

CERTIFIED

THE ULTIMATE PRIZE: NCARB CERTIFICATION

Some recently licensed architects add one more step to launching their careers after getting a degree, completing the Intern Development Program (IDP), passing the Architect Registration Examination® (ARE®), and becoming licensed. They become NCARB certified.

One of the recognized achievements of an architect's career, an NCARB Certificate makes an architect eligible to gain licensure and then work in other jurisdictions in the United States (subject to additional requirements in some states). Some view it as the ultimate prize.

"Personally, it has been a validation that all of my hard work is recognized," said Erin Carraher, AIA, NCARB, LEED AP, of Blacksburg, VA. Carraher, who obtained certification five months after licensure. She is licensed in New York and Virginia today and plans to add West Virginia to the list soon.

New architects have the advantage in that—if they have NCARB Records and have kept their Records up to date—the switch to certification can mean saving on the application fee and on Certificate renewals for the first three years. NCARB

waives the \$1,500 application fee as long as their Records remain active through the internship, examination, and licensure processes.

"The NCARB Certificate facilitates reciprocal registration in other jurisdictions. This makes it especially valuable for recently licensed architects since it's impossible to know where job opportunities may be and they may want to apply for jobs outside the jurisdictions in which they sat for the ARE and originally became licensed," said Lenore Lucey, FAIA, NCARB, CAE, Chief Executive Officer.

TAKING THAT OBVIOUS NEXT STEP TOWARD MOBILITY

"To me, it was the next logical step in the registration process," said Seth Oakley, NCARB, LEED AP. "The hard part was over, and if all it took was a bit of paperwork and some time, it seemed like an easy task to complete."

Oakley became licensed in January 2010 and was certified in July. The project manager at M+A Architects, Dublin, OH, had dreamed of being an architect since age four.

CERTIFICATION

SETH OAKLEY
LICENSED: JANUARY 2010
CERTIFIED: SIX MONTHS LATER (OH)
AGE: 31



MELISSA VITTERI SIEG
LICENSED: MARCH 2010
CERTIFIED: FOUR MONTHS LATER (OH)
AGE: 29



ERIN CARRAHER
LICENSED: MARCH 2010
CERTIFIED: FIVE MONTHS LATER (NY, VA)
AGE: 31



While the decision to become certified was a simple one, the advantage he perceived was far-reaching. “My rationale is that of maximizing value to my firm and my career. Anything that I can do to maximize my flexibility to practice within my firm and my career seems important,” he said.

That is especially important because of the realities of the profession today and the prospects of change in the future. “I think architecture is no longer a regional profession as technology and communication allow us to participate around the world relatively easily,” he said.

REALIZING THE VALUE EARLIER INSTEAD OF LATER

Melissa Vitteri Sieg, AIA, NCARB, LEED AP, describes a similar reasoning to get her certification, and a comparable estimation of its value.

While she said the process was a natural transition requiring nominal effort, the payoff was clear. It gave her “a sense of validation”—an acknowledgement not only by her own state, but potentially other states, of her achievements to earn a professional degree, fulfill the internship, and complete the ARE.

Sieg, an architect at the firm of Trinity Health Group, Westerville, OH, has already participated in health care design

work involving several states in her young career, so certification made a lot of sense. She became certified in July 2010, just four months after licensure.

“We have a national client base and have completed projects in 26 states,” said Sieg. “Several people in my firm are NCARB certified. NCARB is essential for qualifying us as professionals in these states, and to help us continue serving our clients.”

The path that many architects take—getting certified a few years later after licensure—did not appeal to her. She knew her Record was active and in good standing, and was comfortable with the NCARB process, having gone through the IDP and completed the ARE.

FOR THE RECORD

One in every three architects attains an NCARB Certificate, and that decision tends to come in the first half of a person's career.

Average age when certified:

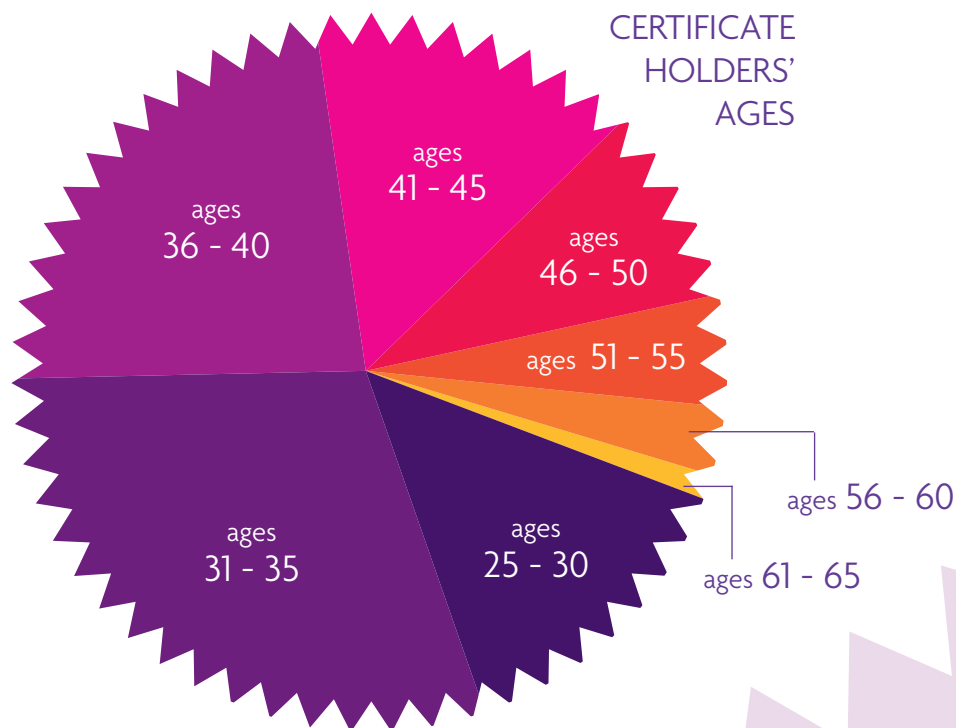
38

Total number of architects (54 jurisdictions):

105,312

Total number of active Certificate holders:

38,287



“Reopening an inactive Record and applying for certification is more expensive in the long run,” she said.

ANTICIPATING THOSE CAREER CHANGES

Erin Carraher made her decision based on the need for mobility when relocation is not only possible, but probable. Only five months transpired between when she was licensed and when she was certified.

“Soon after becoming licensed in New York, I decided to move to Virginia where I had the opportunity to teach in the architecture program at Virginia Tech, as well as practice in a small firm,” she said. “I wanted to become licensed in Virginia as well as New York and had heard from colleagues that NCARB certification was the best way to go about pursuing reciprocity.”

Carraher is a project manager at OnSite Architecture in Blacksburg, VA. She also teaches digital media and a design studio

as an adjunct professor at Virginia Tech in the School of Architecture and Design. “I could have applied for licensure in Virginia directly, but decided that because I may end up at a university or a firm in a different state in the future that it would be a good investment to pursue certification as a part of the reciprocity application process,” she said.

FOR THE UNDECIDEDS

The trio also offers a few insights for young architects who have not yet seriously considered taking that next step.

Oakley’s advice is not to be misled by the fact that certification is an uncommon designation in the profession. With only about one-third of licensed architects holding active Certificates, “It is respected and always considered during hiring and reviews,” he said.

“You don’t have to get NCARB certified if your projects are and will continue to be located within the boundaries of your state,” Sieg said. “However, if there is a

chance you [or any of your clients] will expand beyond your current borders, it’s better to be prepared than not.”

Carraher believes the advantages for young architects clearly outweigh almost any reason to bypass certification.

“I would highly recommend pursuing certification to anyone who is interested, if not for any reason other than to show your commitment to the highest levels of professionalism in the field,” she said. “Architecture, both in practice and in education, is a particularly competitive field these days, and I think NCARB certification is another way to help make you stand out from the crowd.” **DC**