

# CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS

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## Israeli cybersecurity firm expands to Livonia

NICK MANES  

- Company GuardKnox to open office in Livonia's office park
- GuardKnox hires automotive industry veteran Joe Romeo to head office
- SE Michigan becoming hub for mobility-focused cybersecurity firms, with many originating from Israel

An Israeli cybersecurity provider for the automotive and broader mobility industries plans to open a new subsidiary office in Livonia.

GuardKnox USA announced this week that automotive industry veteran Joe Romeo has been hired as the new subsidiary office's managing director. Romeo has worked in a variety of capacities over 20 years at companies like Ford Motor Co. and Bosch, the company said in a statement.

Having worked in the industry, Romeo told Crain's that he had numerous conversations with different companies working on cybersecurity in the automotive and broader "mobility" space, but was drawn to the Israeli company because of the opportunity it presents.

"GuardKnox is small, they're nimble. They're incredibly talented, and incredibly competent," Romeo said. "And they bring to the table a great mix of technology that's been proven."

The office, which is in the process of being built out and set to open in the spring, is located in the Laurel Park Place office building near the interchange of I-96 and I-275 in Livonia. Romeo declined to provide specific hiring plans at this time, but said the subsidiary is in the process of onboarding some new engineers and will likely be hiring someone to take on business development work.

Romeo said the company intends to aggressively recruit engineering talent in the region, although he declined to give an overall investment figure.

Cybersecurity, Romeo said, is top of mind for nearly every automotive executive he speaks with, and for one simple reason.

"The number one concern is, 'I don't want to see my name or my company's name in a headline because there was a mass attack on one of our vehicles,'" Romeo said. "In those cases, their best cases, it's only a recall of several hundred thousand vehicles that cost them hundreds of millions of dollars. But what they're really worried about is somebody getting hurt."

Given the strong presence of the automotive industry in Southeast Michigan and those concerns about a hack as vehicles become more connected and head toward autonomy, cybersecurity has become a hot industry in the region.

Increasingly, many of those companies are coming from Israel.

Citing data from a Business Facilities report, the Detroit-based nonprofit Michigan-Israel Business Accelerator (MIBA) **notes** that the state ranks third in the country for potential cybersecurity growth, and, as of 2017, the state ranks third in the U.S. for employment in the sector with 13,160 jobs in cybersecurity.

MIBA CEO Scott Hiipakka told Crain's that yet another Israeli cybersecurity firm will be announcing a metro Detroit expansion in the coming weeks, but he declined to name the company at this time.

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