

Machine Operator Course At NC Community College

This spring Pitt Community College (PCC) in Greenville, North Carolina will launch a 12-week course to train logging equipment operators. Graduates of the program will receive a certificate from the North Carolina Association of Professional Loggers (NCAPL) and qualify as an entry-level equipment operator.

The program is a collaboration of PCC's Continuing Education Div., the NC Agromedicine Institute (NCAI) and NCAPL. Funding for the program will be provided primarily through grants awarded to PCC by the NC Rural Economic Development Center and the NCAI by the Golden LEAF Foundation. The grants, plus additional funds provided by PCC, will cover curriculum development, instructors' salaries, student tuition and personal protective equipment.

"North Carolina has lost approximately 30% of its logging workforce within the last five years. Even with good markets, equipment availability and professional management, the shortage of qualified operators will limit the growth of logging businesses in the near future," says Doug Duncan, NCAPL Executive Director. "We need a properly trained workforce with the focus on qualified equipment operators."

The training is designed to provide the technical and practical knowledge necessary to become a skilled operator. The course will also include training on good work and life skills and behavior. "Our ultimate goal is for our students to find productive work and be able to feed their families," says Dr. David Lusk, PCC Dean of Continuing Education. "We know that for many of them just learning how to operate the equipment won't be enough. They need to learn basic skills such as money management and how to interview for a job." According to Lusk, the goal for the first year is to conduct the training twice and produce 25 to 50 trained graduates, with a minimum of 25 employed within three months of course completion.

Caterpillar Forest Products is donating \$1.25 million in equipment, including a Cat 525C skidder, 573

wheel-type feller-buncher and 559 DS loader package with pull-through delimeter and ground saw.

"Traditionally, equipment operators have learned on the job, which can leave gaps in what they need to know to be a good operator and steward of the environment. We are supporting this program because it is designed to cover everything that a skilled operator should know in addition to running the machine—working safely, taking care of the equipment, taking care of the environment and how to work most efficiently and productively," comments Michael R. Duncan, Caterpillar Forest Products Industry Manager. "Attracting and training equipment operators is critical to the survival and expansion of the forestry industry and this program is an important step in that direction."

Cat dealer Gregory Poole Equipment Co. will maintain the equipment through its Greenville branch. Gregory Poole personnel will also participate in portions of the training related to equipment maintenance.

Students will be recruited from tobacco-dependent, economically distressed, and/or rural counties in North Carolina; however, anyone 18 years or older, including out-of state residents, may apply. Applicants will be screened to ensure they have the basic skills needed to complete the training and perform the work of a forestry equipment operator. PCC will develop the screening by profiling current operators to determine what level of proficiency is required in four areas: math, reading for information, locating for information and observation. Because they are operating heavy equipment, students also will be subject to drug testing prior to being accepted into the program.

NCAPL is currently accepting applicants for two full-time positions connected with the training program. A training director and logging supervisor will be hired with salary and benefits commensurate with education and experience. Interested persons should contact Doug Duncan at contact@ncloggers.com for additional information.