

# Boston Globe: Those with drive find jobs that deliver



WINSLOW TOWNSON FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Mike Powers of Salisbury practices driving a truck at the Teamsters Local 25 truck driving school in Tewksbury.

**By Hattie Bernstein** GLOBE CORRESPONDENT OCTOBER 14, 2017

Nothing worthwhile comes easy.

That's what I'm thinking as I sit in the passenger seat of a 60-foot tractor-trailer, 13 feet high, 25,000 pounds of steel and fiberglass balanced on 14 wheels, watching Mark Cerato tap dance between the clutch and gas pedal.

With more than a million miles under his belt, the Hudson, N.H., resident could probably do this in his sleep. But as we head out of the parking lot at the Teamsters Local 25 training center in Tewksbury, the 54-year-old instructor makes the turn as if it's his first.

We're taking a spin around the block. But whether it's a short local trip or a trek across the country, the protocol is the same: Inspect the truck, inside, outside, and under the hood; fasten your seat belt; check the multiple rearview mirrors; and proceed with caution.

"You do not cut corners. Period," says Cerato's teaching colleague, Tom Morrissey 48, of Watertown, a 29-year Teamster who started his career in trash hauling and later drove a truck for the construction industry.

The Local 25 program, launched about 18 months ago, aims to backfill a critical shortage that continues to grow as truck drivers reach retirement age and retailers' Internet sales — which depend on truck deliveries — steadily increase.

Since March 2016, 70 students have completed the Local 25 program, earned their commercial driver's licenses, and now have jobs, says James Donovan, the 27-year Teamster who oversees the training initiative.



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**Instructor Tom Morrissey of Watertown goes over the inside of the truck cab with student Kiersten Kelly of Charlestown.**

In addition to preparing for the CDL road test, students have opportunities to earn other transportation-related credentials: Among these are first aid, CPR, and licenses to operate hoisting machinery, such as backhoes and forklifts, and to handle or haul hazardous materials.

“Trucking is a job they can’t send overseas,” Donovan says.

The free program is small and has a long waiting list, but the union has its sights on expanding both funding and enrollment.

Currently, the training is underwritten by some employers of Local 25 members, the apprenticeship program of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, and grants from state workforce investment boards.

The course is open-ended. Instructors are dedicated to one-on-one teaching. Students stay until they are prepared to ace the CDL course.

“We don’t say ‘no’ to anybody who won’t give up,” Morrissey says. “They say, ‘I sat with my sister last night, or my daughter, and we worked on this together.’ ”

“We make adjustments for every student,” adds Cerato, who’s been a Teamster truck driver for 34 years. He uses video, written materials, and hands-on instruction and pairs English-language learners with bilingual students, because everyone must take the state licensing exam in English.

Incentives for these jobs include competitive wages — the median annual wage was \$41,340 in 2016, according to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) — and generous benefits packages that come with health insurance and retirement plans. A recent [job listing](#) for a full-time UPS driver in North Reading, for example, offered a starting rate of \$24 per hour.

Burlington resident Michael McCarthy, 27, who enrolled in the training program in September, was working as a driver’s helper for a moving company when he heard about the opportunity and applied. With a commercial driver’s license, he could drive for the company, a promotion that would bring higher pay and open other doors.

“They spend a lot of time, one-on-one, show you the right way to do [things], give you hand-outs and information,” says McCarthy of the Teamsters instructors. “Every little detail, they’ll help. They really want to see you succeed.”

For Michael Powers, 57, a retired Boxford police and fire dispatcher who lives in Salisbury, the program — and the license he received on Sept. 20 — are the tickets to a new career.

The former municipal employee found the program through the [Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board](#), part of a statewide network that helps people who are underemployed, unemployed, or seeking a new career.

“It was the most intense thing I’ve ever done — inspections, memorization, repetition — the most mentally exhausting,” says Powers, who passed the test six weeks after he started the course.

It quickly paid off. A week after earning his CDL, Powers was hired by [Gloucester Transit Mix](#) to drive a cement mixer.



DAVID L RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

**Natalia Teodoro of Stoughton is a graduate of Teamster University, a program run by Local 25 of the Teamsters Union.**

Stoughton resident Natalia Teodoro, 38, was driving a box truck for UPS when she began classes, determined to earn a commercial license that would allow her to drive a bigger truck — and do less lifting when she makes deliveries.

She had been an occasional driver for UPS for two years, filling in during holidays and vacations until she was promoted to part time. When she enrolled in the Teamsters program, she was driving full time and juggling responsibilities as a wife and mother.

“That was really tough. My shift started at 6 p.m., eight hours till 1 a.m. I came home, got my kids ready for school, and drove to Tewksbury [for classes], an hour back and forth, five days a week,” she says.

But for Teodoro, who is married to a union carpenter and is the mother of a son, 13, and a daughter 6, the hard work is paying off.

Today, she has her CDL, membership in Teamsters Local 653, her dream job, and a chance to show her kids what it takes to succeed.

“Nothing’s easy,” she says. “ If you want a better life for you and your kids, you’ve got to do it.”

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