

SMITH & SOLOMON[®]

TRAINING SOLUTIONS

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TRUCK DRIVING SCHOLARSHIPS HELP PUT THREE PHILLY MEN ON THE ROAD TO FINANCIAL SECURITY

PHILADELPHIA--Three months ago, three Philadelphia men, Ali McPherson, Eddie Boone and Bernard Baker had never heard of each other.

McPherson was a postal carrier and part-time paramedic trying to find extra work to support a wife and four daughters. Boone and Baker were out of work and trying to find jobs.

Along came Jen Doyle, Manager of Adult Learning and Workforce Development at Project H.O.M.E.'s Honickman Learning Center and Comcast Technology Labs. Project H.O.M.E. is a Philadelphia nonprofit organization that works to end homelessness and help adults and families take steps out of poverty. Their workforce development program helps North Central Philadelphia residents gain training and skills, giving them better opportunities in the job market.

Doyle had three scholarships from Smith & Solomon, a local commercial driving school in Philadelphia that trains people to drive tractor trailers and buses. Smith and Solomon is the Northeast's largest commercial driving school. With 13 locations including Philadelphia, Cherry Hill and Bordentown, the firm offers professional commercial driver training in order to prepare students with or without truck driving skills to pass the verbal and practical tests required to earn a CDL and prepare them for entry level positions in the transportation industry.

Doyle was screening scores of local candidates to receive the scholarships which would almost assuredly guarantee the recipients a full time job making anywhere from \$37,000 to \$50,000 a year.

Boone, McPherson and Baker met all the requirements and started to learn to drive tractor trailers.

“Eddie had never even driven a stick,” recalls McPherson. “But we encouraged each other to hang in and complete the course.”

They did, finishing the four-week program and getting their commercial driver’s licenses.

Today, McPherson qualifies to drive the postal service tractor trailers, Baker is already driving over the road for Swift Transportation Inc. and Boone is driving a school bus for the city of Philadelphia.

“They stop in all the time to thank us,” notes Doyle of Project H.O.M.E.. “They are really happy with their jobs.”

But there is one problem. “The program was very successful and we’re grateful to Smith & Solomon for the training and job placement. But we need more programs like this.”

Doyle is hopeful someone will step forward and provide the money for additional scholarships for truck driver training. “We have lots of people, including several women, who heard about the program and are asking about learning to drive.”

If Doyle and Project H.O.M.E. are successful in getting additional funds, the scholarships are all but guaranteed to take North Central Philadelphia residents off unemployment and put them in readily available jobs.

“There is a shortage of 20,000 over the road truck drivers in the U.S. right now with a projected shortfall of 110,000 by the year 2014,” notes Larry Carrangi of Smith & Solomon. “There is a real need for commercially licensed drivers in Philadelphia. If we had the funding we can expand this driver training program and help dozens of unemployed people in the North Central part of the city.”