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Holtsville investigative firm keeps hiring

August 19, 2011 by JAMES BERNSTEIN / james.bernstein@newsday.com



James C. Owens is not a [Long Island](#) business executive many here would have heard of, and the company of which he is chief executive, Holtsville-based Carco Group Inc., is not one that is a household name, either.

But Owens, 42, is accustomed to not being seen much or heard. For nearly a decade in the 1990s he was an officer aboard U.S. Navy submarines in what is referred to as the "silent service," since subs traditionally operate in near-total secrecy.

During one tour of duty, Owens was aboard a sub that did not surface for 78 days.

"I liked being under there," Owens said last week. "You get a little grumpy because you're with the same group. But you're so busy. You have no time to rub each other the wrong way."

Carco also operates out of the spotlight. The company conducts background checks on employees and does fraud investigations involving automobiles. Owens joined the company in 2003 as chief information officer, and has been chief executive for the past two years.

In an era of shrinking payrolls, Carco is adding employees. It has about 250 currently, 10 percent more than it did last year. The additional hiring is the result of stronger U.S. government regulations requiring companies to verify that prospective employees are eligible to work in this country. About 60 percent of Carco's business is background checks and 40 percent is vehicle fraud. So why Carco? In the late 1970s, founder Peter O'Neill, who is still company chairman, had only a few minutes to come up with a name for the business, which was then more heavily involved in background checks on cars. The name has become well-known among companies seeking background checks, and so it has stuck, Owens said.

There are plans to hire more people next year, he said. What's happening?

In typical submarine officer fashion, Owens is keeping that a secret.

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