

Column: College Community Connection

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Thanks to a Truck Driver

By Dr. Al Roberts

Santa may rely on a sleigh and reindeer, but other folks who want holiday packages delivered to distant destinations typically rely on trucks. In fact, the entire U.S. economy depends on the trucking industry. Every year, our nation's truck drivers carry more than 10 billion tons of freight, a total that represents 70% of all shipped domestic tonnage.

Hauling all these goods is a task that requires more than 3.5 million commercially licensed drivers, and the trucking industry currently faces a shortage of qualified job candidates. In October, the American Transportation Research Institute released a study identifying the driver shortage as the industry's most critical issue. The report noted, "An optimistic trucking industry outlook, based on improving economic growth in the United States, has many in the industry concerned that the demand for truck drivers will further outpace the supply of qualified drivers. To this end, the American Trucking Associations (ATA) estimates a shortfall of 48,000 drivers, with projections that the shortage could increase to 175,000 by 2025."

Southside Virginia Community College is helping address this need through the continuing expansion of its Truck Driver Training School, which has already educated more than 2,500 students. SVCC's Truck Driver Training School was established in 1996 at Ft. Pickett in Blackstone. We added a location in South Boston in 1999 and another in Emporia in 2007. More recently, SVCC has entered into a partnership with Danville Community College and Patrick Henry Community College to offer the successful program across a broader region. SVCC's truck driver program has a graduation rate of 85%, and 75% of program graduates have found employment in the industry. They hold jobs with more than 70 companies in capacities that include long distance (coast to coast), regional, dedicated, and local routes.

SVCC's leadership in truck driver training is also recognized beyond the borders of our region. Earlier this year, Duncan Quicke, the program's coordinator, traveled to Green Bay, Wisconsin, at the invitation of Schneider National to participate on their Truck Driver Training Advisory Board, a forum for exchanging ideas and best practices in areas such as safety, training, regulatory compliance, and technology. Schneider is one of the nation's largest truckload carriers, and representatives from only 11 schools around the nation were selected to be included.

Students in SVCC's Truck Driver Training School participate in a six-week program during which they receive 240 hours of instruction and hands-on practice. The class day mimics a normal workday, and activities include pre-trip inspections, keeping logbooks updated, highway driving, and maneuvering procedures such as twisting, turning, and backing up.

For information about driver qualifications, student prerequisites, and upcoming class schedules, call the Truck Driver Training School at 434-292-1650.

Dr. Al Roberts is president of Southside Virginia Community College, an institution of higher learning that provides a wide variety of education opportunities to a diverse student population within a service area that spans ten counties and the city of Emporia. He can be reached via email at al.roberts@southside.edu.