



News Release

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Community generously supports Ridgewater for commercial driving simulators

WILLMAR and HUTCHINSON, MN – An effort to address a critical need for commercial driver license (CDL) training recently received a large boost when the Bernick Family Foundation and Southwest Initiative Foundation (SWIF) each donated \$10,000 to a Ridgewater College training campaign. The effort began last fall with a kick-off \$10,000 donation from Duinick, Inc.

Ridgewater's Customized Training and Continuing Education (CTCE) department has been partnering with the Ridgewater College Foundation to raise funds to purchase two CDL simulators to expand training. The trucking industry is critical to the state and national economy, but has been even more so during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic.

Thanks to community support from about a dozen generous transportation partners, the campaign has raised \$56,500 since October toward the goal of \$200,000 for simulators and the trailers to transport them. Other donors have included Dooley's Petroleum, Inc., Minnesota Asphalt Pavement Association, Nelson International, Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Corporation, Transystems, Centra Sota Cooperative, Renville County Corn and Soybean Growers Association, and Larry D. Konsterlie.

In addition to donations, Ridgewater committed \$70,000 in leveraged equipment funds (a form of legislative support targeted at high-demand employer needs in targeted high-demand occupations) to purchase the first simulator plus trailer for about \$146,000 and is ready to roll with regional simulation training, according to Sam Bowen, dean of Ridgewater's Customized Training and Continuing Education team.

The college has long offered short-term, non-credit CDL training, as well as CDL training for Agriculture students, but simulation offers expanded possibilities.

"This simulator is a tremendous asset in terms of enhancing the effectiveness of training drivers, both new and experienced," Bowen explained. "It will aid in the recruitment and training of new drivers, helping to keep the training cost-effective, while also shortening the time necessary in the truck. Students can utilize this technology to gain exposure to tasks such as backing, shifting, and navigating difficult terrain or weather conditions in a safe and controlled environment."

“It doesn’t matter what industry you are in, but in the construction industry, there is a real need for CDL drivers and it is only going to get worse as we see the Baby Boomers retire,” explained Jason Duinick, vice president of business development for Duinick, Inc. “We see the simulator as a tool in our toolbox to train the drivers we already have with safety refreshers as well as a tool to train new drivers to get their CDLs through the college.”

As of 2019’s fourth quarter, Minnesota had more than 8,000 job vacancies in transportation and material moving occupations, according to Minnesota’s Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). Heavy and tractor-trailer truck jobs are also among the state’s DEED occupation listing projecting the most job openings from growth and replacement needs for 2016-2026.

For more information about CDL training, contact Dayna Latham, Ridgewater College, at dayna.latham@ridgewater.edu or 320-222-6063.

Submitted photo cutlines

Jason Bernick of the Bernick’s Family Foundation explores the new Ridgewater College commercial driving simulator with Ridgewater instructor Erik Hoff. Bernick’s, Duinick’s, Inc., and the Southwest Initiative Foundation each supported the CDL training effort with \$10,000 donations, giving the training campaign a huge boost on its way to \$200,000. Accepting the donation from Jason Bernick on the left are Ridgewater’s President Craig Johnson, in front, and Ridgewater’s Sam Bowen, dean of Customized Training and Continuing Education.

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Ridgewater College is a community and technical college with campuses in the central Minnesota communities of Willmar and Hutchinson. The college serves more than 5,000 students through its nearly 100 academic programs and more than 68,000 training hours for individuals and businesses through customized training and continuing education. The college is a member of Minnesota State and accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

Minnesota State includes 30 community and technical colleges and 7 state universities serving approximately 400,000 students. It is the fourth-largest system of two-year colleges and four-year universities in the United States.

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