



# Eastern-in-the-News



## TRUCK DRIVING PROGRAM OFFERS CAREER OPPORTUNITIES TO LOCAL STUDENTS

**Moorefield — Nov. 12** — Ever since David A. Simmons, Jr. signed up for the truck driving program at Eastern WV Community and Technical College, his life has changed completely.

In the summer of 2011, Simmons was working for Pilgrim's Pride doing "a little bit of everything, working inside," he recently recalled, "but mostly as a yard-jockey — to get the birds in."

So when the truckers delivered the big rigs full of chickens for processing, he would "move the trailers around the yard. And then I helped Shipping to get them out." And those early transport tasks gave him a taste for bigger things.

Heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers in the Cumberland, MD and nearby WV area currently earn on average nearly \$20 per hour, for an average yearly salary of \$39,850, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. The industry now offers very good job prospects, with an expected 21-percent growth rate through 2020, as "many companies have trouble finding qualified long-haul drivers," notes the Bureau's 2012-2013 Occupational Outlook Handbook.



**Eastern's 18-wheeler offers career training in-cab.**

"I'd wanted to get my CDL (commercial driver's license) for a long time," said Simmons." So when "the poultry business was slowing down," and he "wasn't getting that much out of it," he decided to go back to school.

A 2004 graduate of East Hardy High School, and a resident of Mathias, he'd heard about Eastern's truck driving program, which prepares students to pass the CDL state exam and to

take the big rigs over the road. That August in 2011, after seven years with Pilgrim's, Simmons signed up.

"Dave was pretty exceptional, a natural, with a big drive to do the program," said Lowell Evans, Eastern's trucking instructor. "He picked up on things quickly, and then passed everything on the CDL test with flying colors."

#### **4-Week Program**

Although Simmons stood out for his personal motivation, most of Evans' students generally enjoy an excellent pass rate on the state exam.

"We run a four-week program," he explained. "The first week is in the classroom, but the remainder of it is on the road and doing all the things you need to do — the maneuvers, the backing, the parking — to pass the CDL test.

"The whole objective of the class is to prepare them for being on the road and passing the test," Evans emphasized. "We run a lot of rural back roads, and then Corridor H doubles as the highway, the Interstate. Most drivers, when they leave here, are more than prepared to drive over the road, and about 75-percent of them usually end up employed as truck drivers. Some get a job quickly, and with some of them, it takes a little longer."

After earning his CDL, Simmons did experience a couple of false bites when he first started looking for work. Then his second application to Swift Transportation bore fruit.

Swift immediately placed him with a company trainer, to supplement his Eastern training with Swift-specific rules. Later, the company teamed him with an owner-operator for a few months. "Then he had a chance to get out on his own, to get his own truck," Evans related.

#### **48 States Tour**

"My terminal is out of Richmond, Virginia, and the main office is Phoenix, Arizona. I go to all 48 states," Simmons reported by phone one day from Denver, Colorado, where he was taking his required 34 hours off after driving for 70 hours on, the maximum allowed by law.

"I need about four more states and I'll have visited the whole lower 48. I've been all around California, up to Washington state, through New Mexico, to Miami, Florida and all over."

Simmons has performed so successfully for Swift that the company has already advanced him to a trainer's position, a promotion that reflects the high quality instruction he got at Eastern. Simmons said that he enjoys teaching other drivers, which is now an option if he so chooses, and that the pay is a little better than taking the long hauls.

"But I prefer the long hauls. The job has been pretty well mellow, and I love the driving. For a long time, I've been wanting to go out and see this country," he said. "I love this country."

Meanwhile at Eastern, Evans noted, "Everything is going great with the program. Enrollment has picked up tremendously in the past few months. As far as I know, my class is booked through January."

#### **Evenings & Weekends**

The college limits Evans to training just four students in the truck at any one time, and it recently hired a second driver-instructor to serve as back-up in case Evans is ever out for any reason.

"Now, depending on the amount of interest we get, we're looking at maybe having evening classes or weekend classes," Evans noted. "We have a lot of people who have interest in the truck driving program, but they have jobs, and they can't do it because the classes take place during their work hours. So they'd be interested in an evening or weekend class."

Ward Malcolm, Eastern's Dean for of Career, Technical and Workforce Education, confirmed that idea. "If I find enough students who are interested in evening or weekend classes, we would certainly offer it. It might take a bit longer than four weeks to finish a

weekend course, but we could get more people to pass the state exam and out there on the road working.”

For more information about Eastern’s financial aid opportunities, programs of study, workforce training and community education, call toll free: 877-982-2322; or check the College’s website: “[www.easternwv.edu](http://www.easternwv.edu)”.

Serving the residents of Grant, Hampshire, Hardy, Mineral, Pendleton and Tucker counties, and fully accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, Eastern West Virginia Community and Technical College is a comprehensive and equal opportunity community and technical college bringing the resources and assets of Education That Works to the families, communities and employers of the Potomac Highlands.