



# TEAMSTERS LOCAL 710 MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

**YRC: VIRGINIA CLARK**

MONDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2014

## Local 710 at Work: Driver Shortage Widens Career Lane for Female Long-Haul Truckers

### Chicago Sun-Times Profiles Local 710 Long-Haul Driver Virginia Clark

OCTOBER 11, 2014 | SUN-TIMES STAFF — The path to financial security for Virginia Clark came from behind the wheel of a semi. It's a route the long-haul driver would like to see more women pursue in a field that's in the grips of a driver shortage, industry representatives say.

Clark is one of the 5.2 percent of women semi-truck drivers in the U.S., a career where pay varies widely and that women say offers opportunity amid roadblocks.

The industry is short 30,000 truckers nationwide, and that's expected to grow to more than 200,000 in the next decade, Ellen Voie, president and chief executive of the Women in Trucking Association, said. The group was founded to address obstacles and encourage more women to enter the field.

"I was just fascinated with the big trucks and looking for a better way to take care of my family; that's what got me into it," said Clark, 53, who earns a six-figure salary.

For the past 20 years, she has worked for YRC Worldwide out of its Chicago Heights terminal.

The Merrillville, Indiana, resident previously drove for Greyhound. Before that she tried construction.

"[Construction] was too physically hard for me," she

said. "I tried doing office work. I just couldn't make the kind of money I needed to make to support my family."

She was steered into the driving career.

"My mother kept telling me that it would be something good for me to look into it," she said. "She and my father were willing to help me take care of my kids.

"It was interesting, and I liked it. It was a challenge."

Over a 12-year period, Clark drove for several small companies. One day she spotted a billboard that Roadway Express, now merged into YRC, was hiring union drivers.

She applied, got the job and watched her pay jump from \$10,000 a year to \$68,000.

"Now I'm over \$100,000 a year," Clark said.

Voie said pay varies depending on what you're hauling and driving. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median annual pay is \$38,200.

Women and men face safety issues on the job. Drivers have had their vehicles broken into and have been robbed.

For women, sexual misconduct also is a problem. The work requires on-the-job training, and faced with a

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## | Female Long-Haul Truckers, cont'd

shortage of female trainers, student drivers typically are on the road working in tight quarters for weeks at a time with male trainers who are, in essence, strangers.

“So you’re actually sleeping in a bunk bed situation on a truck with somebody that you don’t know,” said Desiree Wood, who was a driver for five years but stopped to found REAL Women in Trucking, a support and advocacy group. “You have a lot of problems. It gets ugly. Women have been raped. They’ve been beat up.”

“Harassment, although it’s not as prevalent, it’s still an issue,” Voie said. Her organization has an anti-harassment employment guide that it gives to companies who are members “so that they can have an expectations exchange with the drivers and describe harassment and let the drivers know what to do if they experience it.”

Women looking to enter the field should do their homework checking out schools and carriers, Voie said, noting that it’s important to ask if there are women in leadership roles and see if recruiting ads show women.

“Talk to other drivers,” Voie said. “Make sure that the company’s culture appreciates women.”

Clark said her dealings with men in the field have been overwhelmingly positive.

“We’ve got the guys out there that think that women should be at home barefoot and pregnant, but the vast majority of them, they’re willing to help you if you need help,” Clark said. “I learned a lot from the men. They were willing to teach.”

Voie said the industry’s image has kept more women from considering the work.

“Women just don’t picture themselves driving a truck, and we’re trying to correct that,” she said. “You don’t have to be mechanically minded. You don’t have to be big and burly. There’s so much automation and technology in the job and in the truck these days. Everything from automated transmissions and technology for cranking dollies.”

As part of her organization’s efforts to help attract more women to the field, Women in Trucking is teaming with the Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana in hosting a “Trucks are for Girls” event Monday at Olive-Harvey College in Chicago. The event, which targets girls ages 7 to 12, will give girls a chance to drive a simulator and climb inside a big rig while learning about careers in the industry. Outreach is key, Voie said.

Who makes good trucker candidates?

“You have to like being isolated,” Wood said. “You have to like your own company, be adaptable and very low maintenance.”

Clark said you also must be prepared for the long work schedules. “I go to work on Wednesday at 1 in the afternoon, and I finish up on Monday night,” she said. “I’m off all day Tuesday and then do it all over again on Wednesday.”

But Clark loves the job. Besides the pay, the appeal for many is the independence and opportunity to travel the country.

As Wood put it: “The feeling of freedom is awesome.”

*This story originally appeared in the Chicago Sun-Times on October 11, 2014.*

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