



Remodelers: Getting Certified

by Wendy Talarico

Getting certified by one of the remodeling trade associations is one way for remodelers to differentiate themselves from the rest of the pack. While qualifying for the certifications isn't difficult, the process can be time-consuming and costly. But earning a professional trade designation not only gives you an edge over competitors, it also contributes to the industry's credibility.

Many trade organizations, including the National Kitchen and Bath Association, the American Society of Interior Designers, and the American Institute of Architects, offer trade certifications in remodeling-related fields. But unless your business is fairly specialized, you'll probably look at two principle sources for certification: the National Association of Home Builders' (NAHB) Remodelers Council and the National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI).

Certified Graduate Remodeler

Those who have successfully completed the NAHB Remodelers Council program become Certified Graduate Remodelers, or CGRs. According to Dickson Clements, CGR program manager, the program emphasizes business education, since poor business management is the main reason most remodeling firms fail.

Applicants, who may or may not be Remodelers Council members, first fill out a "Professional Profile" application and submit it to the council along with three letters of recommendation from professional colleagues. The profile asks for general company information as well as information about the applicant's educational and professional background. Applicants must have at least two years of experience in the remodeling field.

The form is graded by officials with the Remodelers Council based on the applicant's abilities and experience. Depending on the grade, the candidate may be required to take three, six, or nine courses at the Graduate Builders Institute (GBI), part of the NAHB's educational arm. GBI offers courses around the country. Remodelers have three years

after their profile is evaluated to complete their educational requirements. They can choose from business courses, including estimating, computer applications, and construction contracts and law, as well as remodeling-specific courses, such as sales and marketing for remodelers and design/build.

After completing the courses, the remodeler signs the CGR "Code of Ethics" and receives all kinds of marketing items, such as an enameled gold lapel pin, foil decals for their stationary, and, of course, a certificate suitable for framing. To keep their certification current, CGRs must earn three credits of continuing education every three years.

Certification costs are less for members than for nonmembers. (To become a Remodelers Council member, you must join the local home builders association.)

- Application fee: \$50/\$100 (member/nonmember)
- Each GBI course: \$150
- Certification fee (includes marketing kit): \$125/\$225
- Recertification fee (every three years): \$100/\$150

Certified Remodeler

NARI members and nonmembers who've been in the remodeling business for at least five years may earn the Certified Remodeler (CR) designation after completing a lengthy application called the "Qualification Matrix," submitting an affidavit saying they adhere to NARI's principles for business operation, and taking an eight-hour written examination.

Like the Remodelers Council, NARI promotes remodeler education; the test serves as an inducement to learn, says Janis Hawkins, manager of certification and education for the association. Remodelers often form study groups that meet two or three times per month to prepare for the exam.

CR candidates may also purchase the *Examination Study Guide Manual*, a book compiled by the University of Illinois to help applicants study and review for the test. The book contains five sections covering the various aspects of remodeling, from business practices to mathematics

to interior finishes.

The test itself covers business management, codes, safety, site planning, carpentry, and other subjects. Questions are multiple choice or essay. Those who successfully complete the test and pay the certification fee receive a marketing package to help promote their new designation.

To become a NARI member you must fill out an application through one of the organization's local chapters. Dues range from \$150 to \$400 per year, depending on which chapter you join. CR costs are as follows:

- Application fee: \$40/\$80 (member/nonmember)
- Examination fee: \$200/\$325
- Certification fee (includes marketing kit): \$100/\$200
- *Examination Study Guide Manual*: \$95/\$195
- Recertification fee (each year): \$75

Is It Worthwhile?

All this just for some initials after your name? Some remodelers may see it that way, but others say there are real advantages. Jonas Carnemark, president of Carnemark Systems and Design in Takoma Park, Md., says he learned a lot in the process of earning his CR designation. "Through our study group, we learned about things you might not run across elsewhere as a remodeler," he says. "We discussed things like concrete additives, business accounting, electrical work, and OSHA requirements."

While the public may not be able to tell a CR from an uncertified remodeler, Carnemark says remodelers are aware of the distinction. "The public may not know it isn't some hokey thing, but there's a certain amount of respect when you deal with other remodelers," he says.

Dave Petrisek, president of Dutch Quality Inc., a remodeling firm and custom cabinet manufacturer in Lancaster, Pa., says, "The real value [of becoming a CGR] comes in meeting the other people at the courses. Just to hear they were struggling with the same issues and to learn what they've done to cope is very helpful."

Petrisek makes a point to explain the certification to clients and potential customers. All of the company's plans, business cards, and so on bear the CGR logo. "It helps people to perceive us as professionals," he says. "In this business, any edge we can get is of great value."

For more information, contact the NAHB Remodelers Council at 15th and M Streets, N.W., Washington, DC 20005; 800/368-5242; or NARI at 1901 No. Moore St., Suite 808, Arlington, VA 22209; 703/276-7600. ■

