

## Father, son duo brings towing service to local area

by Michael Mattison

It started out a piece of a personal business that has grown into an entity of its own.

Paul and Eric Platz own and operate Five Star Towing between Winthrop and Lafayette.

Eric had a tow truck for his car scrapping business for about 10 years. "People found out I had a tow truck and you are towing for other people," he said. "Before you know it, you are towing \$60,000 cars with a \$5,000 tow truck. That one got wore out."

Eric had worked in New Ulm and was the main tow truck operator for the school buses there. "I was looking at buying a big semi tow truck and Dad went with me because he was bored. I almost bought it and he stopped me. He said, 'How about we buy a better one together and go more large scale on this.'" That discussion took place in January 2018.

Eric has been completely self-employed for the past two years and has been working from the farm.

Paul explained that at the same time the agriculture economy collapsed and hasn't been very good. "I was looking at something to support the farming habit," Paul said. "Lots of farmers are doing lots of things to keep their farms going." He was looking for something totally unrelated to the farming cycle.

"The good thing about this," Eric said, "is it isn't farm related. Even when the farming economy is awful, there is always stuff to tow."

They found their big truck in Sacramento, CA. Paul flew out to California and bought it from a family-run business. He was not able to drive it back because it didn't meet the emissions standard in California. "They didn't want it in the state but they wouldn't let us drive it out either," Paul said. They ended up putting it on a flatbed to get it home.

They also were looking to replace Eric's old truck. Many of the newer cars are all-wheel drive and are not able to be towed so they were looking for a rollback to handle those situations. That was purchased in Princeton, MN.

The third truck was found in Long Island, NY. Eric drove his car out there to pick it up and towed the car home.

They got their business set up and Paul's son Phillip set up a website for them. Initially, 80-90 percent of the business came off the website. "If somebody breaks down on the road, they get on their phone and look for a tow truck in the area," Paul said. People with towing coverage will call their provider and the provider will then look for towing services nearby as well.

"What we have discovered is that we are in an area that is underserved by towing companies,"

Paul said. "Especially on the large truck side. You have to go to Mankato, Madelia, Howard Lake, St. Cloud or Willmar to get a truck that can handle semis."

The harsh winter was very good for business. "Now that has died down but once people discovered we are here, we are getting stuff that isn't related to the weather."

When they started, they were expected to have 2-3 tows a week. It has turned out to be 2-3 tows a day on a normal day. Many days it is many more.

"It was supposed to be a part-time job for us but it is becoming way more than a full-time job," Eric said. "There are times we might be towing 20-22 hours a day."

Eric added that when they contacted the counties and State Patrol, those entities were excited to have tow trucks but especially a big one so the wait times for accidents aren't as long. "They want the road open as fast as possible," he said.

"Us being here has really reduced the down time for the roads," Paul added.

They started up in June and business started picking up in November and throughout the winter.

Eric said it got busy when the farmers hit the fields, pulling out equipment that was stuck.

"No day is ever the same, it is always something different," Paul said.

The Sunday blizzard was a memorable day for Five Star Towing. "We had law enforcement that stuck with us all day. They gave us lights," Eric said.

"That would warn people we were there. They realize it is dangerous for us to be out there," Paul said. "We really appreciate law enforcement being there. People tend to slow down a little more when they are there."

Eric said they are contemplating replacing one of the trucks already because business has been so good.

"The last 2-3 months have been good for all the towing companies," Paul said. "We're not basing future projections on that. That kind of winter only comes along every 5-10 years. At the same time, people had no idea we were here and now they have discovered we are. We are starting to get a lot of calls that are unrelated to accidents or weather."

He added that the truck lines in the area indicate that they like having a towing company that can help them in the area. "If you don't have to drive a truck an hour, we are so close that it helps keep their costs down," Paul said.

Paul said that the majority of their business comes from north and west of their location.

"My whole life I raised kids and tried to teach



The Five Star Towing fleet consists of three trucks.

Photo by Michael Mattison

them what I know," Paul said. "It's the other way around this time. I didn't know anything about towing and Eric did. It's a humble day when you learn something from your son. He's taught me a lot."

Eric enjoys the challenge of getting things tipped back over while minimizing damage, figuring out to get semi trailers broke in half back home. "Basically, doing the impossible with what you have to work with," he said.


Paul said 99 percent of the people they encounter are just glad they are there to help.

Some of the challenges come with not getting the whole story of the situation that they will be running into and also people not knowing where they are when they need help.

They got called to winch a van out of the ditch. They weren't told that it had sheered off a telephone pole and the power lines were live.

"You learn to ask a lot of questions to learn what is really going on," Paul said.



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Eric and Paul Platz have been operating Five Star Towing for about one year.

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