



Illinois Business Journal

Vol. 22 No. 8 • May 2022

Big rigs see big need in trucking industry

You, too, can be a semi driver

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH

As soon as newly trained truck drivers roll off the line at Lewis and Clark Community College, local firms are snapping them up.

Such is the need in the industry, says Kent Ripperda, who heads up the program. “We’ve had 205 come through the program since our initial start in the fall of 2014. We’ve had a 94 percent rate as far as them finding a job,” he said.

At 320 hours, LCCC’s Truck Driver Training program, is longer than the required minimum offered in both educational and private settings. There are a handful of such programs in Metro East and LCCC’s has gained traction in the past eight years.

The course comes with two options. One is eight weeks, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., the other is 16 weeks, but only in the mornings. Each has the same number of hours, split between textbook and actual driving.

The longer option works well for somebody who’s working a job, Ripperda said. Some students take the shorter, more intense course and still manage to work an outside job.

■ See DRIVERS, Page 3



John Young, left, graduated from Lewis and Clark Community College’s truck driver training program in 2015. He attained a driving position with XPO Logistics and is still with them. Davie Metzger, right, was the original instructor of the program at its inception in 2014. He retired from the program in 2016 but helped out part time for several years. LCCC file photo

Job needs driven by ecommerce

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH

The Illinois Trucking Association routinely conducts a poll of members, asking about industry challenges.

Recent months have focused on the shortage of truck drivers.

As of April, 45 percent of carriers say it’s “extremely difficult to find workers.” That’s up from 38 percent in March. Another 37 percent said it is “very difficult,” compared to 33 percent in March. Another 13 percent rated it “somewhat difficult” – down from 20 percent the previous month.

Not one of the respondents said it was easy to find a driver. And, only 5 percent said they were not in need of drivers right now.

About the same time as the latest poll, Walmart announced it is raising pay for its private fleet of truck drivers, including the nearly 325 truck drivers in Illinois. The company is also launching a new fleet development program to train the next generation of drivers.

With the raises in place, Walmart drivers can now make up to \$110,000 in their first year with the company, with the potential to make even more down the road, based on factors like tenure and location.

■ See TRUCK, Page 3

New partners hope to build legal powerhouse with merged firm

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH

Jeff Cooper was at the pinnacle of his profession in 2008 when he decided he had enough of practicing law and stepped away to pursue other interests.

This year, he saw reason to come back full force, thanks to his new partner, Ethan Flint.

The pair last month announced the merger of their two firms, Flint Law Firm LLC and Raefan Group, to form FlintCooper LLC, an Edwardsville-based operation with offices in Paducah, Ky., and Dallas.

Cooper built his reputation between 2000-2008 as managing partner with John Simmons in what was the SimmonsCooper Law Firm in East Alton. By the time Cooper left, they had built the firm into a national asbestos-litigation power. The firm has since morphed into Simmons Hanley Conroy, now based in Alton, and remains a national force in mesothelioma cases.



Cooper

“When we built the old firm, it was a lot of fun,” Cooper said. “We did it with a lot of family and friends and people we’d gone to school with. It grew so quickly that anybody you knew

that had talent we’d bring into the law firm. That was very much like a family and to leave was very, very hard. That’s one of the reasons I stayed away from law for a significant period of time thereafter.”

Cooper left to take on the role of entrepreneur, and he’s had better-than-average success.

Initially and for years, he was part of an effort to attract an MLS soccer franchise. His personal efforts were not fruitful, but others did eventually land



Flint

a franchise for St. Louis.

During that period, he also started and funded a business incubator, Eudora Global. That resulted in startup of a pharmacy benefit manager company called Citizens Rx, which became a success although Cooper and his group sold their assets in it.

Also begun was a financial technology company called Atomic 47, which does well in both the U.S. and Mexico. Cooper travels frequently to Mexico.

The company also launched Lineup Media Group, a film and television production company that has slowed during the pandemic; Yo Radio, a

global radio streaming service; and an e-sports brand called Ultimate Gaming Championship, or UGC, which does online games and tournaments.

Many of Cooper’s pursuits are under the umbrella of ePlata, a portfolio of companies providing financial, health-care and lifestyle solutions, of which Cooper is founder and CEO. He is also chairman of the board at Eudora Global; chairman and CEO of Atomic 47 and LMG; and a board member and co-founder of Citizens Rx.

Cooper began slowly returning to law “three or four years ago” when attorney colleagues began asking him to help ease their workload. He formed a firm called Raefan Group, which offered legal services covering every major business sector and the critical global regions of Mexico, Latin America, Asia-Pacific, Europe and Africa. Raefan Group is now part of the new firm.

■ See MERGER, Page 2

St. Louis
Regional
Freightway

Pages 7-10



ILLINOIS BUSINESS JOURNAL ROUTING SLIP			
Please initial and pass to the next executive in your department.			
The last person is to return to my office. Thanks _____			
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____