

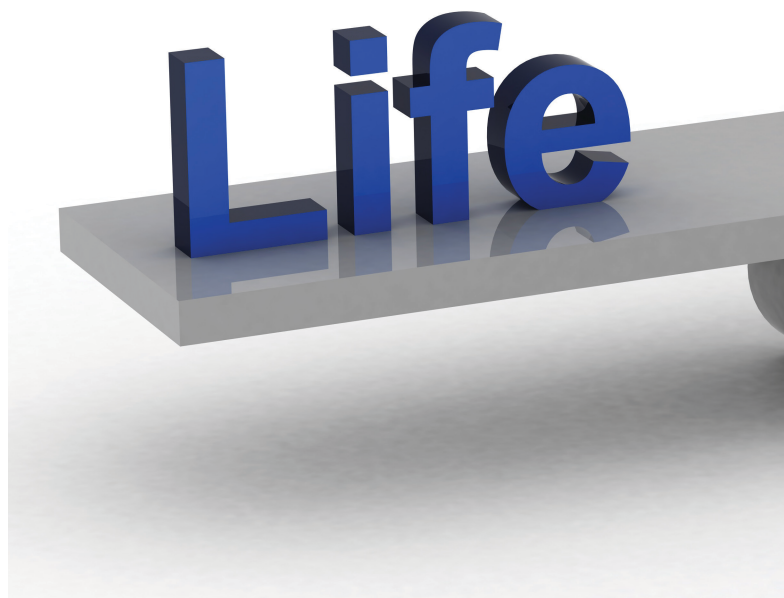
# Drawn to Make a Difference

It has been nine years since Vito Strolis of Michigan discovered that there was more to life than towing and recovery. Now he helps others through life coaching while continuing to own and operate Ruehle's Towing & Transport of Mount Clemens, north of Detroit.

Back in 2010, Strolis was getting smacked around by life and was smarting. "I was going through a transition in my marriage, dealing with my stepfather who raised me and who had terminal cancer, and the economy was bad ... I was getting hammered," he recalls.

For weeks, he carried in his pocket a brochure for LifeCare, a coaching program for people under emotional stress. He finally took a class and became hooked, so much so that he eventually became a coach himself. Today Strolis stands in front of several hundred people once a month and conducts a presentation about the faith-based program.

"If you know what it's like to sit in the audience, it does make a difference when presenting," he says. He sometimes invites guests for Sunday and holiday dinners for one-on-one time, because "it's very embarrassing for a person to explain their story to a general audience. It's uncomfortable to have that discussion."



## Better Work-Life Balance

He says he was drawn to make a difference in people's lives as part of his own transition of becoming "a more complete person." At age 62, Strolis figures he has gone through various life stages and can offer different kinds of insight and scenarios.



PHOTO: VITO STROLIS

Strolis noticed over the years that the towing community is tightly knit, hard-working and competitive. But it might also benefit from a better home and work life balance.

"At trade shows they measure success by how many trucks you have. You ask, how's your family? And the answer is, 'I have 10 trucks.' My idea of success has nothing to do with towing or income. It's what I do outside of that arena."

Outside of the towing sphere, he feels appreciated, receiving notes or cards from people he has coached but whom he hasn't seen in years. He labels these his most fulfilling cases. "They'll touch base and tell me what's going on in their lives."

## Who's in Control?

Most of the people who attend LifeCare coaching classes are women, he notes, because "for some reason us guys think we have it all under control."

Vito Strolis makes a presentation to employees of the city of Mount Clemens.

# Work

*“Every day is a good day,  
it just depends on what  
we do with it.”*

He has witnessed an evolution in who attends the coaching program. “I see more people who are mandated to come as part of divorce proceedings.” The divorce rate, he adds, covers all ages, from 21-year-olds to people past 70.

And Strolis has also noticed that, much like he did, people don’t immediately jump into LifeCare coaching. Some people never return after an initial orientation, while others slowly wade into the coaching waters. “We’ve had people who show up six months after a presentation and say they want to take part.”

As a sign of the times, he’s also involved in Families Against Narcotics, helping to educate parents about the symptoms to look for in the ongoing opiate crisis. “It’s brutal when you hear on a police scanner that somebody is not breathing. It’s a nationwide problem. It’s not a matter of if you’re going to know somebody involved, but a matter of when.”

## Save Yourself, Save Others

Participating in a LifeCare coaching program, he says, is akin to saving yourself first in an emergency so that you can help others. “When you’re in an airplane and lose oxygen, you put your mask on first, before a child’s, to be able to help the rest.”

However, even coaches can get overwhelmed worrying about the people under their care – if they don’t show up for a meeting, if they’ve dropped out. “If you don’t monitor yourself, it definitely will take a toll. We as group leaders or facilitators hold meetings to make sure nobody is getting burned out.”

Becoming a LifeCare coach has put a sprint in Strolis’ step. He clocks in to Ruehle’s Towing about 5 a.m. each day and makes sure to check out by 6 p.m. – still a long day – to attend community functions.

“I would say his biggest passion is being involved in the community,” according to a nomination for the Towing and Recovery Association of Ohio’s (TRAO) tribute to 40 towing leaders in honor of the organization’s 40th anniversary in 2018. Strolis was chosen as one of the 40 leaders.

## 40 Years of Towing

He has the confidence to leave the towing to others in the company, saying “I have a great crew of people,” a certainty gained after decades in the business. Ruehle’s Towing owns 30 pieces of equipment, including 25 wreckers, and employs up to 27 people.

Strolis was a bit of a military brat – he was born in Tripoli, Libya – having moved several times when his dad was in the Air Force. He got his jumpstart in towing and recovery after answering an ad in a local newspaper for a part-time tow truck driver at the company he eventually would own.

“I came here and jackknifed a car because I didn’t know how to drive a stick shift,” he recalls. But the owner must have had a sense of humor – or a sense of desperation – for he commented, “You have potential.”

It was a tumultuous place, he explains, because the family-owned firm operated on a steady diet of arguments among relatives, enough to convince Strolis never to involve his own children, a son and two daughters, in the business. “I said I’m not going down that road.”

However, the part-time gig turned out to be a boost for Strolis, helping to put him through college, where he studied marketing and psychology, a handy major for a life coach and mentor. Numerous towing employees have advanced to become police officers and firefighters with Strolis’ encouragement.

“It’s difficult to explain to most people why I do what I do, but I know in my heart and my mind why I do what I do,” he says. “I don’t know the percentage of people who make a difference in people’s lives, but I know that I do.”

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Have a personal pastime, hobby or passion? Doing something special for your community? Let us know. We’ll share your stories with fellow towing owners and operators in the industry. Email [mpadilla@towtimesmag.com](mailto:mpadilla@towtimesmag.com).