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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Job Placement Opportunities Available to Wheeler Correctional Facility Diesel Truck Maintenance Students***Owner of Middle Georgia Freightliner-Isuzu Sees Value in Partnership*

**ALAMO, GA. – SEPTEMBER 12, 2018** – Earlier this month Heath Wood, General Manager of Middle Georgia Freightliner-Isuzu in Macon, Ga., visited with the current students and previous graduates of the Wheeler Correctional Facility Diesel Truck Maintenance program. He was intrigued with the curriculum of the program provided through Oconee Fall Line Technical College (OFTC), and he liked what he saw enough to begin partnering with the facility and technical college to offer job placement for the inmates upon release.

"I was impressed with the knowledge and skills that these inmates obtain in the program," said Wood. "There is a desperate shortage of skilled and trained diesel mechanics, and if someone has the right ability and attitude, hiring them is a win-win for everyone."

During his visit, Wood met with the students to discuss work requirements and details about the job and the company. Salaries for entry-level positions in this field begin around $30,000 per year and increase based on knowledge and ability. Wheeler Correctional Facility is excited about this new relationship with Middle Georgia Freightliner and says this will help continue to motivate students in the program to learn as much as they can.

"Most of the individuals in our care will be eventually released back to their communities, and no matter the cause of their incarceration, it is our responsibility to rehabilitate them and prepare them to successfully re-enter society," said Heather Kersey, Principal. "We want to make sure they have the knowledge and job skills needed to be productive citizens and give them that second chance to do the right things. These programs are an excellent tool to help motivate and change lives behind these walls and help ensure that they can get a decent job and do not return to prison."

Wheeler Correctional Facility intends to join with other businesses in the state to help find quality employment for their offenders upon release. This program at Wheeler and Coffee Correctional Facility in Nicholls, Ga., supports Governor Nathan Deal's "High Demand Career Initiative," which focuses on teaching the skills needed by industries with worker shortages.

"OFTC is excited to enhance the existing partnerships with CoreCivic and Middle Georgia Freightliner,” shared Roy Williams, Dean of OFTC’s Trades and Industrial Programs. “The need for a trained workforce in the heavy truck repair field is critical, and this partnership will benefit everyone involved."

It also illustrates CoreCivic's support for re-entry services through innovative education and training partnerships like the one with Oconee Fall Line Technical College at Wheeler.

"We know that education and training dramatically increase the odds of success after release," said CoreCivic president and CEO Damon Hininger. “We are committed to providing new opportunities that will, hopefully, change lives."

The idea of giving second chances to the inmates at Wheeler resonates with Wood. Friday morning February 2, 2018, his family's 50-year old company experienced a devastating fire that destroyed the parts department, warehouse, and full-service truck department. Later that day, a new site less than one-half mile away was identified. On Monday, February 5, they were back in business, thanks to the efforts of a lot of friends, associates, employees, and the community.

"Our top priority will always be hiring people who can do the job right because our customers' livelihoods depend on keeping their trucks rolling," said Wood. "When you experience what we have this year, seeing all the people who worked so hard to get us back on our feet, I feel like you have to give an opportunity to anyone who has paid their debt to society, can do the job, and wants to make their lives better."

**Captions (Photos attached)**

**(Speaking to Group):** Middle Georgia Freightliner-Isuzu General Manager Heath Wood explains employment opportunities available to the students enrolled in Diesel Truck Maintenance classes at Wheeler Correctional Facility in Alamo, Ga.

**(Officials):** Inmates at Wheeler Correctional Facility (WCF) have the chance to leave prison with vocational skills that will help them build a better life, thanks to the collaboration between business leaders, Oconee Fall Line Technical College (OFTC) and WCF staff. From Left: WCF Warden Vance Laughlin, WCF/OFTC Instructor Jeffrey Wyatt, Middle Georgia Freightliner-Isuzu General Manager Heath Wood, OFTC Instructor Brent Redfern , WCF Principal Heather Kersey, Instructor Supervisor Al Tippett.

**(17-Working):** Students in the Diesel Truck Maintenance classes at Wheeler can apply their classroom knowledge by gaining hands-on experience working on a heavy truck.

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