

Trucking shortage could be in store for Ontario, association boss says

BY PATRICK MANGION
Staff Writer

It seems the lure of the open road, catchy CB radio handles and coffee at the finest truck stops has lost much of its appeal in an increasingly high-tech workforce.

But if trucking continues to fall out of favour as a career, it could be harder to get your favourite products on store shelves. And, in the long haul, consumers will pay the price.

If a truck driver shortage in Ontario isn't at the crisis stage yet, it isn't far off, said David Bradley, president of the Ontario Trucking Association.

Citing a federal government study calling for 80,000 to 90,000 new truck drivers in the province within the next five years, Mr. Bradley said a driver shortage is the biggest issue facing the industry today.

"Even if the study was only half right, we'd virtually have to replace our entire workforce by 2008. It's not going to happen," he said.

In the United States, where some goods are unnecessarily sitting in warehouses, demand for truck drivers has already reached a flashpoint and Ontario is "perilously close," Mr. Bradley said.

"There's no silver bullet. It's going to take a lot of little things to make a dent," Mr. Bradley said. "(Truck driving) isn't viewed as being particularly sexy."

It has been a long fall from late 1980s, when government deregulation helped create a thriving trucking industry in the province.

But, today, despite industry efforts to make the profession more appealing to young people, attrition and not enough new drivers threatens to strip bare the ranks of Ontario's 100,000 truck drivers.

It could mean higher prices are on the way for consumers since as much as 90 per cent of goods in the province are transported by freight trucks.

Bob Morley has been a truck driver for 16 years. A shortage of drivers will force shippers and receivers to pay more for transportation, he said.

"Anyone who is not willing to pay will have to wait," said Mr. Morley, a member of the Road Knights team.

Veteran members of the nine-driver team act as ambassadors for the industry, including attending career fairs and speaking to high school students about the profession.

Misinformation has turned many prospective young truck drivers away and more education will be needed to address that, Mr. Morley said.

"A lot of people don't want to do the

lifestyle. But they don't understand what it takes. You can go out there and make a reasonable salary and be home every night. Or you can make a lot of money being a long distance driver," he said.

Government has a role to play in helping an industry vital to the economy, Mr. Bradley said.

"Truck drivers aren't deemed skilled workers. Intellectual snobbery pervades immigration policy in Canada," Mr. Bradley said. "We can get strippers into the country, but not more truck drivers."

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PAGE 1 - DEFERRED PAYMENT
COPY READS: Do not pay for 12 months on Store Purchases of \$200 or more.
SHOULD READ: Do not pay for 12 months on Centro Supreme 4-Burner Stainless Steel Barbecues, 85-1277-4/1283-8

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Cnote D131 insert to DE331 - All zones

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