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**HIGHWAYS TO WELCOME TRUCKING SCHOOL GRADUATES**  
*A.C.E. project paves way for new career path through unique partnerships*



A.C.E. program participants and Carolina Trucking Academy graduates (clockwise from left) Antwan Turner, Joshua Arrington, Patricia Arrington, trainer Wayne Gilbreath and Randall Butler.

Joblink Case Manager Bill Evans sits between A.C.E. participants Tamika Bynum (left) and Josh Arrington (right) following a networking session at Employment Security Commission in Roanoke Rapids. Joining them are collaborators Diana Mitchell and Shirley White of REDI (Roanoke Economic Development, Inc.)

RICH SQUARE, N.C. – What has 18 wheels and a smile as wide as the state of North Carolina? You could ask a recent graduate of Carolina Trucking Academy, Patricia Arrington, but she’s probably on the road in the cab of the big rig she’s been driving since completing her training and obtaining her CDL.

Arrington was one of several individuals who participated in the Women’s Economic Equity Project, a statewide initiative locally known as A.C.E. (Achieving Career Excellence) whose purpose is to provide unemployed or underemployed individuals with the right set of skills to meet both the individual and employer needs.

Arrington, along with fellow students Randall Butler, Antwan Turner, and Arrington’s 23 year old son Joshua were the first set of A.C.E. participants to successfully complete the two week intensive truck driving curriculum at Carolina Trucking Academy in Raleigh. Tamika Bynum was only in need of her license at the time others were attending school. She has been successful in obtaining her Class B and is currently searching for opportunities.

“It was a pleasure to be able to point the participants towards a career in the trucking industry,” said Carolina Trucking Academy CEO, Charlie Gray. Gray was one of the many collaborators who partnered with REDI (Roanoke Economic Development, Inc.) to make this project possible.

Connectinc, a nonprofit organization in Battleboro and a major partner in the ACE project, was extremely instrumental in introducing these students to a new career path. In addition to being a network of support services, Connectinc bridges the gap between where individuals and families are and where they need to be. The organization introduces and matches clients with opportunities provided by the Workforce Investment Act.

According to Tameka Bynum, seeing is believing. Bynum found out about A.C.E. from her sister, but didn't believe the program was for real until she attended the first meeting to hear it for herself. "It's real," she said. "The people, the programs, the settings, they're all working. I would recommend A.C.E. to anyone. They really have it together," she said.

"It has been a joy assisting each A.C.E. participant reach their personal career goal," said Connectinc A.C.E. Representative. "I'm continuously seeking new individuals to participate in the program."

Joshua Arrington had doubts about the program in the beginning too. "I didn't believe it either until I took the first step," he said. Arrington obtained his Class B license as a result of his participation in the program, but already has his sights set on following in his mother's footsteps and obtaining his class A. "I have my permit, now it's just a matter of saving up the money," he said.

Bill Evans, one of the case managers with the Employment Security Commission/Joblink at Halifax Community College said he enjoyed working with the participants and felt the partnerships and collaboration worked out very well. "I think this has been a very productive endeavor," he said.

Bynum and Arrington both seem to agree. "All they want is cooperation," said Bynum. "Dedication is what it takes, but that starts with knowing what you want and they help you figure it out. It's just a matter of how bad you want it."

The A.C.E. program is supported by grants from Z. Smith Reynolds and the North Carolina Department of Commerce Division of Workforce Development.

For more information, contact Connectinc at 1-888-927-3230 or Roanoke Economic Development, Inc. at 1-800-433-2236 or visit [www.roanokecenter.org](http://www.roanokecenter.org).