



Eastern-in-the-News



LEARN TO DRIVE THE *BIG RIG* FOR PREDICTED JOBS RECOVERY

Moorefield, WV — Sept. 7 — In a recovering, although still sluggish economy, a new industry study shows that at least one career field — commercial truck driving — is already suffering a severe shortage of trained employees.

The U.S. trucking industry “will need to hire about 200,000 drivers by the end of this year, and will need to add another 200,000 by the end of 2011,” according to a CNN/Money.com report on last June’s logistics analysis by the Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals.

And through a local, four-week training program, at least six area residents have already seized that looming opportunity. “All three students who graduated my first class are ready for the road,” said Lowell Evans, Instructor for the CDL Truck Driver Training program recently launched at Eastern WV Community and Technical College.



After successfully completing the CDL Truck Driving class recently launched at Eastern WV Community and Technical College, all three driver-trainees in the course passed the state exam and received their WV Commercial Drivers Licenses. (From LEFT: Jeremy Crites, William “Bill” Miller, Jr., Lowell Evans (Instructor), and Justin Connolly.)

“They’re ready to be out there and ready to drive and,” Evans emphasized, “I wouldn’t be afraid to recommend any of them for hire.” All three students in Evans’s first CDL class completed the training in August, and all quickly passed the state’s licensing exam that course graduates can schedule through Eastern’s Workforce Education Department and take in Moorefield.

Evans’s second class of three learner-drivers opened their study books August 30, and the college plans another CDL Truck Driver Training class to start October 4.

The classes meet at Eastern’s Technology Training Center in the Grant County Industrial Park by the Petersburg Airport. “In previous years we’ve brokered in a similar training from an out-of-state provider,” said Sherry Watts, Eastern’s Director of Workforce Development. “Now, we believe we can better serve our community by providing this training directly.”

Money Opportunity

On the basis of that decision, the college purchased and reconditioned a regulation-size, eighteen-wheeled tractor-trailer that students use to learn the trade.

“And because we’re mobile,” Watts noted, “it may be possible in future years to offer this training at other locations throughout the Potomac Highlands.” Currently, the college stations the vehicle at the Tech Center in Petersburg.

For more information, or to register for the October class, contact Watts at 304-434-8000; or toll free: 877-982-2322.

“Driving a truck is a pretty good money opportunity,” said Evans, a veteran driver with 23 years experience on the road, “at least as compared to a lot of things around here.”

Tractor-trailer drivers earn, on average, about \$35-thousand per year in the Cumberland, MD and nearby WV area (about \$2-thousand more than the statewide average), according to the most recently available data from the Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics. Light truck and delivery service drivers in this area take home nearly \$29-thousand annually (some \$3-thousand more than the average statewide pay for that job).

“I enjoy driving and I’ve always wanted the CDL,” said Lahmansville’s Jeremy Crites. “And they offered it to me through my job at Pilgrim’s Pride—so I took it.”

A worker on the pullet crew, Crites entered the class “already knowing a little about it, but I also learned a good bit,” he acknowledged, “especially on how to drive, and the book work.”

Practice Makes Perfect

Under Evans’s leadership, the class spends the first two weeks in the classroom, “because the first thing you have to do is pass a written test at the DMV,” to get a West Virginia CDL Learner’s Permit. “That enables you to ride with a licensed, qualified driver, and you can get practice driving,” he said, “and learn how to do all the things you need to do.”

Made up of several parts, the Learner’s Permit written test includes questions on “general knowledge about a truck, and about the different things you need to know to be able to drive one,” Evans noted. Additional sections ask applicants to apply their knowledge of air brakes and of tractor-trailer combinations.

But before Evans allows his students to take the state’s written exam, he provides his students, along with his classroom teaching, several online practice

tests. “I will test them to death in the classroom,” he emphasized.

“And when we get into the actual driving part, and I have them on the road, I run them through everything they would have on the road test,” he said. “They won’t get anything on the test that I haven’t already thrown at them in class.”

Evans’s classroom approach also includes video instruction that presents a variety of challenging on-the-road scenarios to the student-drivers, and explains the best ways to deal with them.

200 Training Hours

Petersburg’s Billy Miller, who delivers baby chicks to Pilgrim’s Pride’s brooder houses, appreciated Evans’s teaching approach. “The instructor made you feel welcome and comfortable,” he said, “and helped us study the book. I learned a lot — and the videos were awesome. They put you in some situations that you would never be in for your two or three weeks in the road class.”

Justin Connolly, of Points, also enjoyed the training. “The instructor is really good, and it’s convenient to have it this close to home in the Moorefield and Petersburg area,” he noted.

“It’s a good opportunity — I got a driver’s certificate for 200 hours training, and that looks good on your background,” he pointed out. “It’s a pretty good course for anybody who wants to get into it and learn how to it.”

Pilgrim’s Pride employs Connolly also, and all three newly licensed CDL drivers emphasized their gratitude to the company for sponsoring them in the training program. “And to all of the people at the college, too,” said Miller.

A scheduling coincidence gave the students a unique way to express their appreciation, because the third week of the training class — and their first days on-the-road — fell on the same calendar dates as the Tri-County Fair in Petersburg. So the student-drivers asked Instructor Evans if

they could enter their training vehicle into the Fair parade.

“Their request made us glad,” said Eastern’s Sherry Watts, “because it showed that the learners were feeling ownership in their own training class — and that always improves training outcomes.

Best In Show

“So they washed the truck, and shined up the tires, and they drove it in the parade as part of their training,” Watts said. “Because Lowell was riding with them, and he had them doing stop-and-go drills, and practicing other maneuvers that they needed to learn for the class.

“And with that polished-up Eastern training rig, they won ‘Best Show Truck’ in the Tri-County Fair Parade.”

Although Evans noted that job advancement was a primary motivation for all of his trainees, the pleasure and pride that the student-drivers took in their training and their vehicle came as no surprise. “Yes, the driving jobs are the more premium pay jobs. Still, one of the guys in our second class just loves to drive,” the instructor pointed out. “He loves to travel, and that’s what he wants to do and get paid for.

“Well, if you’re going to be a truck driver,” said the 23-year veteran of the

road, “those are two qualifications you should probably have.”

Tuition for the class is \$3,200, and “many students can qualify for financial assistance in the form of state grants,” Watts pointed out, “through the Workforce Development component of the Higher Education Adult Part-Time Student (HEAPS) grant program.”

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.eastern.wvnet.edu”.

Serving the residents of Grant, Hampshire, Hardy, Mineral, Pendleton and Tucker counties, Eastern West Virginia Community and Technical College, fully accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, 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 Highland