



News Release

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Life after Fraser: Madawaska man who accepted early retirement from downsizing paper mill about to embark on new career that will literally take him places

Aroostook County - Gerry Martin of Madawaska is about to embark on a new career, and the 57-year old former Fraser Papers veteran employee of 29 years is literally going places.

Martin was one of the dozens of Fraser employees who, this summer, accepted an early retirement offer from the company in the wake of the shutdown of two papermaking machines at the company's Madawaska mill. On November 2nd, two months after his final week as day foreman in the shipping department at Fraser, Martin will graduate from the Commercial Driving Academy at Northern Maine Community College – and the offers of employment are already pouring in.

“There are people calling our instructor here at NMCC everyday for drivers – none of us will have problems finding a job,” said Martin. “I have spoken with a number of trucking firms in the Valley and have been told to give them a call back as soon as I graduate. They are especially anxious to hire drivers who have gone through the professional program at NMCC. The Commercial Driving Academy here has a very good reputation. The firms I have spoken with about going into the field highly recommended the NMCC program.”

For Martin, becoming a commercial truck driver is as much about pursuing a life-long dream he has shared with Carol, his wife of 28 years, as it is a new career opportunity. The two have always wanted to travel and see other parts of the country.

The downsizing at Fraser, coupled with a major health issue that Carol is currently facing and the subsequent desire to spend more time with family, convinced Martin that the time was right for a change.

Determined, Martin took the first official step toward his new life on August 15, a fateful and fitting day for a man proud of his Acadian and Franco-American roots given it is recognized worldwide as the national Acadian holiday, to pay homage to the historic triumph over tragedy of the Acadian people.

August 15 was also the day of two important sessions in Madawaska. The first was a late afternoon meeting at Madawaska High School where Martin and other Fraser employees learned they could apply for Trade Adjustment Assistance monies to defray the expenses of education and training for a new career. Immediately upon leaving that meeting, Martin went downtown to Café de la Place, where NMCC officials were hosting a community information night for Valley residents.

“I had previously been made somewhat familiar with the driving academy through a brochure someone had given me, but I wanted to learn more, so I attended the info night. There I talked with Dennis Dyer and was very impressed. Although I was nervous about the program, as it had been many years since I had regularly been in a classroom, he immediately made me feel very comfortable and we kept in touch,” said Martin.

Dennis Dyer is the lead instructor and program coordinator for NMCC’s Commercial Driving Academy. He has been a CDL instructor for over 10 years, and has worked closely on numerous occasions with people like Martin, who are turning to truck driving as a new career later in life.

“The statistics for this program show that the highest numbers of our students are in the 41-50 year old category. They come here for a career change, because of a life circumstance like a lay-off or to fulfill a dream they have always had to learn to drive an 18 wheeler. These students do very well in the class and are usually the top pick for employers because they have a solid work history and the determination to succeed at this new career. They are generally calmer when they are behind the wheel and having them in the classroom always adds a perspective to the class that a 22 year old can’t – they have life experience,” said Dyer.

For his part, Martin is quick to point out that any initial apprehension about becoming a student again quickly turned to comfort and growing confidence as he began both his classroom learning experience and on-the-range and on-the-road training behind the wheel of the 18-wheeler.

“This has been a new experience. It has been a challenge, yet enjoyable. The classroom atmosphere was laid back but structured. The instruction was superb. Any questions or concerns brought up were addressed immediately. The instructors have been wonderful. Their patience is top notch and ‘safety first’ is stressed at all times,” said Martin. “I have nothing but positive things to say about NMCC. From day one I was welcomed – even by the students who knew I was old enough to be their father. It has just been such a great experience.”

The soon-to-be professional commercial driver is quick to point out that he passed his recent commercial driver permit exam with flying colors.

“I don’t think my classmates and I would have passed had we not taken the class,” said Martin.

Their permits in hand, Martin and his fellow classmates are now out on the road with their instructors and with the end of the eight-week program in sight, it is time to look ahead.

“I’m looking to work part-time to supplement the family income, but, more importantly, I’m looking forward to traveling and seeing the country while getting paid to do it. On longer trips when I have a lay-over, I plan to take Carol along and we can check out the sites,” said Martin.

The state-licensed Commercial Driving Academy at NMCC teaches students how to handle a Class A commercial vehicle safely and efficiently with hands-on experience on the driving range and on the road.

Classroom instruction covers areas essential to professional drivers, including logbooks, trip planning, and in-service air brake adjusting. In addition, students are offered the opportunity to earn additional endorsements such as hazardous materials, tank vehicle and double/triple trailer, which make them even more marketable in the workforce.

As an additional benefit for participants in the Commercial Driving Academy, students are now being offered the opportunity to reside on-campus and purchase a meal plan in the college dining hall during the eight-week program at a modest additional cost.

“Other driving schools in Maine are charging \$6,000 or more for this training. At \$3,495 we are indeed a lower cost option and having on-campus housing now available has helped us accommodate those from other parts of Maine and beyond who realize that being a professional driver is a good career choice,” said Dyer. “Good paying jobs are out there for anyone who has a CDL and wants to work.”

The two upcoming eight-week day sessions of NMCC’s Commercial Driving Academy will begin on November 19, 2007 and January 28, 2008 respectively. An evening and weekend course offering to accommodate individuals who cannot participate in the day program due to current employment or other circumstances will begin on October 30 and run through March 29.

The day sessions run Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. through 4:30 p.m. The evening and weekend session is held on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 5:30 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. and Saturdays between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

For more information on the Commercial Driving Academy, contact the NMCC Continuing Education Division at 768-2768.

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Gerry Martin, who accepted an early retirement package from Fraser Papers this summer, will officially begin his new career as a Commercial Truck Driver after he graduates from the Commercial Driving Academy at Northern Maine Community College on November 2.