
December 3, 2012 - Talking to Ricky Strange, it's hard to see why anyone wouldn't be a truck driver.

“Students fresh out of here will make, on the low side, $45,000 a year,” said Strange, head of Southeastern Technical College’s commercial truck driving (CTD) program. “Students on the high side: I’d put that at close to $70,000. And we’ve had students make $120,000 starting out.”

In a struggling economy, numbers like that are hard to ignore. What’s more, demand for drivers figures to remain high. A new report released by the Georgia Center of Innovation for Logistics shows the United States will need 115,000 new truck drivers next year.

Strange credits the demand to an economy slowly getting back on its feet.

“As the economy picks up, naturally, people have to have more goods,” said Strange. “People don’t think about it, but everything you get, a truck had something to do with it. A train can carry a lot of freight, but trains don’t run to Wal-Mart. And trucks don’t run without trained drivers to operate them.”

Locally, Strange sees even more opportunity for drivers.

“With the deepening of the port in Savannah, they’re talking about adding at least 4,000 more jobs just to pull containers per year for the next ten years,” said Strange. “That’s 40,000 more jobs right here in Georgia just for drivers pulling in and out of the ports.”

Of course, even if the jobs are easy to find, you still have to work. And truck driving can be a difficult task, something Southeastern Tech’s CTD program freely admits.

“For the students that are willing to work, the jobs are out there,” said Strange. “The only downfall is they’re going to be gone from home for a good bit. They’ve got to get that two years of experience under their belts, and then they can come back and find jobs that allow them to be home a little more.”
“I knew going into it I was going to have to be out on the road for a while,” said Tim Barnes, a CTD student from Vidalia. “You’ve got to get your miles. But I also liked that you could have a good, respectable career and not have to go through a couple years of school.”

Indeed, most students can complete the program in two months. With scholarships provided by the STC Foundation, CTD students who qualify for the HOPE scholarship will pay roughly $450 to spend eight weeks in a program with a 100 percent pass rate and a direct line to companies like DOT Foods, who are guaranteeing their first-year drivers $61,000.

For most jobseekers, often the hardest part of the process is getting that first call back after submitting an application. But for truck drivers, that’s practically a non-issue.

“I’ve already got companies calling,” said Barnes. “I mean, you put in an application, they’ll call you within three or four hours. That’s how badly they need drivers.”

For more information on STC’s CTD program, call 912-538-3100 or 478-289-2200 or visit www.southeasterntech.edu.

Photo: Truck driving students Larry Roberson (left) and Tim Barnes take a break from practicing on Southeastern Technical College’s truck driving training course.

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