

on the free exchange of information with horror. They prefer to filter and interpret the facts for us by providing only THEIR opinions.

Threats to free speech and our other freedoms aren't new. We've had them before and we've defeated them. Let's do it again. Write your representatives. Let the FCC know how you feel. Talk to your friends and neighbors. It's called People Power!

Like I said, I was wrong in the '80's, but I think I'm right on this one. Hind sight tends to be 20/20.

Terri Marinucci New Operations Director

In July, Terri Marinucci became NARTE's operations director, replacing Laura Holmberg.

Laura, who has been with NARTE for over 10 years, left the position upon the arrival of her baby boy, Cazimir John Holmberg. She will continue to be on NARTE's staff as a part-time accountant.



Before accepting this position, Terri held the position of Exam Program Coordinator for NARTE. Prior to joining NARTE's staff, she worked as the licensing department coordinator and office manager for The Sanger Organization which was sold to Dearborn Financial. In addition to running the Insurance Pre-Licensing Department, she managed staff, including the

Continuing Education Department and the Production Department.

Congratulations Laura, and welcome aboard Terri!

What is the Value of Certification?

By Russell V. Carstensen, PE, NCE
NARTE Executive Director

A while back a person asked me what the value of certification was. He was trying to determine if his

company should continue to subsidize certification and renewal for their employees. He actually posed two questions – what is the value of certification and is there more to renewal than just a monetary commitment? The following is the essence of my response.

Value to Self and Employer

I perceive the first question to be a request for a statement as to the value of NARTE certification. First, let me state that NARTE is a nonprofit professional association. NARTE certification programs are accredited by the International Certification Accreditation Council (ICAC). ICAC certification surveillance requirements will be discussed later in this note.

To be NARTE-certified, individuals must have proven expertise that is verified by personal references. Our certified members have years of field experience (the number of years vary, depending on the field of certification) and have met stringent requirements for education and training, work experience, supervisory and peer endorsements and examination. NARTE certification is truly an objective credential confirming competence in the individual applicant's field. NARTE certification assures a measurable level of expertise and competence. The credibility of NARTE certification has prompted many corporations as well as parts of the U.S. military to mandate or prefer NARTE certification as a prerequisite to employment.

NARTE certification enhances the public image of the company and its technical personnel. NARTE certification offers a reasonable assurance of character and is evidence of willingness to abide by NARTE's honorable and ethical code of conduct. NARTE certification provides a substantial sense of achievement and confidence among employees.

The rigorous NARTE certification criteria prove to employers that certified individuals have the training, experience, discipline and the initiative to get the job done right. Levels of NARTE certification, when used as a benchmark for advancement, serve as a barometer for assessing training requirements and personnel evaluation. At a recent technical symposium I had three individuals report to me that their NARTE certification was the single element that confirmed their selection for their current position.

Surveillance Is More Than Paying Dues

The second question relates to surveillance of the certification after it has been awarded. In the next several paragraphs I will explain why renewal is more than simply meeting a monetary commitment.

Every person who applies for NARTE certification stipulates that they have read and agree to abide by NARTE's code of ethics. Failure to do so could be cause for cancellation of their certification. Thus NARTE feels that applicants are honorable and their word is reliable. There is a disciplinary process for those who are not.

The competency certification awarded by NARTE must be renewed every year. NARTE imposed this requirement specifically to maintain a connection with the certificate holder as a way to monitor their standing. (In the accreditation world this is referred to as "surveillance".) Initially, NARTE required those renewing to provide a letter documenting that they were continuing to practice in their chosen field. That requirement was in place for several years. NARTE received numbers of letters describing projects of general interest. Those authors were invited to expand on their experience by submitting papers for publication in NARTE News. However, a large number of letters simply stated that they were continuing to practice. Another segment did not respond to the request for a letter at all and had to be pursued by staff for confirmation.

At this point only 28 states have a continuing competence requirement as part of the engineer licensing law. For the states that do not have a continuing competence requirement, engineering license renewal is accomplished by payment of the required fees and an absence of complaint against the licensee. NARTE's Board of Directors has embraced the concept that practice demonstrates competence. If a person is not practicing, their skills will atrophy. If a person is not competent, no one will hire them.

NARTE staff examined the renewal situation and the staff time involved in following up on practice confirmation. Staff proposed and I implemented a process asking individuals to sign a line on the renewal form indicating that they were continuing to practice in the field. I felt that this would serve the same purpose and would simplify the renewal process by having all actions related to renewal completed on a single

sheet that was to be returned to NARTE along with payment. This approach has worked reasonably well.

New Standards Applied to Certification

In 2003, ISO Standard 17024, General Requirements for Bodies Operating Certification Systems of Persons, was released. This standard addresses minimum requirements for a certification organization. One of the areas covered is surveillance and re-certification procedure. Paragraph 6.4.1 of the standard states "... The certification body shall define surveillance and re-certification requirements according to the normative document, to ensure that the certified person continues to comply with the current certification requirements...."). For NARTE those requirements included continuation of practice and adherence to the NARTE code of ethics.

As stated earlier, NARTE is accredited by ICAC. In 2004 ISO Standard 17011, Conformity Assessment – General requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies, was issued. NARTE's accreditation agent, ICAC, has elected to adopt ISO 17011 as their standard for accreditation. One of the impacts of this decision is that, beginning in October of 2005, NARTE will be specifically audited for compliance to its requirements for surveillance and re-certification. ICAC does not declare what the surveillance process should be. They simply audit NARTE to see if NARTE did what they said they would do.

It is in NARTE certificate holders' best interest to opt for a simple effective methodology for surveillance and re-certification to assure compliance. Signing the renewal form meets that requirement. Otherwise NARTE would be required to cancel the certificates of non-compliant holders for failure to follow instructions, not for a lack of competence. NARTE would rather not go in that direction.

So it should be evident then that there is value to both the employee and the employer and that value continues over time. NARTE equates experience to competence. People will not continue to hire incompetent practitioners. Continuing employment then is a valid surveillance measure of competence. The fundamental value of certification is the confirmation of competence by an independent third party.