licensed Investigators, 1408 Claremont Way, Sacramento, CA, 95822, (916) 456-9908.

Is there a field you would like profiled? Please write: Expert Advice, Rocky Mountain News Business Department, 400 W. Colfax Ave., Denver 80204.