



Code Officials: Partners in Community Safety and Economic Growth

Young Plans Examiner Enlightens Students about Code Official Career Opportunities

Rebecca Brown remembers this advice while growing up: “It’s important to find a job that makes you happy.”

She knows she’s found it as a code official, and that’s why she’s spreading the news about being a code official to children attending Austin Bailey Elementary School in Summerville, S.C.

Brown, 33, plans reviewer for Dorchester County, S.C., made the presentation in May on residential code safety as her contribution to the International Code Council’s Building Safety Month. By 2018, she hopes to make the presentation to students at 13 elementary schools in her school district and another three elementary schools in a neighboring district.

“Enforcing codes is the invisible profession,” she said. “When we do our jobs right, nothing happens. I really like that saying, because it’s very true.”

As a handout to the Austin Bailey students, Brown renovated an old ICC coloring book. Instead of “Codie the Cougar,” it features “Safety Sam,” “Safety Sara” and “Safety Scott,” who invite their readers to go on “A Safe Home Scavenger Hunt!”

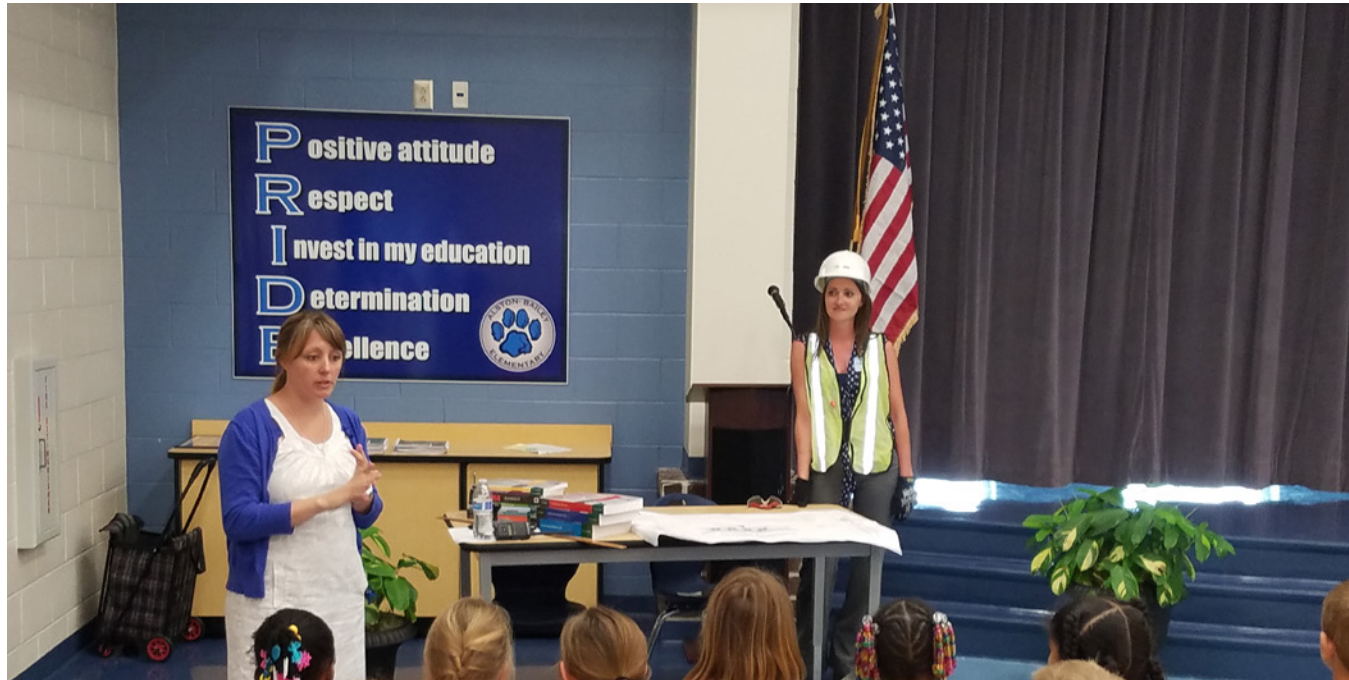
As part of the “hunt,” youngsters are encouraged to check the egress window in their bedrooms number and placement of smoke and carbon monoxide alarms, fire-place safety, handrail safety, electrical outlets and family fire escape plans. The back of the coloring book includes a checklist of 16 safety includes and a “Certificate of Safety.”



“I hope they take these books home to go on the scavenger hunts with their parents and learn something,” she said.



By Rick Hauffe, Senior Regional Manager, State and Local Government Relations, ICC



Rebecca Brown being introduced to students at Austin Bailey Elementary School. As a code official, Brown found a job that makes her happy, and she wants grammar school students to know about career opportunities in the field.

To top off her presentation at Austin Bailey Elementary, Brown retrofitted a classic fairy tale, calling it “Three Little Pigs and A Structurally Sound Home.”

“I like to start with educating little kids about building safety,” she said laughing. “They seem to listen better.”

Brown’s interest in construction started when she was small. Raised in a family of five boys and two girls in Summerville, she says she was the only sibling who seemed interested in following her father Robert McGrew, Sr. into construction.

“He was a carpenter, and I was his little helper,” she said.

Brown said her path to her current job started in accounting and estimating, moving to production management for a private residential building firm in 2005. Her first exposure to codes and enforcement occurred while she designed and built her own home in Summerville.

When the economy took a tailspin in 2010, Brown took a job as a code enforcement officer in Edisto Beach, S.C. For three years, she soaked up everything she could, from codes to planning and zoning, but the hour-plus commute took a toll.

She took a code enforcement job in Summerville and later worked for Moncks Corner, where she served as town building official and fire marshal.

Next, she worked as a third-party inspector for the office of state engineers and office of school facilities for southeastern South Carolina, and then took on the same role for the entire state.

“Anybody who’s been in the same position knows that being young and a woman is challenging,” she said. “You have to work hard and learn everything you can about the codes so you can answer questions and prove yourself.”

“It’s taught me to be ridiculously organized with my spreadsheets and keeping lists, making checkmarks and prioritizing.”

She left the statewide position to return to work for Dorchester County government and to invest more time in raising her son Hayden, 10, and daughter Peyton, 6. She’s happy raising them in the same town where she grew up and said Peyton likes going to her office where she can doodle on discarded building plans.

“I’m proud of the work I do, and I’m proud they understand that the importance of my job is to keep them safe,” she said.

Brown’s dedication to her work earned her recognition from her peers in code enforcement. When the International Code Council created the new [Emerging Leaders Membership Council](#) (ELMC), Melissa Hopkins, county building official, recommended her to ICC Board Member Donny Phipps.

Hopkins recommended Brown to serve on the ELMC Advisory Committee. Phipps selected Brown as his board “shadow,” so she could learn about governance at ICC.

Since then, she’s become close friends with Phipps and his wife Judy. She accompanied the Phippses to the 2016 ICC Annual Conference and ICC Board meetings. Brown said she was amazed by the size of ICC’s network of code officials and stakeholders from every state and territory, as well as several other nations.

“It was my first Annual Conference, and it was overwhelming,” she said. “I come from a small town and never imagined anything on that scale before.”

Brown is a member of the Coastal Code Enforcement Association of South Carolina and the Building Officials Association of South Carolina. Her focus now is on raising her children, becoming more involved in her state ICC Chapter and someday serving on a code action committee.

She said the advice about finding a job “that makes you happy” has served her well.

“It does improve your quality of life all around and makes you a happier person,” she



Attending the Building Safety Month proclamation event at Dorchester County, S.C., are, from left, Con Chellis, Councilman; Fire Marshal Rickie Jenkins; George Bailey, Councilman; William Hearn, Councilman; County Building Official Melissa Hopkins; Plans Examiner Rebecca Brown; Larry Hargett, Councilman; Council Chairman Jay Byars and Willie Davis, Councilman.

said. “I don’t dread getting up in the morning and going to work. I rather enjoy it!”

She said she gets some ribbing about having had so many different jobs in the last 10 years. Brown agrees it has been a long, winding path, but she said it’s led her to a great job.

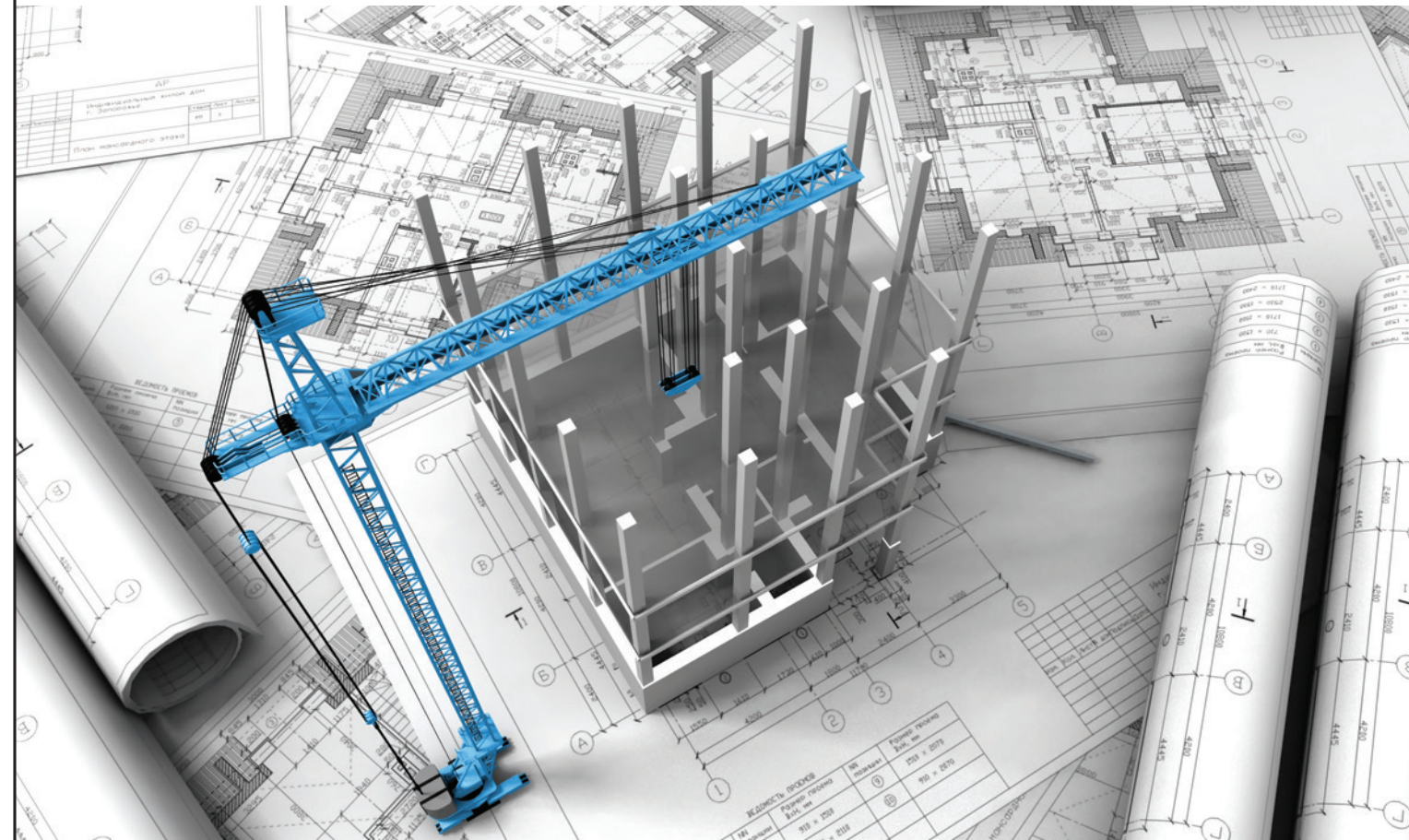
“The best way I can explain it is comparing it to going to the department store to buy a pair of pants. I tell them you don’t buy the first pair of pants you see, right?” she said. “No, you try on a few and pick the best one. I’ve tried on several careers and I picked the one that fits me best.

“Your career should be more important than a pair of pants,” she said laughing. “That usually shuts down any teasing.” **BSJO**



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