

## SERVICE AND PARTS

## Tech-savvy dealer blazes her own trail



Safavi Long: "TechWall will improve productivity in the service drive by a minimum of half an hour per repair order." (LONG CHEVROLET BUICK-GMC)

KW By: **Ken Wysocky**

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As a longtime automotive industry veteran and dealer principal at Long Chevrolet-Buick-GMC in Athens, Tenn., Saphura Safavi Long is intimately familiar with the inefficiencies that can plague fixed ops departments.

But in her other role as CEO of Gratis Technologies, Safavi Long developed a solution for those woes: [techWall](#), an artificial intelligence-enabled, fixed ops

management tool. In essence, the platform replaces the clumsy, time-consuming communication processes among technicians, service advisers, parts employees and customers with fast and convenient digital communications provided by just one system.

“To manage fixed ops these days, you have to sign up with a multitude of vendors ... and you have to pay to integrate all of them,” Safavi Long told Automotive News. “But techWall is a comprehensive, end-to-end system that handles everything from scheduling service appointments to service-drive management to online payment for customers.

“The only thing it integrates with is a store’s dealer management system — and the interface is first-rate.”

With degrees in mechanical engineering and nuclear physics, Safavi Long — a self-described “serial entrepreneur” — is no stranger to technology. After a stint working for a now-defunct company that developed steam-supply systems for nuclear power plants, she developed a Web-based customer relationship management system in the 1990s for a Tennessee-based dealership owned by her husband, Nelson Long.

Safavi Long eventually formed a company, Prize Corp., built around the customer relationship management system, called ReckonUp. She sold the business in 2007, then established Gratis Technologies in 2012. In 2018, she bought the Athens store. Safavi Long, who was born in Iran, was one of the first women chosen by General Motors to become a dealer under a minority dealer development program, she said.

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Along the way, she also was busy developing the techWall platform, which went to market in 2019.

"I actually bought the dealership to prove that techWall works — and to show that fixed operations is what dealers really need to focus on the most," Safavi Long said.

The dealership she bought was drastically underperforming. With one technician and one service adviser, it was generating about three repair orders a month.

"It had an awful, awful reputation," she said.

Thanks in large part to techWall, the service department now boasts a 76 percent absorption rate, employs 14 technicians and four service advisers, and generates nearly 700 repair orders a month, Safavi Long said.

Service employees generally waste hours every day waiting in line at a parts counter or walking back and forth between a service drive, service bays and a parts department. TechWall slashes wasted time by using digital technology to streamline the communication process between all involved parties, she said.

“No one has to leave their space to talk to someone,” Safavi Long said. “TechWall will improve productivity in the service drive by a minimum of half an hour per repair order. It also will improve a dealer’s customer satisfaction index and raise the service department’s absorption rate.”

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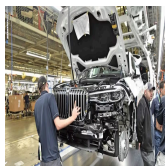
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