

Janet Michaels 0:00

Guy, hello and welcome to the valley today. I am your host, Janet, Michael, it is Laurel Ridge Community College Day and back on the Zooms with Guy Curtis, director of marketing for the college. He and Brandy have been bouncing back and forth. But Guy informs me, right before we got started, I get him this month and next month. I'm so excited to have some continuity.

Guy Curtis 0:29

That's right, we're ahead of schedule and we're planning already. But yeah, after commencement activities last month, Brandy had the show, and we're super excited today to share another in-demand program that we offer, and so within the marketing and PR world, we're always busy looking at the future. So excited to have our new guest on today, and glad we're able to take a little bit of a breath from commencement. But now moving forward, we're looking at the Fall and looking for opportunities for individuals. Locally, we have a lot of in-demand programs at the college for those hot in-demand jobs and credentials. And so excited to share our next guest today.

Janet Michaels 1:01

So joining us today is Jeff Burkhardt. Jeff is the Senior Director of Operations for the driver training program with Ancora Education. Jeff, we talked a little bit before we started recording that CDLs are very near and dear to my heart. My husband has had one since 1984. He's going to be so annoyed that I've said that out loud on the air when we were in high school.

Jeff Burkhardt 1:24

Well, it's a real pleasure to be here. Janet, thank you guys. It's a real privilege for us. The fact that your husband is a CDL holder and that history, I'm even more enamored there. Janet, it's just a fantastic career. And again, I really appreciate the opportunity to be on the show with you all.

Janet Michaels 1:38

Guy, Curtis, I am really surprised that these classes aren't full every time and that you need to add more, because to me, having a CDL is like having a high school diploma. It's something everybody should have because it's a great fallback career, even if it's not something you intend to do full time.

Guy Curtis 1:56

Yeah, it is. It's a great way to get yourself started. And actually, because of the demand we have in our region. We have weekend classes and weekday classes. There are folks coming in and out of these opportunities, obviously locally, but also nationally. And I think bringing Jeff on today to speak to his experiences and core, being part of a training partnership with Laurel Ridge Community College just shows that demand and how things fluctuate and change. So yeah, we are offering classes weekly, almost in some cases, they're sustaining and helping those credential needs in our region. I took a look briefly just before the call today that over the last 12 months, just within Laurel Ridge region, our service region, roughly 850 jobs have been open, and so there's continuing efforts to fulfill those jobs as folks move around the industry and look for new opportunities. So yes, that's what we're offering classes consistently, and give flexibility for folks who want to get into a meaningful career within just weeks. And that's the key thing about this, if you're on the fence, if you're a local, recent graduate who was not finding quite their way, or if you're looking for a career shift, and even Jeff mentioned as his career moved around and changed, moving to different localities within our region, it's great to have that CDL in your pocket for an in demand job and quickly getting that job based on the training we have here at the college. So it's a great option for those who are looking to certify quickly and find a meaningful job right away.

Janet Michaels 3:15

Jeff, I feel like CDL and truck driving in general is probably one of the most misunderstood career paths from the general public. They think it's one thing and it's not, or they think it's not something that it is. It is a broad career path, but it's also could almost apply to anyone.

Jeff Burkhardt 3:35

Absolutely Janet, and that's one of the big attractions to the industry, in terms of being a truck driver, earning a CDL that gives you an entry point. You could be a driver. You could be a career driver, and that's fantastic. There is plenty of upward mobility opportunities. I myself had a CDL from 1997 I worked my way up through my previous employer, through the ranks in terms of transportation and dispatching and safety manager, et cetera, fleet manager. And then in my current career path is where I'm in the education space. Same difference. It was all based on having that CDL to begin with. But regardless of what paths you may experience or take upon yourself, it's a career path that is always going to be present and available. The demand for drivers is still outstanding. It is better now than ever before, and just the broadest range of opportunities. Guy had mentioned that 850 drive positions there locally that can be multiplied around the country, whether it be due to e commerce or whether it be due to the shifting demographics of truck drivers, a lot of them are retiring and well, you need to replace those in terms of the driver needs. So it's an in demand occupation, and it's going to be that way for the foreseeable future.

Janet Michaels 4:45

So years and years ago, like when I was in elementary school, my grandfather was quote, unquote, a truck driver, so we would not see my papa for days or even weeks, sometimes at a time. That's what people traditionally think of as a truck driver, that you only get to see that person when they're not on the road. That's not the case. Now you can come home every night in most cases.

Jeff Burkhardt 5:11

absolutely. And I'm so glad you mentioned that many drivers, actually, majority of CDL drivers, are your traditional tractor trailer jobs. They are home every night, whether it be a UPS or some of those freight carriers that have the Hub and Spoke models where you're out and back every day. It could be your beverage delivery, your fuel tankers, the cdlb, which is just a smaller class, but it's still the same difference in terms of a truck and trailer for the most part, whenever you see those vehicles in your communities that are servicing local convenience stores, whether it be for fuel or whether it be for beverage distributors, those are all commercial drivers, and they all hold CDLs, and for majority of those are home every night. Obviously there still is a large segment of the industry to where they're the long haul, quote, unquote, truck driving population. Those appeal to many people for a host of many different reasons. But again, this is the broadest range of opportunities, between whether you want to be home every night or whether you just want to see the

country. And literally, all of those opportunities are there. One final note on that, Janet, in terms of the perspective as far as the industry goes, and the truck driver as a position, we enjoyed some positive press, if you will, from COVID. Literally shown on the news how certain essential jobs were focal points. Obviously, healthcare workers and things of that nature, God love them are always there. But there was a mind shift where these truck drivers are out there and they're still delivering the goods. We always knew that to be the case in terms of an essential function, and a very popular one, but we did enjoy a little bit of free press from that period of time that it is definitely an essential part of the nation's infrastructure.

Janet Michaels 6:49

Let's talk about demographics for a second. You mentioned that just a second ago, women are really taking this on as a career.

Jeff Burkhardt 6:56

Absolutely, and we love to see the increased population in terms of our student body, collectively, across ancora, we're probably going to complete 10 to 12,000 drivers. As far as entry level drivers, the percentage of that that are our women has increased steadily for a lot of different reasons. Number one, the equipment is safe. It's always been safe as far as the carriers go, but primarily automatic transmissions, which that cuts across the board. That is not unique to women, as far as people being less intimidated by the job, but all the modern conveniences of personal vehicles are there in trucks. So they're very safe the truck stops, they are now more appealing to the general population in terms of both safety and amenities and things like that. The truck stop that you walk into now is a far cry, different all things equal than the one you walked into 10 years ago, because they are appealing to the new population of truck driver. Don't get me wrong, you will still see the quote, unquote, old timer that's out there that is the quintessential truck driver, the cowboy type. They are still out there, and I love them. They are, however, it is a slice of Americana in terms of the diversity within the trucking industry now, and everybody is certainly embracing that. So yeah, it's fantastic to see, and there's certainly no turning back as terms of that.

Janet Michaels 8:10

It's gonna be good for those misconceptions. When people stop at Buc-ee's for for example, or some of these larger truck stops as tourists or whatever, and they walk through and think, Wow, this is supposed to be a truck stop, and this is really nice. Maybe being a truck driver isn't what I always thought it was 100% right?

Jeff Burkhardt 8:30

It's a business objective to appeal to their market. So whenever you do have these shifting demographics of truck drivers, whether that be gender, whether that be nationality, whether that be youth or age groups, you're going to try to appeal to your market. That is your business's objective. So that's why you do find healthier food offerings and truck stops, for example, and very clean facilities for showers and doing laundry and again, safety. Safety is paramount, even more so now than ever before, especially for the women truck drivers, they notate that, as far as being one of their top concerns, as it should be, the ability for Wi Fi, being able to immediately connect with your home is also a big attractant into why truck driving is no longer just that cowboy. You don't see him for weeks, as you mentioned earlier. So being able to have that connectivity with your home and your family, that's very important now. And so that is another attractant to the industry.

Janet Michaels 9:28

Let's take a break when we come back, can we walk through the program a little bit like, how does it get started? What do I need to know? How long does it last? And give some of the logistics of going through the program. Can we do that in the next segment?

Jeff Burkhardt 9:41

Absolutely, Laurel Ridge is enrolling now. Be more than happy to speak to that

Janet Michaels 9:45

Perfect we're going to come back and continue our conversation with Guy Curtis from Laurel Ridge Community College. His guest today is Jeff Burkhardt. He is a senior director of operations of driver training through ancora education, that is the partner program that trains. People for the CDL at Laurel Ridge. We're gonna learn more about that when we come back in just a couple of minutes.

Holly 10:07

Hey guys, I'm Holly and I'm Bonnie, and we would love to meet you at our brewery. Winchester brew works, that's right.

Bonnie 10:11

Our family friendly tasting room in Old Town is the perfect place to hang out any day, because we're open seven days a week. We've got refreshing beers, seltzers and slushies, plus food trucks and events on the weekends,

Holly 10:21

And the best part is, part is we are so excited to be part of this brand new passport program where you just need four stamps from Winchester area breweries and cideries to get some great free swag.

Bonnie 10:30

So pop on by our brewery and we'll get you a passport. You can find out more at Winchester brew trail.com you foreign

Janet Michaels 10:46

Welcome back to the valley. Today. I am your host, Janet. Michael is Laurel Ridge Community College Day. So I am on the Zooms with Guy Curtis. He is their director of marketing. His guest today is Jeff Burkhardt. Jeff is a Senior Director of Operations for the driver training program at ancora education, that is the company that Laurel Ridge partners with to do their CDL programs, which we talked another what, 20 minutes Jeff during the break sharing stories about how amazing it is to have a CDL and be a driver. So if someone's listening right now and they're like, I hadn't really considered how far truck driving has come. Maybe this is something I should consider. How does that work?

Jeff Burkhardt 11:24

Fantastic question. My first statement would be, do not lose that thought. Talking about the prospective truck driver, the truck driver career path is in high demand and with a relatively short amount of training. So allowing me to speak to that a little bit whenever you join or you look for a high quality training provider, like Laurel Ridge, for instance, is at the top of the heap. So whenever you go to their program and you want to enroll in that class, you'll be given the overview of it. It's typically four weeks. It could be eight weeks for the part time course, because we want to appeal to the broadest range of student availability. But we'll stick with the four week program, so you'll do a week of classroom, and then the next three weeks is where you'll be actually on the vehicle, learning how to inspect it, how to back it, how to drive it. Those are the three components of the skills test at the end of the program. You're a graduate. At this point, next step is crossing that goal line. And by that, I mean we go to the DMV and we sit for the skills test, not too indifferent than what one may have done way back when they were 16 years old, or what have you. They're with an examiner, and they're going through the paces. Obviously, it's a little bit different, because you're an attractor trader now, but upon completion of that, you'll have your CDL, and that's where the fun begins. And by fun, I mean the job opportunities. Most of our students will have job offers to them before they even graduate. That's how in demand the occupation is. Some of the students come and then they have their destination already in mind. A whole host of them are not quite sure yet. They just know there's a high demand job, and they're very interested, and they can land jobs before they even graduate with extremely high quality employers, whether it be national or local. As far as the training requirements itself, if you already hold a driver's license and you are at least 18 years old, now, between 18 and 1920 year old, you won't be able to drive out of state, cross state lines, but you can still get a commercial driver's license. But once you're 21 and older, then you can cross state lines, which gives you the broadest range of employment opportunities. But outside of that, you'll take a D, o, t physical, which is fairly benign in nature. In other words, you'll have to be able to have some minimal requirements as far as your physical abilities. And on a side note to that, there are exemptions that are made for folks who have prosthetic limbs and things of that nature. There are plenty of those that have their commercial driver's license as well. It's just a little bit different of a step in terms of meeting those requirements. You'll get your commercial learners permit to accompany your normal driver's license that will allow you to drive the big rig once you're in training and on the public roads, that's really all you need. You have to pass a D O T drug test once you get your learner's permit. Again, this is a heavily regulated industry. Most people have no problem meeting those requirements, and then they are with, usually a group of students with an instructor, no more than three or four students to one instructor and a truck. So it's very intimate. You might wonder, okay, so you mean, after only four weeks, I can get my CDL? That is true. You can that is not diminishing the training in terms of its relatively short

amount of time, because that's a standard in the industry. Is a four week program, 160 hours, basically, but you will learn all the skills that are needed in order for you to attempt and pass that skills test, to get your CDL and then the job opportunities again, not to be redundant, but I will be, because they are so broad and such in high demand.

Janet Michaels 14:56

And they're really good paying jobs, and if you get that initial. Single job with a company as a CDL driver. And then they need, because we were talking about this too, they need you to do an add on. My husband got a hazmat endorsement. I think it's called on to his CDL. Usually, companies will pay for that. If they need it. Need you to be able to do this. They'll even cover that. But that comes with you when you go somewhere else in a lot of cases.

Jeff Burkhardt 15:21

Absolutely, your employability, like with any endeavor, the more credentials or experience the skills you have that's going to make you even more valuable to that workforce, the employer base out there. But the hazmat endorsement is a perfect example of that, a relatively simple thing to acquire after doing a little bit of studying and passing the test. But for the most part, carriers do offer more for those who have that endorsement. We talked about the pay. It varies. There's hourly pay. There's a sense by the mile. But regardless of the pay structure, very highly competitive. A lot of our drivers that will exit the program, their entry level drivers, at this point, without a mile under their belt, can earn it really runs the game Jana everywhere from entry level of 45 to \$50,000 and up from there, depending on whether you run with a team, depending on what kind of a route you may have, it's obviously going to vary depending on your employer. But what I'm getting at here is that the entry level position. And keep in mind, too, if you're going through Laurel Ridge, you could complete this program with zero debt, student debt, which is of a huge concern. So every dime that you earn after that is going right into your pocket. You're not having to pay off a huge student loan, which is another attractant to this industry. But specifically talking about the Virginia schools and what Laurel Ridge has to offer as well.

Janet Michaels 16:44

He makes a really good point guy, Curtis, because even if you're doing this part time, so you've got your full time gig and you're doing this part time, so it takes you eight weeks with all of the different scholarship opportunities and funding mechanisms that you have in place there at Laurel Ridge, you really could come out of the gate in the green?

Guy Curtis 17:03

Yeah, absolutely. The training costs are minimal in terms of investment. And Jeff talked about the wages that are available. Good, gracious, starting off. That sounds awesome. But as far as local funding available to college, we have a few different incentives. We have a program called Fast Forward that is helping the first third of the cost of tuition in many cases too. There's other locality funds that can help support an individual and paying for the rest of the tuition. To Jeff's point, there's a chance you could walk away with minimal debt other than your time and energy to get into that course and finding a new opportunity through that as a job. It seemed like a great return on investment. But any rate, you want to inquire, you want to find out what financial options are available to you. Everyone's unique based on their household income and where they live and so forth. Do inquire? Do reach out? We do have a number of opportunities just to start investigating the CDL program. For example, as the show's airing this weekend, June 14, there is a getting started in trucking. First Steps to your CDL course, it's a free class, a chance to spend time with a professional like Jeff in the CDL area, a few hours learning about the growing industry, how to get started, how to get your permit to get started. And it's a free course. So you a little bit of time and energy to investigate. I think the big part of that is talking to an expert who knows the industry, knows the outlets and opportunities. And if you're intrigued about today's call, you have to inquire and find out what options you have. So I think that's the first big step. If you can't make the 14th of June, there's another one on July 12, and that's a morning from eight to 12 on a Saturday. And so those are great opportunities. So our courses are upcoming too. If you are inquired and interested, get your funding figured out right away. But we have a class coming up on June 23 it's a weekday class. Another one July 7, and a weekend class too. So there's a weekend option. So if you're working full time during the week, your weekend option might be the next best opportunity for you. So starting in July 12, a weekend course is available as well.

Janet Michaels 18:57

And it wouldn't be unheard of for someone to be listening today that works for a company, and maybe they are currently working in the warehouse, but they have trucks that are going in and out of that warehouse, and they've never really considered changing from being in the warehouse to being a truck driver. It's entirely possible they could approach their supervisor or the owner of that company and say, Hey, I don't really want to do warehouse anymore. I really want to be a truck driver, and I heard on the radio that I can get my CDL in

X number of weeks for this much money, companies sometimes will foot the bill for that if you're going to then ultimately be driving for them. 100%

Jeff Burkhardt 19:32

Right? Janet, there are many employers, partners that we have, that have the doctor, driver, the warehouse to wheels that upper mobility employers want to retain their workers, and so there is that opportunity to get into a different position. By all means they should approach that. A lot of the already have that formally in place. But as far as like the enrollment there at Laurel Ridge, it runs the gamut. It runs from those who are not yet employed, there are employer partners who are sponsoring, quote, unquote, there. Employees to attend the class, to get their training and to get their CDL and everything in between. So it really runs the full spectrum in terms of opportunities, both on the funding side and then obviously the job opportunities on the other side.

Janet Michaels 20:13

Jeff, you touched on this earlier in our conversation, is just the diversity of the jobs, from driving a coke truck to I told you during the break, my husband used to work for universe, so he was all up and down the Shenandoah Valley, delivering uniforms. He's delivered building supplies. Our neighbors just had some work done. There was a TED Lansing truck that was here that requires a CDL. There's a ton of things that you can do to make every day different. If going over the road isn't really your thing.

Jeff Burkhardt 20:43

Here are folks who like the physicality, like the flatbeds, where you're tarping your loads and things of that nature, the beverage and food distributors who are handling materials on and off the truck. And then there are those who say, hey, look, I just want to drive from point A to point B. See the country, drop my trailer, grab another trailer and go, Okay, that's fine. Janet, it's just the opportunities are just so vast you almost cannot pigeonhole anything. It's just a matter of, again, appealing to the human nature of somebody who's looking for a job, who's looking for an opportunity. This one, being a truck driver, offers such a huge amount of opportunities I just can't speak to it highly enough.

Janet Michaels 21:22

Tim used to joke that he took a lot of those jobs because he liked being in the truck all day. He liked seeing the country countryside. He liked being all over and no day was the same. And then couple of years ago, he said, you know, if I ever decide to get back into this full time, I'm going with one of these no touch options. I'm like, what? So is that like driverless driving? And he's like, No, you don't have to touch anything. You pick it up, and it's already on your trailer, and you take it to where it's going, and you sit in your truck, and they take it off, and then they put a new one on, and you go back to Europe to touch anything. And I'm like, Wow, that sounds like something I would be good at.

Jeff Burkhardt 21:56

No. Again, your frame of knowledge and the personal experience with this industry speaks volumes. You're 100% right. And again, you know that all those opportunities are out there. One other thing I did want to mention, speaking of diversity and the pay structure, one thing that is also attracted to this position is to where you don't know who's behind that seat. In other words, male, female, young, old, regardless the wages are based on you driving. It is not gender specific. It's not nationality specific. It's at your ability as a driver to get from point A to point B. And so that pay scale. It not to get into some sort of a long discussion in terms of pay variances with gender etc, etc. My only point being as a truck driver. It's at parity. It's equal. You driving a truck, I driving a truck. If our experience is the same, neither one of us is going to make more than the other. We're going to get paid by us, performing to the hour, performing to the mile.

Janet Michaels 22:52

So guy Curtis, where should people start to get more information about this program? I assume you have a web address for everyone listening today.

Guy Curtis 23:00

Laurel Ridge workforce.com, forward slash, CDL, or Laurel ridge.edu We have upcoming classes that are available and some interesting stories too. I think the other opportunities to look at our course catalog, if you have seen that in the community, we've sent out many of those across our region, but our course catalog highlights two unique stories about the long haul, driving opportunities and the short haul, both graduates of the CDL program have had tremendous success. And taking a look at our catalog as the latest upcoming

class, dates and times, including that getting started and trucking that free course, and also the upcoming weekend and weekday course options, those are best places to go. One story in particular I would like to highlight is our last cover of our catalog. Noah's Lucas is a 2024 graduate of page County High School, CDL graduate, and he's working for his local family business, Lucas farms, but he connected with our Fast Forward career coach, Lisa Heiser. She's been on the show before, and so I think connecting with a person at the college is probably your next best opportunity as well to kind of figure out your training options, but also really your funding and what is out there available to you as an individual. So talking to a coach at the college would be the next best step. In addition to our website, certainly give us a call or come to one of those free courses to find out more about the career, as are your options. So I really want to thank Jeff for his time and energy, for today's conversation and reliving some of your experiences too, Janet, with your husband.

Janet Michaels 24:21

My husband's now gonna know I actually do listen to him sometimes when he tells those stories. So this is a benefit for me, too.

Jeff Burkhardt 24:28

Thank you so much for again, for being invited to the show, Janet, and guy for having me and Janet specifically for introducing a lot of your personal knowledge there, which was total coincidence. This wasn't planned in advance, Lisa, I did not know. So you sharing your stories just really contributed to the discussion very naturally, and it does apply. So I appreciate you introducing those things

Janet Michaels 24:50

I don't often have enough to contribute. So I was very excited as soon as Guy Curtis introduced you, and he said, CDL, I'm like, Oh my gosh, I know what that is. I know people that have done that. This is going to be fun, but thank you both for taking the time today. I do appreciate it. Thank you. My pleasure.

Guy Curtis 25:05

Thanks, Janet. I have one more selfish plug for the college, as this show is airing this Saturday, June 14, Laurel Ridge is hosting Laurel Ridge night at the Winchester Royals. So I know you're a big baseball fan, so we have a quite a treat for that evening. So the opening pitches at 7pm and it's gonna be delivered by President Blosser. Yeah, honestly, today, as we record in advance, we're gonna work on throwing a little bit, but she's gonna throw the open pitch. We're having national anthem duet by current and the past. Student Leo, the mascot, is going to be there. We're gonna give away a lot of Laurel Ridge swag, and it's, of course, free to the public to attend this baseball game. So Laurel Ridge night at the Winchester Royals, June 14, a Saturday, at 7pm they actually play the Cardinals. So those who are listening from the Ormond County for area, it's a great hometown rivalry. Great chance to enjoy an evening of baseball with the college, but also to learn about the CDL program and many other programs we have to offer.

Janet Michaels 25:59

I will be back tomorrow with a brand new episode of the valley today a few minutes afternoon. So meet me here then you.