



## Snowbirds fly, leave driving to transporter

**Autolog adds Midwest to areas served**

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Many of Southwest Florida's returning snowbirds are forgoing the long drive from — and then to — their northern homes for the convenience of turning their car over to a transport service.

One of those companies, Autolog Auto Transport, expects to continue serving increasing numbers of this area's part-time residents this year and in 2010.

The New Jersey-based company served 600 north-to-south and south-to-north customers in 2008. That total is projected to increase to 950 for 2009 and 1,200 in 2010, according to Autolog's vice president, Larry Tolstyka.

He pointed to several reasons for the upward swing.

- Actively marketing via the Internet and direct mail,
- Adding an outside sales representative to market to suburban communities both here and in the North,
- Business derived from the economy-related demise of some competitors over the last few years.

"It's sort of an unfortunate situation, but in the economy we're in, there are victims in the marketplace and because we refuse to be a victim, we're able to capitalize," Tolstyka said. "We've been in business for 33 years, so we're able to weather the storm."

The company can provide door-to-door service by picking up customers' cars at their homes and delivering them to their other homes. The less expensive option is to drop the car off at an Autolog terminal and then pick it up at another Autolog location.

It costs \$624 for "the average passenger vehicle," dropped off at the terminal in Linden, N.J., where Autolog is headquartered, to be delivered to its Fort Myers terminal, located at the Wynstar Inn & Suites on Daniels Parkway in Fort Myers, Tolstyka said. Door-to-door service would cost another \$80 to \$120, he added.

"The main motive for our customers is just to have transportation to get around," Tolstyka said. "They're looking at it from an economic perspective. They don't want to rent a vehicle. That would be costly. So they've chosen a company such as ours to get it down to where they want to be."

Stella Megaro has used the door-to-door service for about 10 years in her travels to and from her homes in New Jersey and Marco Island. "They do a very good job," she said. "They're prompt and my car is always in very good shape."

The Northeast - Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, eastern Pennsylvania and eastern Virginia - had been the company's sole coverage area until February, when the Midwest - Michigan, Indiana, Ohio and Illinois - was added.

Fort Myers-Naples is one of 11 markets in south Florida that Autolog serves.

Autolog's purchase, this year, by United Road, a nationwide vehicle transportation company with an extensive Midwestern network, prompted the expansion, Tolstyka said. The new service area boosted the company's business in the Fort Myers-Naples market by about 10 percent last tourist season, he added.

Tolstyka said Autolog is able to deliver cars for its Northeastern customers within four to seven days and six to 10 days for Midwest customers, "98 percent of the time."

Geneva Cook said deliveries are a problem she and her life partner, Eugene Gervais, have had with the auto transport companies - Autolog not among them - that they've used when they travel between their homes in Cape Cod and Cape Coral.

"They promise you everything and deliver nothing," she said. "Your car never gets here on time and they never pick it up on time."

She said her car was supposed to arrive on a Wednesday this fall and instead arrived the following Sunday, leaving her and Gervais without transportation for five days.

Tolstyka said Autolog prides itself on avoiding such calamities.

"We're not the cheapest service provider out there, but we make sure we deliver consistent service to our customers," he said.



Mike Colon, an independent trucker who works with Autolog Auto Transport, prepares a car for unloading Friday at the Wynstar Inn & Suites off Daniels Parkway in Fort Myers. (Don Manley/news-press.com)

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