March 8, 2006

Job market resurrects truck driver training

With job prospects for professional drivers strong, commercial truck driver training has returned to Rogue Community College.

Offered through the college’s Workforce Training Center, the training had been furloughed since summer 2004 pending market factors favorable to its return, said Jeanne Howell, associate dean at RCC’s Table Rock Campus. Several changes have been made since then. Length of the training has been reduced to five weeks, with one week of classroom instruction and four weeks of behind-the-wheel, hands-on learning, and tuition has been trimmed to $3,900, according to Bill Jiron, training services coordinator.

“Our slogan is, “We’re back and we’re better,” Jiron, said. “The college has a fleet of three semi-trucks as good or better than what students will encounter on the job. All our instructors have at least five years’ professional driving experience.” The training is endorsed and supported by major trucking firms including Gordon Trucking, Fresh Express, GI Trucking, and A & M Trucking, with several industry representatives serving on the advisory committee.

A number of companies have said they will hire RCC-trained drivers and reimburse their tuition over a two-year period, Jiron said. Other funding sources include state agencies, grants and scholarships, and approved private lenders.

In the past some 90 percent of students completing RCC’s training have found driving work with regional firms, he added. And current employment opportunities appear excellent, based on the state’s Labor Market Occupational Report. In February, Oregon had 259 job openings for drivers, with openings in southern Oregon projected to be much higher than the statewide average. Drivers in Jackson and Josephine counties earned average annual incomes slightly more than $35,000 – above the state norm.

Because more than three-quarters of all goods in the United States are shipped by truck, employment outlooks are projected to remain strong, according to the American Trucking Association, which predicts that the current nationwide shortage of 20,000 drivers will grow nearly fivefold within a decade. As a result trucking companies are offering generous 401(k),
stock option and health care packages to new recruits. Companies have begun outfitting more of their cabs with satellite radio and television and introducing policies to allow drivers to bring pets and spouses on the road.

For more information about RCC’s commercial truck driver training, contact Bill Jiron training services coordinator, 245-7905.

###

N06-35