

AR's New CEO Knows Real-Time Towing

By Steve Calitri



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Jerry Carnahan's background and experience was tailor made for the job he's taken on as the new CEO of AutoReturn (AR), known by towers as a national dispatcher of police tows; as Carnahan details it, "the nation's leading provider of a full-service, law-enforcement, towing management solution for municipalities." AR's tow-management system combines leading edge technology with 24/7 support to keep law enforcement, dispatchers, towing companies, and citizens connected from dispatch to impound. This system, says Carnahan, has proven to reduce crash-scene, tow-truck response times by two-thirds to an average of twelve minutes.

Carnahan grew up in the towing business, operating trucks for his father in Great Falls, Montana. Jerry's "little brother," Mel, runs Carnahan's Towing today and "Dad still operates a truck and goes on calls at age eighty-seven," said Carnahan, knowing full well how towing can get into one's blood.

Carnahan's resume covers law enforcement, towing, incident management, and risk management. He was a Secret Service agent at age twenty-one on President Jimmy Carter's detail. When he left the Secret Service, Carnahan became an adjustor for Farmers Insurance and led its towing program. Later, he was a deputy sheriff in Weber County Utah, involved with accident scenes and disabled vehicles. Adding to his incident management credentials, he served five years with Metro Las Vegas' Critical Incident Review Team.

Carnahan began consulting with AutoReturn in 2016. Eventually, AutoReturn's founder, John Wicker, decided that Carnahan had some important bonafides for running a towing-technology company that served law enforcement and municipalities; he saw that Carnahan could contribute to



Jerry Carnahan

AutoReturn's success in a big way. So Wicker made a shrewd executive decision; he handed the helm to Carnahan. Meanwhile he continues to be involved in planning for the company's future as AutoReturn's chairman.

AutoReturn is now contracted with over thirty cities, counties and states in the U.S., plus, Rome, Italy. Its responsibilities to both the municipalities and towing operations are unique in this industry.

Some towers over the past ten years have been misinformed regarding AutoReturn, assuming AutoReturn's business model was similar to that of a motor club. But the two models couldn't be more polar opposite. AutoReturn does not set rates and the more calls dispatched the merrier; AutoReturn's revenue is driven by the number of calls it dispatches and the more the tower makes the more AutoReturn makes.

Note: Editor-in-Chief Steve Calitri interviewed Jerry Carnahan by phone in April for this article.

Still, the wrong assumptions persisted around how AutoReturn operated.

AutoReturn would drive down non consensual tow rates, the misinformed towers feared. "AutoReturn never sets rates that towers are paid," Carnahan said. Towers interviewed by American Towman over the past several years have been okay with rates paid to them through AutoReturn. In some cases those rates were higher than paid before AutoReturn came onto the scene.

The second fear among those who towed for the police was that AutoReturn would come into a city and mess with an established rotation list. Over the years these fears have largely proven unfounded.



Brother, Mel Carnahan (inset) and Dad, Gene Carnahan, circa 2017.

As to the issue of upsetting an established rotation in a city, Carnahan has this to say, "We don't want to upset the status quo. For example, if a city has four towers in the rotation and it's working well and the city is happy with that, we take that approach."

One of the specific tower

concerns had been that AutoReturn would flood an area by adding more towers to a rotation list and dispatch strictly to the truck closest to the breakdown, overriding the tower who was up on the rotation.

"The law enforcement agency," says Carnahan, "determines if ▶

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the call goes rotation, closest to the scene or a hybrid model. We can and do work with all three. Some use closest to scene to speed response, some prefer rotation and a few use rotation and closest to dispatch with a priority call when they want the vehicles cleared quickly. The facts prove a model allowing a closest to dispatch can drastically improve response times, but, as I have said, we work with whichever model the city requires."

'The city,' says Carnahan, "besides managing the tow rates, sets the service level requirements."

AutoReturn provides the cities a quantified level of accountability. "AutoReturn measures everything," said Carnahan. "And we provide comprehensive data on service performance. Response times are critical for reducing secondary crashes and saving lives."

Carnahan believes that AutoReturn and towers have mutual interests and AutoReturn has been a positive force for towers in the cities they dispatch for. "In my estimation," said Carnahan, "the biggest issues facing towers is spiraling costs, unfair competition and unprofessional tow operations. We strive to help communities run smoothly by connecting law enforcement, towers and vehicle owners to keep traffic moving and officers and tow truck operators safe." 

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