

Drivers needed to keep on truckin'

BY CARISA CHAPPELL, *Published February 4, 2009*

Like many industries today, the trucking sector—which transports nearly everything that we wear, eat and buy—is having problems finding qualified drivers for its long-haul, heavy-duty rigs.

Trucking companies say that they have the applicants, but many of the would-be drivers lack the qualifications, according to industry experts. It's become especially troublesome in recent years as the industry has tightened security and safety measures, according to the American Trucking Association.

The bad economy may be easing the demand for trained truckers in some areas, but the reprieve is temporary, and the industry still faces a shortage when current baby-boomer drivers begin retiring, said Scott Giltz, dean of technical and career education at **Clackamas Community College (CCC)** in Oregon.

As people look for new jobs in the spiraling economy, enrollment in many community college trucking programs is growing. Southeast Community College in Nebraska, which started its trucking program 35 years ago, has seen enrollment in the program jump by 30 percent, according to David Grant, chair of the program.

States and the federal government realize the importance of the trucking industry and ensuring that it has enough workers. **Last spring, CCC and the Oregon Trucking Association received a \$300,000 state grant to address the truck-driver shortage in the state.** The college previously received an \$848,486 Community-Based Job Training Grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to focus on transportation issues.

Giltz said that CCC's program is unique in that it has partnered with private career schools for training instead of solely providing the training.

"They have the expertise and insight to see that someone succeeds in getting a commercial driver's license as part of our certificate program," he said.

The genesis for the training program came from business and industry several years ago. They were desperate for drivers and approached the college. With the state grant, CCC helped form the Truck Driver Shortage Solutions Consortium to address the issue.

The college and its consortium partners hosted six summits and developed a professional curriculum that was vetted by business and industry.

With the Department of Labor grant, the group expanded its efforts, which included developing incumbent worker training programs and reaching out to high school and middle school students to educate them about careers in transportation, Glitz said.

Pima Community College (PCC) in Arizona, which offers three certificates through its 10-year-old truck driving program, enrolls 100 to 150 students annually, said Ramona Garcia, program coordinator. In addition to the training, the college provides one-on-one student support and career placement assistance during and after training.

“The Class A vehicle driver certificate is the most popular,” Garcia said. “Students learn the skills needed to secure a commercial driver’s license and can complete the certificate in four to six weeks.”

The college also offers a professional truck driver certificate, which includes a paid externship with a local trucking company.

The college provides additional support, such as English as a second language help, a refresher course and a safety awareness program, Garcia said.

The equipment to train students can be expensive. Many programs use hybrid training, allowing students to first test their skills on a computer simulation before testing them on the actual road. Delaware Technical & Community College is using a state-of-the-art commercial transportation simulator to help train its students as part of a study on truck driver training. It is sponsored by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.