

David Scrivner (left) and Michael Peters are two of the 24 technicians who have completed Penske Truck Leasing's technician certification program.

Certifiably **QUALIFIED**

Penske offers technicians a chance to prove their knowledge, skills **By Avery Vise**

David Scrivner has worked for Penske Truck Leasing for 16 years — 10 as a Lead Technician in Lexington, Ky. It was a career he had long wanted, and he joined Penske right after he graduated from Nashville Auto Diesel College. Scrivner even had a family connection to Penske; his father had worked for many years as a truck driver for a company that leased trucks from Penske.

Michael Peters joined the military at 17 right out of technical school and went to work for Penske after his service ended. With three years at the company, he's now a Technician 1 in the Louisville, Ky., facility.

Despite their different backgrounds and paths, Scrivner and Peters have something important in common besides being Penske employees. They are among only 24 technicians who have completed Penske's technician certification program (TCP). But while certification always will be a remarkable achievement, its ranks won't remain exclusive forever; nearly 650 are enrolled in the TCP as the company rolls the relatively new program out to more regions.

For Scrivner, the motivation to

achieve certification was simple and straightforward: "Anytime you can learn something to help you out, that's always a good thing." Even though Scrivner had completed many hours of training in the past and had a decade of experience as a Lead Technician, he found the certification process to be a valuable refresher course. He also admits that a cash bonus for completing the program didn't hurt either.

Peters points out that just because you knew the technology a couple of years ago doesn't mean you know it now. "Things change so fast, if you don't keep up, you'll be lost," he says. Peters hopes certification will be a step toward a supervisory position in his shop, and likes the fact that Penske has offered a clear path toward proving his knowledge and skills. "A lot of people I know don't have an opportunity like this. You gotta take it."

The next level

Penske has had a strong technician training program for years. Aside from the certification program, each Penske technician typically receives 40 hours of training annually, says Mike Hasinec, vice president of maintenance

support. "Our training has grown and become enhanced over time," Hasinec says. For example, Penske has worked with suppliers to provide online training tools and now offers 70 Web-based modules to its technicians. But despite a wealth of training resources, Penske's training program remained somewhat unstructured until recently. "We didn't have anything formalized," says Ken Coats, senior vice president of maintenance services.

In December 2004, the maintenance leadership team decided that a TCP would add more structure and clarity to Penske's training efforts, says Holly Clark, maintenance training administrator for Penske. Clark and other members of the maintenance training management team spent more than a year developing the curriculum and other elements of the TCP. In September 2006, Penske began a pilot demonstration of the program in two of its 16 service areas. The program now is finalized, and Penske is rolling it out nationwide one region at a time.

The TCP covers three levels of training, from Level 3 through Level 1. Each level includes hands-on Web-based and classroom training on

internal policies and procedures — such as Penske's 101-step preventive maintenance process for medium- and heavy-duty trucks — and truck- and component-specific maintenance practices. The program also includes a distance learning curriculum developed with and conducted for Penske by Penn Foster, a nationwide career education school. The training becomes more rigorous depending on the level: For example, the Level 3 Penn Foster curriculum includes introduction to diesel mechanics and engine fundamentals, while Level 1 includes advanced steering and suspension and advanced brake systems.

Completing the certification program clearly will give a technician a major leg up in career advancement, although it's no guarantee of a promotion in a specific situation as such decisions involve more than an applicant's technical skills and knowledge. But certification does come with a definite financial benefit: Technicians completing Level 3 certification receive a \$500 bonus, while Level 2 certification brings \$600 and Level 1 is worth \$700.

"Technicians are the lifeblood of what we do, and for them, the technician certification process is a career development tool," says Mark Oliver, senior vice president of field maintenance. "There is an incentive financially, and the TCP program represents an opportunity for upward mobility if they choose to participate."

For many technicians, however,

enrolling in the TCP is not really about the bonus or even career advancement, Coots says, adding that a large number of technicians pursuing certification are already at Technician 1. "For many, it's about the pride of achievement."

Certifying the certification

This summer, Penske announced that its TCP program had achieved a unique milestone: Certification by the National Institute of Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) as a Continuing Automotive Service Education (CASE) program. Penske is the first — and so far only — truck leasing, rental and logistics provider to earn CASE certification for technician training. Industry suppliers and dealers had obtained CASE certification, but no fleet had done so.

"The automotive community is proud of Penske's commitment to a quality in-house technician training program," says ASE President Tim Zilke.

Penske officials learned about the opportunity for CASE certification while the company was still conducting the initial pilot of its TCP. Generally speaking, ASE certifies technicians themselves, but the CASE program certifies entire training programs that might be offered by companies, organizations and institutions. CASE program standards address the training provider's process of developing and delivering training; it doesn't pre-




Anthony Jones (white shirt), Penske district service manager for Louisville, Ky., observes as technicians conduct a preventive maintenance task during a training session in July.

scribe specific program content.

Clark began working on CASE certification in June 2007, a process that ultimately took about a year. Just preparing the documentation and application took eight months.

Penske decided to pursue CASE certification for a couple of reasons. For starters, executives and managers thought it would be useful to have an independent group examine Penske's program, Coots says. And then there were the technician recruiting and business development benefits of being the first fleet to obtain such certification.

Oliver believes that customers will recognize the CASE certification as further evidence that Penske's maintenance meets stringent criteria. "We believe this will lead to increased trust and confidence from our customers, now that we're now formally certified as a quality provider of maintenance services," he says.

And it's about the technicians themselves, Coots adds. "To provide techs with leading-edge training that keeps pace with the ever-changing engine and vehicle technologies is an invaluable asset for recruiting and retaining the best-in-class talent we need to serve our customers and their fleets." 

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