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Transportation Institute

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DMACC Transportation Institute History

The Transportation Institute Commercial Vehicle Operator Training Program is recognized as being one of the premier truck driver training programs in Iowa. The program is certified by the Professional Truck Driver's Institute.

America depends on the trucking industry to transport nearly everything a person uses on a daily basis. Throughout the history of the industry there has been a shortage of professional truck drivers. The Transportation Institute was created to address this ongoing industry need and to provide an avenue to prepare professional drivers who would be qualified for jobs that were attractive in compensation and opportunity.

The Transportation Institute began as an outreach of the DMACC EDG (Economic Development Group). Iowa was going through the farm crisis, and there were many displaced farm workers. The College was working with state and local community leaders to provide support for expansion of jobs with employers and incentives for companies to locate/relocate within DMACC's district in an effort to create employment opportunities.

Barr Nun, a trucking company planning an expansion, explored possible incentives with EDG training consultant Nancy Heimbaugh. The company shared its plan for a major expansion if a reliable source of experienced or well-trained truck drivers were available in the area. A significant number of other trucking companies concurred, which verified a market for a DMACC truck driving program. DMACC's location played a role in the company requests. The Des Moines intersection of east to west Interstate 80 and north to south Interstate 35 placed Des Moines and DMACC at the hub of major trucking routes.

Purpose

The purpose of the program is to prepare the student to successfully pass the tests for the Commercial Driver's License (CDL), the Iowa truck operators' license, provide the transportation industry with quality entry level drivers and respond to specialized training needs of individual transportation companies and organizations.

Origin of the Institute

In 1985 DMACC was approached by Schneider National, a company located in Green Bay, Wisconsin, and one of the nation's largest truckload carriers. Schneider wanted to build a regional operations center in the Des Moines area and needed to be able to recruit drivers from the region. They were considering a multi-million dollar commitment to construct facilities and to create several hundred well-paying jobs. That offer was made, but did not include an allowance for including other trucking companies' access to training or DMACC's control of curriculum, training personnel or scheduling. Though an attractive offer in some circumstances, Taylor and Heimbaugh were authorized to respectfully decline Schneider's offer to underwrite the start-up costs and overall management of the Institute. They felt DMACC should provide access to a number of trucking companies.

Robert Taylor, the first Director of the Transportation Institute, recalls how he and Nancy Heimbaugh responded to the request and how this led to the founding of the Transportation Institute.

DMACC President Joseph Borgen asked Nancy Heimbaugh to find someone within DMACC who would have knowledge of trucking to help explore possibilities. Nancy and I had been doing contract training with Ruan Transportation at several sites in America, so she asked me to help explore the possibilities. I was transferred to EDG in 1987 from the Diesel program. My understanding of the need was helpful when we considered if an existing program could be modified or if a new approach was appropriate. Dr. Borgen agreed to give us a year to develop our recommendation.

One of our first activities was to visit a respected program at Fox Valley Community College in Appleton, WI. Their approach featured a comprehensive offering of programs and services to the transportation industry rather than just an entry-level driver training program. This was the model we decided to recommend. Dr. Borgen allowed us free hand to develop the concepts and devise a plan.

To respond to Schneider's inquiry, a "623" training program agreement was developed. Schneider was very exacting with the training curriculum we were to use to train their students and required each trainer to be trained by one of their "master trainers." Schneider provided tractors and trailers for their sponsored students.

We called upon several companies and organizations, summarized their needs, and created the Institute concept on a restaurant napkin while at lunch one day and presented our proposal to Dr. Borgen.

From this beginning we refined the concept of an "Institute" for transportation at DMACC. It was to be dedicated to highway transportation, with a secondary goal of becoming self-sufficient without financial support or at least a minimal amount of support from the college's general fund. We would also become the contracting arm of the college for anything related to highway transportation.

We developed a business plan and presented it to Dr. Borgen who approved it with the words of "keep the power on," and we were on our way.

Developing the Institute

A variety of activities took place in 1987 to secure a location and facilities for the Institute. First, a 14-acre site on Delaware Avenue south of Ankeny and just north of Des Moines was selected and a two-year renewable lease was negotiated with DuzMor Manufacturing. It was later purchased in 1994 and continues to be the site for the Institute. The college purchased and remodeled a used, double-wide trailer for an office and classroom. After the trailer was damaged in a tornado, it was replaced by constructing a permanent building that housed offices and classrooms. The site was further enhanced for instruction with the installation of a skid-pan that was coated with a slick coating and, when flooded with water, could cause a specially equipped tractor/trailer to jackknife. This allowed instructors to teach student drivers how to avoid jackknives and react properly.

Training and Equipment

The first three semi tractors and several trailers were purchased for student instruction. Over the years there was constant upgrading of equipment. DMACC Transportation Institute has continued to provide

up-to-date equipment representative of industry standard with a variety of engines and transmissions. All training equipment is road-worthy conventional tractors with 9, 10 and 13 speed transmissions. Truck models include Freightliner, Volvo and International; Engines include Cummins, Detroit and Caterpillar. The goal has always been to provide training on a variety of equipment to better prepare graduates for entry in the transportation industry.

Curriculum and Instruction

The first faculty member (trainer), Tim Whitney, enhanced the curriculum modeled from the PTDIA (Professional Truck Drivers Institute of America), an eight week, 320-hour program. After two years of operation, the program was awarded PTDIA certification. Currently the curriculum specifies 240 instructional hours and is based on the industry's Bureau of Motor Carriers Safety Curriculum. Experienced driver/instructors work individually with students to develop driving skills on the training concourse and on the road. The ratio of one instructor for every two students provides an excellent training experience. This gives the student as much behind-the-wheel time as possible.

Faculty

George Hans, an experienced trainer, was employed to train the truck driver trainers, most of whom were recent retirees.

Advisory Committee

An advisory committee, made up of industry professionals, meets several times a year to support the program. The director and faculty communicate with a large number of carrier representatives when they visit the program to recruit employees.

Relationships

Key relationships were developed with a number of transportation companies including Mike Brooks Inc., Barr Nunn, Smithway, Ruan, and a host of others. These companies agreed to pre-approve potential students for employment upon successful completion of the training program. Shortly after the program was established working relationships with the Des Moines Police Department and the Iowa Law Enforcement Academy were developed and have continued.

The director and faculty also became active with the Iowa Motor Truck Association, CVSA, The Safety Alliance, Truckload Carriers Association, American Trucking Association, and Iowa Department of Education School Bus Division. Institute Director Taylor served on the Board of Directors for Professional Truck Driver Association, Association of Publically Funded Truck Driver Training, and the Commercial Vehicle Training Association.

Special Workshops and Activities

The staff assisted the State of Iowa in rewriting the commercial drivers licensing standards in 1991. In 1992 faculty were contracted to train the Iowa Department of Transportation (IDOT) examiners on how to conduct Commercial Vehicle inspection and drive tests. Later this program was extended to train all the examiners in Iowa.

Students

In May of 1988 the first class with three students enrolled. A new class was then admitted every four weeks through the year. Over the years the program provided an on-going schedule of classes for incoming students. Currently, the program is offered in two scheduling formats by weeks (12 and 6). Each includes 240 hours of instruction. The twelve week schedule is typically offered only in the evenings on a part-time student basis. Classes are seldom cancelled since student interest and employee demand remain at a high level.

Special Seminars and Programs

In addition to the regularly scheduled classes, the Institute also has conducted many seminars and training events for companies like Ruan, Barr Nunn, Thermogas, as well as group instruction for workers at the Iowa Department of Transportation and assisting the Des Moines Police Department and the Iowa Law Enforcement Academy. The staff worked with the State of Iowa to help rewrite the commercial drivers licensing standards in 1991.

Placement

The job market has always been very good, and the vast majority of students are employed shortly after graduation from the program.

Directors

The three directors since the inception of the program are: Robert Taylor, David Whitaker and David Pfiffner.