



Ohio State Highway Patrol

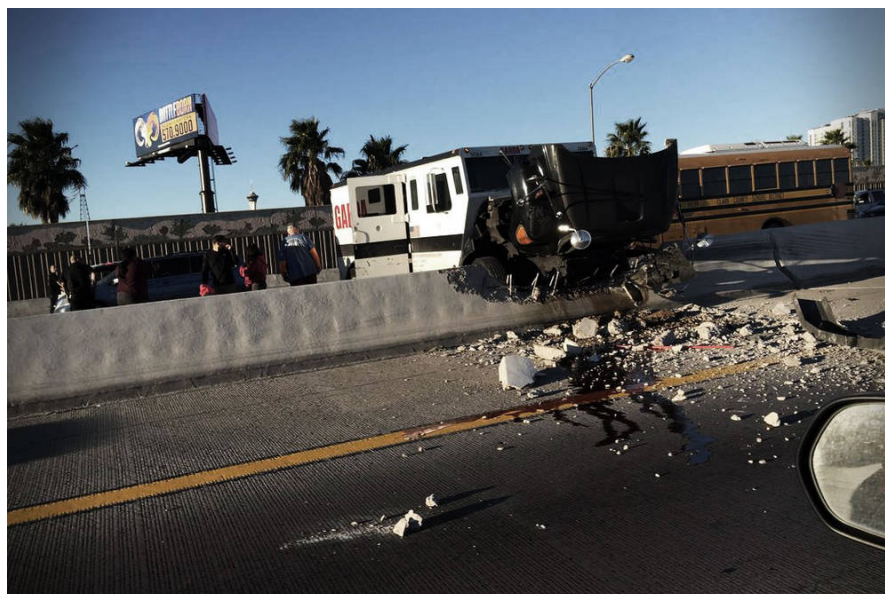
Ohio, 2014

**As it built an armored truck empire,
GardaWorld took dangerous shortcuts. Its
workers and unsuspecting motorists suffered
the consequences.**



BOYD A. LOVING

Ridgewood, N.J., 2018



MIKE BRUNKER | Las Vegas Review-Journal

Las Vegas, 2018



FlaglerLive.com

Florida, 2013



Long Creek Fire Department

Charlotte, N.C., 2019



Rosenberg Police

Rosenberg, Texas, 2016





Circleville Herald

Ohio, 2016

CASH DRIVEN | A TIMES INVESTIGATION

MOVING MILLIONS, LEAVING MAYHEM

Story by **BETHANY BARNES**

Analysis by **CONNIE HUMBURG**

Times Staff Writers

March 1, 2020



Illinois State Police



The armored truck full of money barreled down a two-lane road until it encountered a stopped SUV. The truck didn't brake. Instead it whipped into the oncoming lane, as if to pass, and rammed into a tanker truck. The impact ripped open the side of the armored truck and launched a worker guarding the cash into the air with such force that his seat went with him. Illinois police found him still buckled in, crushed to death.

The 49-year-old grandfather driving the tanker lived until his vehicle caught fire. He died trapped in the wreckage, his throat caked with soot, surrounded by flames.



The tanker truck caught fire.



The Garda truck was ripped open.
Illinois State Police

The sole survivor was the armored truck driver. It was 2010, and he worked for the newest entrant into the race to move America's money, international security contractor GardaWorld.

Years before he got the job, the driver didn't slow down for another car and knocked it into the path of an oncoming truck. Garda hired him anyway, gave him virtually no training, then let him keep driving after hitting cars twice on the job — first sideswiping another vehicle and later backing into a car.

Garda bought its way into the U.S. armored car industry in 2005, swallowing rivals until it blanketed the nation. Today, working from its U.S. headquarters in Boca Raton, the company's American armored car division is almost as large as those at Brink's and Loomis, the heavyweights that have carried the country's cash for more than a century.

But in its rush to grow, Garda took shortcuts that put unsafe trucks and error-prone drivers on the road, a *Tampa Bay Times* investigation has found.

The company has spent so little on maintenance that its trucks have often lacked reliable brakes, seat belts or even seats. It gave drivers barely any training, pressured them to work at a frantic pace and let some keep driving as they crashed again and again.

The result has been armored trucks hurtling out of control in communities across America — swerving into traffic, plunging into ditches and smashing into cars.

In 2011, a farm worker in Washington state was killed because a Garda truck blew a visibly worn tire and flipped in front of his minivan. In 2014, a grandfather in Phoenix lost his leg when a distracted Garda driver collided with his pickup. In 2019, a Virginia preacher died when a Garda truck slammed through a highway median and hit her SUV. The Garda truck had a defective steering system, police later found.

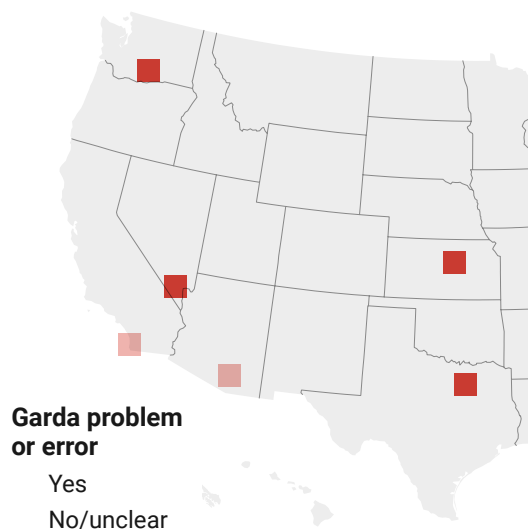
At least 19 people have been killed in Garda crashes since 2008, three in the past year alone.

Twelve died because of a Garda truck's mechanical failure or a mistake by a Garda driver, the *Times* found.

Most were unsuspecting motorists or pedestrians going about their daily lives.

Details on the fatalities

Since 2008, at least 19 people have died in crashes that could be traced to a Garda truck's mechanical failure. Hover or tap for details on each crash.



Map: BETHANY BARNES | Times • Created with Datawrapper

An internal company database shows that crashes and injuries have been commonplace.

From February 2014 to July 2016, the company's trucks averaged nearly 100 collisions a month, according to the crash database. More than 320 people were injured — a rate of one about every three days.

The company data is more comprehensive than anything reported to regulators or available to the public. The *Times* also analyzed more recent federal data that tracks wrecks involving large trucks. It shows Garda having more crashes per mile driven than Brink's and Loomis as recently as last year.

"Who knows who's next?" said Beyanca Martinez, 31, whose husband was killed in a collision with a Garda truck in 2018. "They don't care about people's lives. They care about their money."

Over the past seven months, Garda's communications department declined five requests for an interview. In response to multiple letters summarizing

the *Times*' reporting, the company said the findings do not accurately reflect its current operations or the progress it has made in recent years.

"It is categorically false that our trucks lack basic safety features or that we do not invest in our fleet," the company said in a statement. "The safety of our people and members of the public are paramount in our day-to-day work. We have industry-leading safety policies and protocols in place, including mandatory employee training."

Garda declined the fifth interview request in mid February. Instead, the company's attorneys sent a letter threatening to sue the *Times*.

The *Times* investigation is "baseless and unfounded, and relies on outdated, misleading data and conclusions," they wrote. "GardaWorld Cash Services has in recent years invested significantly in enhanced safety training and fleet maintenance."

[Read the responses from Garda and its attorneys]

In the past three years, the company said it has spent more than \$200 million on its fleet, which includes 550 new armored trucks, with 160 more coming. Many of the trucks have new technology and safety features, according to the company's attorneys.

The *Times* investigation showed a decade-long pattern of dangerous behavior. It is based on thousands of pages of court records, police reports, government inspections, internal company documents and photos and videos taken by workers.

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Ninety current and former Garda employees spoke to the *Times* about what it was like to drive an armored truck, run a branch, oversee maintenance and make high-level corporate decisions. They described experiences that went far beyond the occasional accident any national carrier would expect. Employees who raised concerns said they often were disregarded.

Jammie Bolton, the manager of Garda's St. Louis branch from June 2017 to August 2018, said his supervisors told him to dispatch trucks even if they were in dangerously poor condition. When repairing a truck meant his branch would miss stops, he had to jump on a conference call with higher-ups to justify his decision.

Bolton had worked in logistics his whole career and had never seen trucks in such disrepair. He received two of the new trucks Garda bought right before he left. But he had been promised four, and his branch had 32 trucks in total. "It was really just trying to put a Band-Aid on a gunshot wound," he said.

The *Times* interviewed 56 current or former Garda drivers. All but one said they worked in vehicles with mechanical problems.

Twenty-five of the drivers worked at the company in 2018 or 2019.

Garda has transported cash for many of America's best-known businesses, including Walmart, Starbucks, Target, Chipotle, McDonald's, Trader Joe's, CVS and Chase. It has at least 3,200 drivers, according to the Department of Transportation, and also owns off-site vaults used by major banks — most prominently Bank of America.

A FAMILIAR CLIENT LIST: Garda's clients have included Bank of America, Bath & Body Works, Best Buy, Chase, Chipotle, CVS, Family Dollar, Lowe's, McDonald's, PetSmart, Starbucks, T-Mobile, T.J. Maxx, Target, Trader Joe's, U.S. Bank, Verizon, Victoria's Secret, Walgreens, Walmart and Whole Foods.

Home Depot and UMB confirmed they used to employ Garda but said they no longer did. Family Dollar said Garda services only 4 percent of its locations. T.J. Maxx said it would look into the matter. The other companies declined to comment or did not respond to requests from the *Times*.

The 21 Garda clients the *Times* contacted for this report declined to comment or did not answer inquiries, except T.J. Maxx, which said it would look into the issue. In their letter, Garda's attorneys said the

company “has already lost one client and is on the verge of losing others” because of the *Times*.

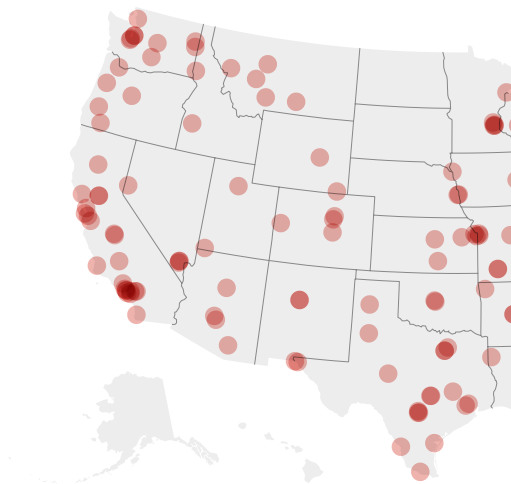
The letter demanded that the *Times* halt publication of this investigation, “issue a full and immediate retraction to each customer contacted” and return Garda’s internal database of crashes, which it described as “stolen materials.” The database was provided to the *Times* by a former Garda employee, who kept it after leaving the company.

Friday evening, Garda’s attorneys sent a second letter repeating their threat to sue the *Times*.

Garda is a Canadian company with more than \$2 billion in annual revenue. It operates across the globe, screening passengers at 28 airports in Canada and providing security for the U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan.

A national footprint

Today, Garda’s 227 offices are spread across America. Some handle armored trucks. The others handle cash services. Garda has offices in Boca Raton and Washington D.C.



Map: CONNIE HUMBURG | Times • Source: [Garda.com](https://garda.com) • Credit: [Garda.com](#)

It has offices across Florida and routes around Tampa Bay. Garda’s founder and CEO is an investor in the group trying to bring the Tampa Bay Rays to Montreal to play half their games.

The crashes have attracted little notice from the public or government regulators. In the rare cases where criminal charges have been filed, they

have been against drivers for unsafe practices that the *Times* found to be widespread at the company. Deaths and serious injuries often led to undisclosed settlements.

“These senior management people at Garda, are they feeling any of this pain?” asked Joseph James, a former vice president of finance at Garda’s U.S. subsidiary. “Absolutely not.”

The most recent death happened in December. An 82-year-old man in a motorized shopping cart was leaving a Las Vegas grocery store when a Garda truck rumbled forward, knocking him to the pavement. According to a lawsuit filed by the man’s family, the vehicle rolled over him as his wife banged on the front of the truck in a desperate effort to get the driver to stop.

Why GardaWorld’s armored trucks keep crashing



ELI ZHANG | Times

‘Did I hit the little girl?’

Every morning, workers across the country arrive at local Garda offices to begin long days moving millions of dollars. They holster their weapons, then climb into one of the company’s trucks.

When loaded with boxes of money, even the smallest Garda trucks weigh more than some elephants. Nearly 2,200 of them are at least 10,000 pounds — the weight of three average sedans and large enough to be subject to special regulations.

Drivers said some trucks were in good condition, but it was more typical to get one with cracked bulletproof glass, gaping rust holes or a broken air conditioner. Some trucks belched smoke or shook so violently it was a struggle to see out of the side mirrors.

Photos of the back of one truck show that a worker had to sit on an overturned plastic bin with a cushion on top. Another truck had a bungee cord instead of a seat belt.



An overturned bin with a cushion on top takes the place of a seat.



A seat belt made from a bungee cord is fastened to a truck's wall.

Forty-eight of the 56 Garda drivers interviewed by the *Times* described trucks lacking the most basic feature of a vehicle designed to guard millions: functional locks. Drivers have used rope or zip ties to keep doors shut. One jammed wads of paper in the handle.

Justin Vance, who worked for Garda in New York City from June 2018 to March 2019, recalled being sent upstate at night in a truck with headlights so dim that he could hardly see. He tried to go as slow as he could without being pulled over. But as he drove through the dark, he had no idea how fast he was going — his speedometer was broken.

Thirty-two workers said they'd driven trucks with broken speedometers. Thirty-eight said some trucks lacked working seat belts. Forty described trucks with bad brakes.

Leaky, shaky, rusty: See inside a Garda armored truck



INSIDE A GARDA TRUCK: Angie Blevins, who worked for Garda from 2016 to 2018 in Louisville, Ky., gives a video tour of her truck. Courtesy of Angie Blevins.

Former Garda branch managers, maintenance workers and drivers told the *Times* that Garda regularly ignored requests for repairs and did the bare minimum to get a truck to run.

In a 2019 court case, a former Dallas branch manager testified that his supervisors questioned why he spent so much on maintenance, even though it wasn't enough to fully repair his trucks.

In an interview, former Garda maintenance manager Mark Brauninger, who was based in St. Louis, said he ordered trucks taken off the road that didn't comply with Department of Transportation rules, only to watch another manager make workers drive them anyway.

Money was a constant issue, said Brauninger, who left Garda in 2016. "How do you fix anything when you can't have any parts to fix it with?"

In 2017, Department of Transportation investigators visited a small Ohio branch in response to several complaints that Garda wouldn't repair trucks.

They discovered that maintenance requests were being sent to an employee who had left the company three months earlier. They determined three of the branch's five trucks were too dangerous to be on the road, two because of brake problems.

Both former drivers and branch managers said that drivers who refused to get into an unsafe truck could be sent home without pay. So they worked with what they were given.

Once, while nearing a red light in Phoenix in 2014, former driver Timothy Dunne said he couldn't get the truck to stop no matter how hard he stomped the brakes.

He slammed on the horn and screamed to his coworker, "We're crashing!" Miraculously, they rolled through the intersection unscathed.

Not everyone is so fortunate.

Years earlier, in 2008, a Garda driver in Georgia saw the flashing red lights of a school bus picking up children. He pressed the brakes, but instead of slowing, the truck jerked toward the bus, just as 10-year-old Olivia Hayes was climbing aboard.



Olivia Hayes was killed in a crash. Her family created a foundation, Livvy's Love, to honor her memory.
Livvy's Love

The driver yelled in panic, “Did I hit the little girl?”

Olivia’s father watched from his parked SUV. He sprinted toward his daughter, who was pinned under the armored truck. Days later, she died.

The Garda driver pleaded guilty to misdemeanor vehicular homicide, according to the detective who investigated the crash. The detective said the driver was charged because the truck’s brakes weren’t working properly, and the driver should have asked Garda to repair them.

Drivers describe common problems

The *Times* interviewed 56 current and former Garda drivers about their experiences at the company. Many said they witnessed strikingly similar safety issues.

**Trucks
with safety
problems**

55

**Broken or
missing seat
belts**

38

Brake problems

40

**Broken
speedometers**

32

Broken locks

48

**Little to no
training**

51

‘If you got a pulse, you got a job.’

Many of the drivers said they joined Garda expecting a sophisticated operation. Some were veterans looking for new careers. Others saw a path into law enforcement or yearned for new skills.

By the end of the first day, their impressions of Garda had often changed. Fifty-one drivers told the *Times* that the company provided little to no instruction. In 2012, two drivers were asked to describe their training under oath. They answered identically: “Here’s the keys. Don’t kill anybody.”

One of them added: “I’m not joking.”

Garda does give some workers a test on Department of Transportation rules. But four Garda drivers who each worked in a different branch between 2012 and 2019 told the *Times* that drivers were simply handed the

answers. Another driver in Portland filed a written labor complaint that said the same thing. He attached a copy of the answer key.

Angie Blevins, who served in the Marines then drove for Garda until 2018 in Louisville, Ky., said the joke among employees was, “If you got a pulse, you got a job.”

Descriptions in the company’s crash database noted that 43 different drivers had crashed multiple times. One driver crashed nine times and racked up three citations. Another had six crashes in one year.

In some branches, drivers have gotten in trouble for going too slow, even if they had a long route packed with stops.

As a result, speeding and running red lights were common, drivers said. In just nine months in 2013, drivers near Dallas were ticketed 21 times for running red lights, a company email shows.

Watch Garda armored trucks run red lights



RUNNING RED LIGHTS: Near Orlando, Garda trucks have been caught on red-light cameras repeatedly. ELI ZHANG | Times

John Creel, who worked for Garda in Indianapolis, testified under oath in 2012 that he sometimes was forced to complete a route with 60 stops in

roughly 10 hours.

It felt like an impossible task. The route stretched 300 miles, and Garda's contracts sometimes required him to wait seven minutes or more at each stop.

If he took too long, the company could dock his pay. Garda once threatened to fire him for being slow on a day that his truck had broken down for hours, according to a copy of the reprimand that was filed in court.

Creel said the pressure led people to drive dangerously.

"You threaten a guy's job, you're threatening a guy's family," Creel said.

"He will do whatever it takes to put food on the table."

Drivers continued having difficult routes long after Creel's account. In a civil trial last year, another driver acknowledged that during one 2018 shift he regularly went more than 20 mph over the speed limit — and his shift still took 13 hours.



Los Angeles, 2012

‘I’m falling asleep driving’



Kansas Highway Patrol

Yvonne Buttici became an armored truck driver at 21, just after graduating from college. She told the *Times* she hoped to become a police officer and was thrilled her first “adulting job” paid more than minimum wage — \$11.30 an hour — and gave her experience carrying a gun. But she also wanted some extra money to send home to family, so she kept a second job at Buffalo Wild Wings.

One day in December 2015, Buttici collected cash around Salina, Kan., from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Then she clocked in at the restaurant, where she ferried cold beer and bright-orange wings to people under banks of televisions.



Yvonne Buttici became a
Garda driver at 21.
Courtesy of Yvonne Buttici

When her shift ended at 1 a.m., Buttici came home to a roommate who kept her awake with loud friends and music.

It was still dark when she returned to Garda at 5 a.m.

Under federal rules, companies like Garda must track their drivers' schedules to ensure that they're not dangerously tired. Drivers must have at least 10 hours off between shifts — including second jobs — before getting back behind the wheel.

Years earlier, in 2012, the Department of Transportation had warned Garda about how often some branches were breaking those rules. And years later, in 2019, the company still wasn't following them, six drivers told the *Times*. Buttici said she'd never heard about driving limits until a *Times* reporter contacted her. At Garda, she said, people frequently drove long shifts with little rest.



Alan Stagg joined Garda shortly after leaving the military. His mother said he saw working at the company as a step toward a future in law enforcement.

Courtesy of Kay Stagg

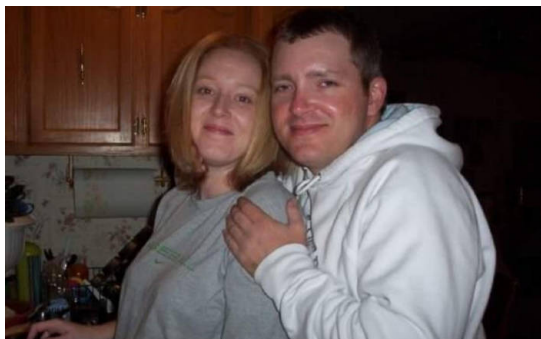
That morning, Buttici said her partner, Alan Stagg, was supposed to drive. But he'd gotten very little sleep after working late for Garda the night before, she said. He asked her to drive so he could sleep between stops. She did.

Less than two hours into her shift, Buttici pulled out her phone.

"Text me when you're awake," she messaged two friends. "I'm falling asleep driving."

Ten minutes later, her armored truck swerved into the oncoming lane.

Teresa Roach, a hospice nurse heading to work in a Prius, didn't have time to react. The 39-year-old mother of four died in her car.



Teresa and Dean Roach. Roach, a mother of four, was headed to work as a hospice nurse

when a Garda truck veered into her lane.

Courtesy of Dean Roach

Stagg, a 32-year-old father of five, was ejected in the collision. The truck rolled and crushed him. Police found him dead in a pile of money.

Butticci remembers little except lying on the ground, unable to move, pleading for first-responders to search for her partner.

The impact left her with three spinal fractures and a torn ligament in her knee. Since the wreck, her hips are no longer aligned and one of her legs is longer than the other.

Garda assigned Mike Rath, who at the time was a contract worker for the company's risk management department, to investigate. He told the *Times* that at Garda "everyone knew" about Butticci's second job.

"She never should have been put in the driver's seat, and she's forever going to live with the consequences," Rath said.

Butticci left Garda and moved back home to California. She was later charged with involuntary manslaughter in connection with the crash. The case against her remains open. Her attorney said she is working to resolve the charges.

Garda settled with Roach's family for an undisclosed sum. "She was a very wonderful woman," said her husband, Dean Roach. "The world would've been a better place with her."

Stagg joined Garda not long after serving in Iraq for the Marines and Afghanistan for the Army. His mother, a teacher named Kay, remembered she was at school preparing for winter break when a police officer called. Her son, who loved cats and *Star Wars*, had been killed in a car crash. She didn't learn much more than that.

She had just seen him at Thanksgiving. She buried him two days before Christmas.

“He survived two war zones, only to be killed in Kansas,” Kay Stagg said.

“Where does that make sense?”



Kay Stagg sits by the grave of her son, Alan Stagg, who was killed in a Garda crash. Kay said when Alan was buried, her husband worried about his son being in the dark, so he bought a lamp for the grave so Alan would have a nightlight. JOHN PENDYGRAFT | Tampa Bay Times

‘World domination’

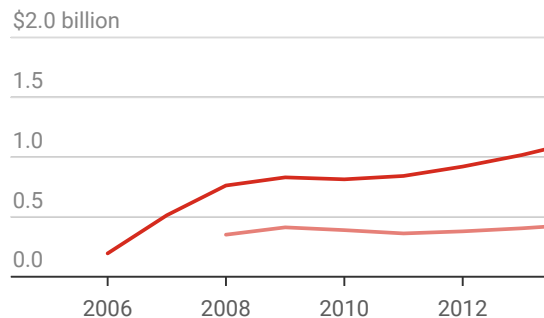
Garda is the brainchild of 56-year-old Canadian Stephan Crétier. The company entered the U.S. armored truck industry 15 years ago with the purchase of Midwest-based United Armored Services.

Over the next 16 months, it completed at least five more acquisitions that turned it into one of the biggest players in the field.

It was the kind of explosive growth that has defined Garda. The company’s annual revenues had gone from less than \$200 million at the start of 2006 to more than \$2 billion early last year.

Garda's quick rise

Garda aggressively bought competitors to become security. Moving into the U.S. armored-truck business expansion.



Fiscal years ending in January. U.S. armored car revenue in U.S. dollars at the Feb. 7 rate of \$0.75 to 1 Canadian dollar.
 Chart: CONNIE HUMBURG | Times • Source: Canadian Security Intelligence Review Board
 • Created with Datawrapper

Crétier, the company's founder and CEO, has been open about prizing expansion. "It's the style of the company to push things to the max," Crétier said in 2009. In a July interview with the *Wall Street Journal*, he likened his strategy to that of James Bond villain Dr. No. The goal, he said, is "world domination."

As Garda grew in the United States, it also snapped up private security companies around the world, becoming an international firm with a large presence in the Middle East and Africa. It has major U.S. defense contracts and protects dignitaries in war-torn countries. Its operating profit margins regularly hover near 20 percent, financial disclosures show.

Crétier's wealth and cachet has grown along with Garda. He started the company by taking out a second mortgage on his home. Today he and other Garda managers own 49 percent of the company, with private-equity firm BC Partners controlling the rest. A wing in the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts is named after Crétier and his wife.

The company announced it would move its U.S. headquarters to Boca Raton in 2011, lured to Florida with more than \$1 million in state and local

tax breaks. By 2013, the company said it had added 500 Florida workers. Officials heralded it as a success story.

“This is a great company that hires great people and helps them live their version of the American dream,” said then-Gov. Rick Scott, who is now a U.S. senator.



Former Gov. Rick Scott shakes hands with Garda CEO Stephan Crétier at an economic forum in Montreal where they announced details of Garda's head office moving to Florida. Associated Press (2011)

Since moving to Florida, the company's yearly U.S. armored-truck revenue has risen more than 50 percent to roughly \$550 million, according to its financial disclosures.

Behind the scenes in a Boca Raton office park, Garda managers were looking for aggressive ways to spend less, said Joseph James, a vice president of finance for Garda's U.S. operation until 2015.

Garda recruited James from Brink's in 2013 with a pitch to help shake up the industry. But once he took the job, he was disturbed by what he saw.

The company put off paying maintenance bills and pressured regional managers to cut costs with an intensity he hadn't seen before.

“It was, ‘Go get your margins or else,’ ” James said.

He said the result was predictable: People got hurt.

Nearly a dozen employees who worked at Brink's, Loomis or Dunbar — many of whom also worked for Garda — said the companies gave drivers more extensive training and were more willing to repair trucks.

Christopher Boysen worked at Brink's from 2017 to 2018. He said the company sent him to a training facility for a week and fixed trucks immediately. In November 2018, he began working at Garda. There, when a truck broke, he said the response was: "If you don't like it here, you can leave." He quit after three months.

For about a decade, Brink's and Loomis have used a dashboard camera service designed to encourage safe driving. Garda employees said the company has used nothing like it. James said his coworkers wanted the same technology as Brink's and Loomis, but they were told the cameras — roughly \$550 to \$800 per truck — cost too much.

James recalled that Brink's took safety rules so seriously, it had a saying: "Every one of those rules had been written in blood."

The difference in approach shows in federal safety data.

No national agency tracks accidents involving small armored trucks. But the Department of Transportation keeps a record any time one that weighs more than 10,000 pounds has a crash that results in a towed car or a person being killed or taken to the hospital.

From 2014 to 2019, the data shows Garda's trucks crashed 321 times — 58 more than Loomis, 68 more than Brink's and 205 more than Dunbar.

Those Garda trucks drove less than the ones owned by Brink's or Loomis. Adjusted per mile, Garda crashed 46 percent more often than Brink's and about 80 percent more often than Loomis or Dunbar.

Michigan State University professor Jason Miller, who uses the federal database to study motor carrier safety, reviewed the *Times* analysis and said he found the difference in crash rates “severely troubling.”

“The differences in accident frequency are unlikely to be the result of random chance and point to safety culture concerns at Garda,” Miller said.

In a statement, Garda said the *Times*’ reporting does not reflect the progress the company has made to “integrate the many legacy, family-owned businesses acquired over the last years.”

“Today our business is a professional, industry leading organization,” the company said. “To compare our business today to what it was when we started consolidating the market in 2008 is false and misleading.”

In the federal data, 2018 was the company’s worst year, measured by crashes per mile.

The second-worst year was 2019.

Workers at some of the companies Garda absorbed said they watched standards sink when Garda took over.

Doniel Penn was an employee of A.T.I. Systems in San Antonio when Garda bought it in 2007. He worked for Garda until 2016. The company cut both maintenance and training, he recalled: “From the time they painted Garda on the side of my truck, every day started to get worse.”

「There appears to be a pattern」

In 2012, the details of Garda’s wrecks began flooding into Christine Bouquin’s inbox.



Christine Bouquin, Garda’s former director of risk management, was disturbed by crashes she felt were preventable.
MARTHA ASENCIO-RHINE | Times

She had been hired to oversee worker’s compensation, then was quickly promoted to director of risk management. Bouquin dubbed herself a “fix-it person,” there to cut down on legal liability and make the company better and safer. She saw a lot to fix.

She wanted to know why trucks weren’t being repaired, so she pulled a sample of the daily reports drivers had filed listing needed repairs on their trucks. She discovered that 62 percent of the reports hadn’t made it to a mechanic.

She thought the problem was that the forms were all on paper, so Bouquin proposed an electronic system to more easily track whether repairs happened. She said she successfully piloted this at a few branches, but the company's leadership thought it was too expensive.

She said she was also disturbed by how many drivers got into crashes she felt were preventable. She suggested activating safety features in software that Garda used to track whether drivers completed routes quickly. The software could send an alert if a driver was speeding, braking harshly or not wearing a seat belt.

Garda turned the alerts on briefly, then turned them back off, she said.

Bouquin said she did manage one victory: To help drivers handle crashes correctly, she made them wear lanyards instructing them to render aid and call 911 in a crash.

Still, tensions between Bouquin and senior leadership grew.

James, the finance executive, said he knew Bouquin irritated leadership and assumed it was a personality conflict. Then he became her boss. He saw that she was pointing out problems that executives didn't want to hear.

"She's a professional," James said. "Her recommendations were not controversial. They weren't exotic. They were things I had seen in a prior life."

Bouquin's relationship with senior leaders only got worse, especially after James left the company in 2015. She said that Garda began to cut her staff, and she began to worry her job wasn't safe.

In 2016, her supervisor asked to meet. The day before the meeting, Bouquin put her concerns about the company's safety problems in a detailed email to the supervisor.

“I realize this is a big company; accidents will happen, and problems can slip through the cracks, but there appears to be a pattern of common issues and we are not providing sufficient resources to control these problems,” she wrote. “Our employees carry guns and operate over 20,000-pound trucks on the public roads. I feel we owe a greater duty of care.”

She included specific examples of deaths and injuries. Then she hit send.

The next day, Garda laid off Bouquin.

She has become a vocal critic, filing, then dropping, a whistleblower lawsuit and reaching out to the family of a woman killed in a crash. The company sued Bouquin to get back documents she kept when she left the company. In a letter to the *Times*, Garda’s attorneys said she is untruthful and has a “personal bias against GardaWorld.”

Bouquin also filed a whistleblower complaint with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. The agency dismissed the complaint, ruling that Bouquin’s termination was part of an extensive reorganization.

It’s true that the company restructured. One of the changes was to eliminate the risk management department.



Travis Bland | The State

Columbia, S.C., 2018

「Two weeks on the job」



Arlington Police Department

In January 2018, two years after Bouquin was let go, a Texas city marshal on traffic duty watched a Garda truck speed past a school, going 21 mph over the limit.

He ticketed the driver, 24-year-old King Easley. It was Easley's first shift at Garda.

Easley kept speeding on his next shift, and the next one, and the next, sometimes going 80 mph or more. All of this was logged by his truck's tracking software. But the safety alerts that Bouquin had requested were turned off.

On his twelfth day on the job, Easley was in the far-right lane when he made a sudden left into a Dallas-area shopping plaza, cutting across four lanes of traffic. Easley cut off Virgilio Martinez, a 32-year-old father riding a motorcycle. Easley's coworker heard Martinez's head thwack against the armored truck's door.

They didn't call for help or render aid. Instead, the coworker followed Garda's instructions, which had changed since Bouquin left: He called his bosses, who sent a lawyer to the scene before the wreckage cleared.

The crash left Martinez broken in the road, blood pouring from his face. He died before he could say what happened.



The bloody motorcycle helmet of Virgilio Martinez. A Garda worker heard Martinez's head hit the side of the truck. Arlington Police Department

But Easley told a police officer he was in a designated turn lane and Martinez had darted in front of him.

Martinez' wife, Beyanca, begged attorney after attorney to investigate. She eventually found a firm that obtained surveillance footage from a nearby bank. The firm sued Garda and forced the company to turn over the truck's tracking data. The video and the data both showed that Easley caused the crash.

At trial, Easley testified that he felt the turn had been safe. Garda's attorney acknowledged to the jury that its driver had been "a cause of this accident."

The case settled for an undisclosed amount. Martinez' lawyer said the family can no longer speak about the case. Easley has left the company and declined to comment.

But before the lawsuit, the day of the crash, the official story was what the police officer wrote in his report: Martinez caused his own death.

That was the story his wife was told. It was the story that aired on the local news. It was a story the company embraced.

Garda sent an investigator who took note of the truck's tracking device but didn't look at the data or ask Easley any questions.

Easley worked his next shift.



Beyanca Martinez met her husband, Virgilio, playing soccer. He died in a collision with a Garda truck. LAWRENCE JENKINS | Special to the Times

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It cost about \$200,000 to bring you this story — which included a year's worth of reporting from investigative reporter Bethany Barnes and important contributions from data reporters, editors, copy editors, designers, visual journalists and digital producers.

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About the reporting

This investigation took a year to report. It is based on interviews with 90 current and former Garda employees and thousands of pages of documents. Here's how key portions of the story were uncovered:

We found 19 fatal crashes through news stories, court filings, police reports and company records. Those documents included descriptions of

the crash, and we used them to determine that 12 of the 19 crashes were caused by a Garda truck's mechanical failure or a mistake by a Garda driver. We took a conservative approach and only counted crashes where the details supported a driver error or a mechanical problem.

We calculated Garda's crash frequency using an internal Garda database covering February 2014 to July 2016 that is more comprehensive than any data the government collects. We reviewed the crash descriptions recorded in the database to determine which crashes resulted in injuries or deaths.

To understand Garda's operations, we reviewed internal company records and examined hundreds of pages of documents across 30 cases related to lawsuits, police investigations and labor disputes. We interviewed 56 armored-truck workers. Most trucks have two workers — one who drives and one who handles the money. Workers switch between roles, and so for clarity we referred to all as drivers. Although Garda is a privately owned company, it still files some financial records with the Canadian Securities Administrators. We analyzed those documents to track the company's growth.

To understand industry safety standards, we reviewed federal regulations and interviewed drivers who worked at Brink's, Loomis and Dunbar. We also spent a day at a UPS training facility in Orlando to learn how other companies train drivers doing similar tasks, and we interviewed the chief operating officer of SmartDrive, the dash-cam service used by Garda's competitors.

We compared Garda with its competitors using public data collected by the U.S. Department of Transportation. The department tracks crashes on public roads involving commercial vehicles that weigh at least 10,000 pounds. It records collisions that result in a fatality, a vehicle being towed or a person being transported for immediate medical treatment. We

downloaded archived files covering 2014 to 2019 from the agency's website, imported them into a database and filtered the records to identify incidents involving Garda, Brink's, Loomis and Dunbar. We then converted crashes and injuries to a rate per 100,000 miles driven. Companies don't report miles driven every year, so we used the most recent data available. To check our methodology, we spoke with Jason Miller, an associate professor of logistics at Michigan State University, who studies motor carriers' safety performance and has worked with this data. Garda had a substantially higher rate of crashes, hospitalizations and trucks towed. Garda also had more fatalities per mile than the rest of the group, leading Loomis by a slim margin. But some of the fatal crashes our reporting uncovered were missing from the data and adding just a few cases to any company's total would change our findings significantly. As a result, we decided not to highlight the fatality data in our investigation.

Former risk manager Christine Bouquin described her experiences at Garda over hours of interviews, as did employees in the risk management department and other coworkers. Any statements about what happened during Bouquin's tenure that are not directly attributed to her are supported by written documents we have reviewed. In a letter, Garda's attorneys challenged Bouquin's credibility.

We reconstructed Virgilio Martinez's death by visiting Dallas multiple times, including spending six days observing the entire trial for the civil lawsuit that Martinez's wife filed against Garda. The trial delved into both granular details about how the crash occurred and Garda's practices as they relate to safety. It included sworn testimony by driver King Easley, some of his coworkers, his managers, Bouquin, the accident analyst Garda hired in the case, the manager for Garda's center for excellence, multiple senior vice presidents and the company's chief operating officer. We also reviewed hundreds of pages of documents and exhibits filed in the case. At

trial, Garda conceded that the crash was not Martinez's fault, but did question how fast he was going and the amount his wife sought in damages. Easley maintained the turn was safe.

We got crash photos from police records, court files and news reports from around the country. The cause of some of the collisions is unknown. Special thanks to the many newsrooms that agreed to let us reproduce their work.

About the reporter



BETHANY BARNES

Bethany Barnes has been an investigative reporter for the *Tampa Bay Times* since 2019. She previously worked for the *Oregonian*, the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* and the *Las Vegas Sun*.

Send a confidential tip: Have you had experiences with Garda you'd like to share? Send a confidential message to *Times* investigative reporter Bethany Barnes via email at bbarnes@tampabay.com or encrypted email at betsbarnes@protonmail.com. Signal message 727-892-2944 or text or call 503-714-6476. Send mail to Bethany Barnes, 490 First Avenue South, 3rd Floor Newsroom, St. Petersburg, FL 33701.

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