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Contact: Todd Hyland / 888-605-6300

BUSINESS AND PUBLIC OFFICIALS GET BEHIND THE WHEEL AT TRUCK DRIVER TRAINING SCHOOL OPENING IN NEW CASTLE

NEW CASTLE, DE, March 3—Delaware public officials and economic development representatives got a firsthand feel Friday for what it's like to drive a tractor trailer when Smith & Solomon Driver Training unveiled its new training facility earlier this week in New Castle, Delaware.

New Castle County Executive Chris Coons and other county representatives got behind the wheel of a Smith & Solomon tractor, experiencing what students and over-the-road drivers see as they take to state, local and federal roads in Delaware.

“Delaware accounts for a good share of the total trucking activity throughout the US—nearly six percent of the average daily truck traffic monitored by the U.S. Transportation Department,” noted Will Bowker, executive vice president at Smith & Solomon. “And there is currently a shortage of commercially licensed drivers in Delaware and across the U.S. There is a dramatic need for drivers right now. The average starting salary for a truck driver is \$37,500 a year so it's a good opportunity for someone who does not plan to go to college to make a good living,” said Bowker.

Coons, workforce representatives from the Delaware Economic Development Office, along with officials from the New Castle County Chamber of Commerce and New Castle Police Community Services, attended the grand opening ceremony unveiling the modern

classroom facility and training yard. The facility is located in a newly opened corporate and industrial park near major state and federal highways in Northern Delaware. More than 120 state, county and local officials including clergy, veterans groups and minority organizations were invited to the opening. “We want everyone in the area to know the benefits of trucking and how easy it is to be earning an excellent wage with as little as a month’s training,” said Bowker.

Long haul drivers in Delaware start at up to \$50,000 and union drivers average about \$60,000. “Clearly truck driving is a relatively simple and inexpensive way to fill badly needed commercial jobs in the county and state,” said Bowker.

“By 2010, Delaware will be shipping 80 million tons of goods to, from and within the state every year—up 180 percent from the last survey in 1998,” explained the Smith & Solomon executive. “Total value of goods shipped by truck in Delaware is about \$100 billion and will grow to \$110 billion in four years. The need for drivers is clearly going to intensify.”

“Not everyone in Delaware is headed for college,” notes Bill Applegate, manager of the New Castle training facility. “But that doesn’t mean that they can’t make a decent living. And even those with college degrees who have been laid off can still find a job to put bread on the table. All the major fleets have trucks sitting up against the fence because of a shortage of drivers. Someone has to bring these goods to market on a timely basis. And right now, major transportation companies and corporate fleets are hard pressed to make up that shortfall with signing bonuses, guaranteed weekends home and other company incentives,” said Applegate.

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Last year, Smith & Solomon educated and placed 900 drivers who had been receiving state unemployment benefits in other states. At an average of \$37,500 a driver, that adds up to \$33 million in tax paying salaries and the reduction of millions of dollars in state unemployment benefits being paid out each year. The Delaware State Employment & Training Division last week began sending the names of candidates for training which is