



**Top:** Harford instructors, ICC staff and Harford students who were awarded their IRC certifications, photographed in the lobby of ICC's D.C. headquarters.

**Bottom:** A Harford instructor presents ICC's Sara Yerkes with a T-shirt.

## Harford Technical High School Certifies Students, Earns First ICC School Membership

Harford Technical High School in Bel Air, Maryland, has received an International Code Council high school Membership, thanks to Jim Ellwood.

Ellwood's work at Harford began five years ago. His job was to inspect the progress students had made on their annual Habitat for Humanity construction projects, making sure that what they were building was up to code. However, it quickly became apparent these students were interested in much more than just building. "I'd have kids come up and ask me questions about inspections," Ellwood said. "So I began working more closely with them, explaining why things had to be a certain way."

Many of the students in the other trades taught at Harford received certificates in their fields of study at graduation. "When I saw that kids were getting certificates for cosmetology and landscape architecture,"



Ellwood said, "I thought to myself, 'Why can't we do that for the kids in the construction program?'"

Ellwood, a Plans Examiner with the Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits in Harford County, Maryland, began teaching the *International Residential Code*® (IRC) to students and instructors at Harford, using IRC books and study companions – the same ones code officials use – supplied by the International Code Council (ICC). The study companions go through the code book section by section, with lesson plans and tests included.

"It's all right there, and the ICC provides everything you need to make a curriculum," Ellwood said. One of the benefits of using ICC code books and study guides is that, at the end of the year, the [Maryland Building Officials Association \(MBOA\)](#) actually can certify students – and, so far, several students have been certified. Thus, the IRC Certification Program was born at Harford Tech.

The certification program gives students the opportunity to achieve a proficiency certification in several or all of the trades represented in the IRC: building, plumbing, electrical and mechanical. Ellwood says students also learn how each construction discipline relates to the other. For instance, carpentry students can learn about the principles behind HVAC installa-

tion, and electricians can discover more about plumbing.

"I tell the students that, on the job, you need the right tools – and not just the physical hand tools," he asserted. "Information, knowledge about the codes, those are just as important tools to have."

Ellwood has been a plan reviewer for the MBOA for 10 years. Before that, he worked as a general contractor for 25 years, building residential, commercial and federal buildings.

In December 2010, Jim Ellwood received the MBOA Presidential Award for starting the IRC Certification Program at Harford. At the presentation, he met Sara Yerkes, ICC Senior Vice President, Government Relations. Yerkes was very interested in the program and the fact that the *I-Codes* and study companion formed the curriculum. She invited the students to Washington, D.C., to receive their certificates at ICC headquarters. She also took them on a tour of the first new LEED-certified building constructed in the nation's capital.

During the previous school year, 19 seniors – 50 percent of the Harford senior class in building trades – and 16 juniors had passed their specific vocational proficiency tests and received their certifications from the State of Maryland. The 16 juniors now have the



**Top, left to right: Nelson Ruiz is presented with his IRC Certificate of Achievement from MBOA President Rich Truitt, Jim Ellwood and ICC Senior VP of Government Relations Sara Yerkes.**

**Bottom: ICC instructor John Gibson speaks to MBOA President Rich Truitt, Si Farvardin, ICC-ES and Harford staff and students at the presentation of Certificates of Achievement to students of the IRC certification program at Harford High School.**





opportunity to obtain additional certifications in the three remaining classifications during their final year at Harford Tech.

Beginning with the current school year, the program will expand to include grades 9 through 12, allowing students the chance to obtain all four certifications while in high school. The ultimate goal is to have students successfully pass the IRC residential Inspector's exam prior to graduation.

Currently, the MBOA and the State of Maryland give proficiency certification to the students in the Harford Tech program. In the future, proficiency certification will come directly from the ICC, providing program consistency through all school districts in the country and allowing students to move to any state and still receive the benefits of being an ICC Member.

The Code Council is offering school Memberships for \$150 year and student Memberships for \$25.

Discussions are under way with officials in various technical high schools and college preparatory schools throughout the country who are interested in starting similar programs. York Technical High School in York, Pennsylvania, has committed to starting this program. New Jersey is showing interest, with Code Council Board Member Stephen Jones taking the lead.

By mentoring these students and creating a code-knowledgeable workforce, code officials provide a great service to them and to the community. With the available *I-Code* manuals and the level of instruction provided by skilled instructors, a code official would need to commit to only two or three hours a month to oversee this program.

If you are interested in starting a program in your local school or need additional information, contact Ellwood at [jvellowood@harfordcountymd.gov](mailto:jvellowood@harfordcountymd.gov). **bsj**

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