

LCCC program helps fill an immediate need for truck drivers

Special to the IBJ

Of all the roadmaps to a reliable, well-paying career, Lewis and Clark Community College’s Truck Driver Training program could be described as an expressway of sorts.

Since it launched in Fall 2014, 86 percent of program graduates almost immediately landed a job in the industry, according to Program Coordinator Kent Ripperda. Of the remaining 14 percent, over half of those graduates went on to further their education in the field.

The jobs waiting to be filled come with a good paycheck, too.

Data from the U.S. Department of Labor shows that the median salary for light truck or delivery service drivers is \$38,394. For heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers, it’s \$49,145. However, Ripperda said he’s spoken to recent graduates who started out closer to \$55,000 in salary.

“Anyone who graduates our program can find a job that starts out at a salary around \$50,000,” said Ripperda. “I think that’s a great payback relative to the cost of our program, which is right around \$3,500 for the eight-week program, and \$3,650 for the 16-week program.”

Job placement is a core focus for LCCC’s program, he added.

“We work extensively with recruiters in the area to make sure our students land the best job they can after they’re finished here,” Ripperda said. “We have great relationships with some of the larger companies in the area like XPO Logistics and Central Transport, both out of St. Louis and Schneider National, which has a terminal in our area. Several companies who hire our graduates



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normally do not hire inexperienced drivers. I think that says something about the quality of our program.”

In addition to offering on-the-road experience with most any size or type of truck on the road, LCCC’s program has one high-tech learning tool a few other programs don’t – a fully simulated cab.

LCCC Truck Driver Program Trainer Joe Turner says the simulator is a big advantage in getting inexperienced drivers quickly up to speed. Some students who join the class are not accustomed to commercial vehicles.

“Some of our students have never even driven a manual transmission before,” Turner said. “In those cases, the simulator lets students practice shifting without being under any pressure. It also saves some wear and tear on our

transmissions. In addition, it helps them hone their skills in situations that can’t always be practiced in real-life training.

“We can expose them to different types of weather situations and give students types of emergency situations, such as a tire blowout,” he added. “It also allows for a smoother transition into the truck. We tell them that their perception of how they look at the road will change, and they quickly apply what they’ve learned on the simulator to what’s in front of them on the actual roadway.”

Another aspect of LCCC’s Truck Driver Training is a culture of inclusiveness.

“We have students from all walks of life,” Ripperda said. “We have men, women, young people just starting out, middle-aged people looking for a career change and retirees wanting to re-enter the work

force. There are plenty of truck driving jobs where you can be home daily or if you prefer, you can travel and see the country. We even have people who have never driven a stick shift before, backed a trailer or been in a truck this size and they come out of the program ready to go to work.”

That was the case for program graduate Donny Sandidge.

In his late-40s, Sandidge found himself laid off from his job with a city street department. Through the suggestion of friends, he decided to give LCCC’s eight-week Truck Driving Training program a try. It had been nearly 30 years since Sandidge was an LCCC Radio Broadcasting student.

“I’d never driven a big rig or anything, but I’d driven different kinds of trucks,” Sandidge said. “I’ll be honest with you, some of the class was pretty tough. I had to put the work in. But the more work I put into it, the more I got out of it.”

During the class, he met representatives of DKD Trucking, a HAZMAT freight company based in South Roxana. After graduation, they hired him. Sandidge has now been with the company for five years.

“It changed my life,” he said of the program. “I’m training drivers now, and that’s amazing to me. I’m still relatively new at this. Whether I’m driving or training someone, I’m always thinking back to what I learned at Lewis and Clark. I use it every day.”

For more information on Lewis and Clark Community College’s Truck Driver Training Program, visit www.lc.edu/program/truckdrivertraining/ or contact Ripperda at (618) 468-5797 or kripperda@lc.edu.

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