

# NCMCA Golden Anniversary Celebration Series – June 2024

2024-06-28

We're celebrating the North Carolina Masonry Contractors Association Golden 50th Anniversary Year by highlighting some monumental events that have taken place throughout the existence of NCMCA. Each month throughout 2024 we will have articles that will showcase the history and folks that helped NCMCA get to where it is today. Please enjoy this yearlong series with our sixth article, "Certified!"

Starting a masonry business is relatively easy if one is a reasonably competent mason and is willing to work hard. There is not a lot of capital required. A few tools, a mixer, some scaffold bucks and boards, a truck, and perhaps a well-used skid steer. There's a demand for small crews. Diligence, perseverance and some luck can result in a growing and successful enterprise. (The inverse is also true. It's fairly easy to get out of business and go back to work for your old boss.) The possibility of having one's own business is certainly one of the attractions of learning the trade.

However, the ease of starting a masonry business has occasionally created an issue for defining exactly what constitutes a masonry contractor, especially for commercial work. Legally, there are no licensing or credentials required in North Carolina. Unlike other professional construction trades that do require licensing to be in business and to bid on work, most any crew that considers themselves to be a masonry contractor can (and often do) submit bids for masonry work on both public and private construction projects.

The masonry industry has regularly faced accusations of poor quality work, scheduling issues, and a failure to understand and construct according to project plan and specification requirements. Unfortunately, there have been many instances that owners, contractors and architects can cite that incriminate masonry. Many of us remember reports of buildings that, because of damage, required repairs that revealed deficiencies in the original masonry construction, including missing and/or un-grouted walls and bond beams and missing rebar. Flashing and water penetration were (and are) often cited as problems with masonry.

Through the years NCMCA members have been aware that the indictment of masonry because of real and perceived problems has cost market share and opened the door to often-inferior building systems.

Professional and established masonry contractors clearly knew (and know) that most problems associated with masonry construction are not generally inherent to the system itself. Rather NCMCA members identify most problems as a function of the unfortunate reality that masonry contractors are regularly selected solely for having submitted the low bid with little or no regard for experience and qualifications. Installation problems. Not system problems. Troubles are often exasperated by a lack of oversight while installation is underway. Doug Burton cites a quote he says he first heard many years ago: "Don't expect what you don't inspect." NC State Professor of Architecture J. Patrick Rand credits Doug when he regularly passes that same advice along to his classes of future architects and to participants in the NCMCA Certification Program classes he has instructed.

From the beginning, NCMCA has recognized the need for masonry contractors to be pre-qualified in some fashion. Installation by professionals with experience, resources, and knowledge greatly increases the odds for successful, trouble-free projects that reflect well on our industry and leave everyone satisfied that masonry was a solid choice.

NCMCA has approached the issue of prequalifying masonry contractors in a variety of ways with varying degrees of success.

From about 1988 through about 1993 the archived minutes record the ultimately unsuccessful efforts of NCMCA to license masonry contractors in much the same fashion as other prime trades including plumbing, electrical, and HVAC contractors. Licensing would have been a means to the goal of prequalification. Gary Joyner's first term as NCMCA president was during the push for licensing. He reflects on the effort.

"In the late 80's our association attempted to make our industry a better place to operate a masonry contracting business. Specifically, we wrote and introduced a licensing bill that required all masonry contractors to be licensed in the state of North Carolina. The procedure for getting a bill passed via the government is something none of us knew anything about. We learned of the complexity, time consuming, and monetary commitment this was going to take. We had some of the right tools in place

including lobbyists, a little money, a few people, but not the support we needed from other organizations. Timing was and is important when going to state legislature (and national, for that matter.) Simply put, we ran out of steam (mainly man hours of local grass roots getting to the right people) and after several years the bill just died. If you have an interest, Lynn Nash can provide a copy of the bill upon request. Again, this was our first attempt to make our industry a better place to do business as a masonry contractor.”

The Association’s licensing efforts were not universally supported. Some sister masonry and construction trade association groups withheld support or expressed opposition. Even some NCMCA members did not support the effort.

Minutes from board meetings in the mid-nineties report that NCMCA reviewed the St. Louis Masonry Contractors Association certification program and developed a Certification Study Group headed by Doug Burton. The study group met with the NC Department of Labor and NC AT&T Professor Dr. Mark McGinley about developing a masonry contractor certification program. A budget of \$20,000 to \$40,000 was suggested for the project. Apparently, that early attempt at certification did not proceed.

About 1998, additional indictments of masonry shortcomings resulting from project failures during the period increased the push for masonry contractor prequalification. NCMCA learned that at least a couple of major architectural firms, including LS3P and Boney Architects had developed their own means of prequalifying masonry contractors by requiring masonry be installed by “lump-sum” contractors; masonry contractors that deal directly with material suppliers to provide a turnkey masonry bid for projects. NCMCA agreed with the architectural firms that there is in fact a correlation between turnkey contracting and increased competency and professionalism. NCMCA began promoting a “lump-sum” specification to architects and specification writers. Members were encouraged to step up to turnkey bidding and were offered “lump-sum” bidding workshops.

Promotion of the “lump-sum spec” met with some success, even among some general contracting firms that recognized the advantages of having everyone required to use bids only from a select group of prequalified masonry contractors. Several GC project manager/estimators told NCMCA how lump-sum prequalification reduced headaches

on projects like schools where masonry is such a large portion of a project's cost. A GC could now submit a bid knowing competitor bidders would not be permitted to use the absolute lowest masonry unit price submitted by firms potentially unqualified to provide headache-free installation.

(Contact Lynn Nash if you would like a copy of the two-page promotional flier NCMCA distributed to promote a lump-sum specification in the early to mid two-thousands.)

While promotion of the lump-sum specification had its supporters and was generally considered a successful means for prequalifying masonry contractors, NCMCA continued to explore a more broad method for not only prequalifying masonry contractors, but also as a means of providing continuing education and professional development for everyone in masonry.

NCMCA once again turned to the possibility of a masonry contractor certification program, again exploring the St. Louis program, as well as certification programs in California, Texas, Tennessee, Washington State, Arizona, and Colorado. In fact, in discussions with Boney Architects concerning the lump-sum specification, Boney representatives brought up the idea of a certification program. At the March 2004 NCMCA board meeting, Doug Burton said he'd read about a new Arizona masonry contractor certification program in *Masonry Construction* magazine and suggested "Nash do the same thing for NCMCA." In reply, Nash said, "Arizona adapted the certification model developed by the Rocky Mountain Masonry Institute (RMMI) in Denver." Nash suggested inviting Ann Wolter, then director of RMMI, to make a presentation about certification.

In March 2005, then-president Danks Burton told the board that he had been reviewing masonry certification programs from other states. He said, "Should NCMCA wish to institute a certification program, it would be possible to model our program after programs already in use." It was agreed that certification would be a major commitment and would take at least two years to implement

Ann Wolter made a major presentation about RMMI certification at the NCMCA 2005 New Bern convention annual meeting. The following is an edited excerpt from the minutes of that meeting:

Wolter answered questions about RMMI's certification program and told the membership that certification should, in her opinion, be implemented for the sake of education, not for an advantage in the market place. 23 of some 40 masonry contractor members of RMMI are certified. In discussion, Wayne Booth expressed support for certification and promised financial backing for such a program. He considers this a "great opportunity... a time to look into the little end of the funnel." Jerry Eckard compared an effort to implement certification to the Association's earlier effort to get licensing for masonry contractors, saying he felt this was a better deal. Danny Batten asked if NCMCA has checked to see how the block and brick producers feel about a certification program. Larry Kirby continued the thought and asked who else needed to consult about their opinion, i.e. Homebuilders Association, AGC and AIA. Nash noted that Paul Boney (Boney Architects) had volunteered his service to help promote masonry certification to AIA members. John Cramer asked if certification would raise the legal bar and have possible undesirable legal ramifications for certified masons. "Could the program be liable?" Wolter opined that certification for NCMCA would compare with a degree offered by a university. "A client could sue an Oxford graduate but couldn't hold Oxford University liable for the graduate's incompetence." NCMCA or RMMI certify that the contractor has taken the course, passed the exam and completed the requirements for certification. "That would be the extent of it," Wolter said. Gary Joyner asked, "Does Boney want this certification or do we want it?" Brooke Steele asked if certification would be a means to give the public better quality masonry or would it be a means to take away the responsibility of the architects and engineers to insure good workmanship? "Could this be an easy out for the architect?" Cramer said certification "might cause the architect to become the artist and the mason to become the professional? Not necessarily a good idea." Several other members offered thoughts both pro and con. Wolter suggested that administering a certification program would probably require adding clerical staff to the NCMCA office. She says it is a long process to get a "critical mass" of masons certified and to get owners and architects to insist on certified masons. She continued, "Several school districts, municipalities and architects, mostly in the Denver area, always include the spec. The spec does sometimes get broken."

In post-convention newsletter comments, President Danks wrote, "The big topic of discussion at the convention was masonry contractor certification. This subject brought a lot of debate from numerous individuals with many good questions still to

be answered. We have established a committee to further investigate if masonry certification is right for us. Contractor certification is about continuing our education in managing a successful masonry business and recognizing those that make the extra effort to be a legitimate masonry contractor.” Appointed to the committee were Wayne Starr, Chairman, Gary Manning, Doug Burton, Gary Joyner, Ashlee Moore, Danny Bowman, Lynn Nash, and President Danks.

After extensive review of programs in other states, including multiple phone conversations with certification participants across the country, and after receiving positive responses from surveys of NCMCA members, the committee recommended that NCMCA proceed to develop and implement a masonry contractor certification program. In September 2005 newsletter comments, Committee Chairman Wayne Starr wrote, “This program has the potential to be the best thing NCMCA has ever done for the Association’s membership and for the industry. The study committee believes certification gives us a chance to dispel the perception that the people in our industry are uneducated and unreliable. I think it offers an opportunity for us to train our people and make them better employees, which will make us better contractors.

We are only as good as the people in the field who represent us everyday.” At its September 2005 meeting, the Board of Directors approved the committee’s motion to proceed.

As it happened, Ann Wolter had taken a “sabbatical” from RMMI in 2005, allowing the NCMCA Certification Committee to hire Ann as a consultant for the new NCMCA program. Ann joined Lynn Nash for several informational events around the state to answer members’ questions and to recruit program participation. Cited in the newsletter as benefits of participation:

- 1) Certification gives your customers a valuable prequalification tool and objective verification of your expertise. By specifying the use of certified masonry contractors, your customers will gain a greater degree of assurance that their projects will be performed according to the highest industry standards.
- 2) Certification provides you and your company with an additional marketing tool. It can also be an incentive in your recruiting efforts and a way to qualify your people for promotion. In addition to the prestige of being designated a certified masonry contractor, you and your key people might just learn something that will make you

better businesspeople and trades people.

3) Your employees will gain broad, deep knowledge about virtually every aspect of masonry design, construction, safety and management. It will build their pride and their confidence on the job, especially in their interaction with special inspectors, design professionals and generals. And, certification can provide advancement opportunity for your high achievers.

4) Certification establishes a tradition of professional continuing education for the North Carolina masonry industry. It says to everyone who buys your products and services that you care enough about the quality of your work to set the highest professional standards for yourselves – just as architects, engineers and manufacturers have done for decades.

5) Certification, and all the educational offerings that lead to it, provides significant value to your association, too. It strengthens NCMCA's ability to help build its members' businesses, and gives nonmembers a compelling reason to join.

Based mostly on the RMMI program but incorporating features of other state programs as well as features unique to NCMCA, the NCMCA Masonry Contractor Certification Program was rolled out at the April 2006 Myrtle Beach convention. The first classes were set for August 2006. At the convention, Holcim (US) announced a \$5,000 grant to fund the new program. (Holcim has provided a total of \$10,000 in grants to the certification program.) Alan Griffin conducted a reverse raffle at the convention to help provide initial funding for the startup. (Randy Terry won the \$10,000 raffle prize.)

The eleven certification classes offered in 2006 have continued to evolve but have basically continued to cover the original course of study:

Module One – “Occupational Safety Management”

Module Two – “The Basics of Masonry Materials: Brick & Block”

Module Three – “Mortar & Grout: Properties, Proportions & Standards; Masonry Testing”

Module Four – “Structural Engineering Basics”

Module Five – “Mastering the Details in Masonry Construction”

Module Six – “Basic Blueprint Reading & Jobsite Estimating”  
Module Seven – “Masonry Special Inspection & Code Review”  
Module Eight – “Masonry Advance Bidding Workshop”  
Module Nine – “Financial & Operational Management”  
Module 10 – “Managing the Human Side of the Business”  
Module Eleven – “Leadership Skills & Supervisory Development/Leadership Boot  
Camp”

Most of the classes last for a full day. Candidates for personal certification must pass an exam at the end of each class and must satisfactorily complete either eight or ten classes depending on the level of personal certification being sought. Eight classes are required for earning “Certified Masonry Professional” (CMP) status and ten classes are required for “Certified Masonry Executive” (CME) status. Anyone can earn CMP status. CME status is reserved for only company owners and principles (as designated by the participating firms.) A firm can earn “Certified Masonry Contractor” status when specified goals are met including a required percentage of certified staff. The specifics and complete details are available in NCMCA’s published document “Guide to Masonry Certification,” available on the NCMCA website or from the NCMCA office.

It is relevant to note that the certification classes do not teach or even much discuss masonry craft skills, leaving that for traditional training sources like vocational classes, family, and apprentice programs. Rather, the classes focus on codes and standards, best practices, and business management.

From the start, participation in the program has exceeded expectations. Bill Parsons instructed the first class in August 2006. To meet demand, three sessions were provided for Module One with two classes presented in Raleigh and one in Charlotte on consecutive days. All three classes were at capacity. Multiple sessions were required for each of the 2006 classes. Mr. Parsons got the program off to a great start. Those who have attended his “Occupational Safety Management” class have often commented about how Parsons made what was anticipated to be a very dull class into an enjoyable, entertaining, and informative session, boding well for the classes to come.

Lynn Nash was often heard to say of the classes that they are “literally being

instructed by the people who wrote the book.” It remains true today. Check the names listed for the members of committees that develop codes and standards for masonry and you’ll find the names of many of the certification program’s instructors. Several have authored and published their own books. The NCMCA classes are instructed by many of the most respected authorities in the industry. Some have been instructing the program classes since the inception:

Bill Parsons, US Department of Labor; United States Air Force

Mike Rosser, Colorado based safety consultant

Robert “Bob” Thomas, President, Concrete Masonry & Hardscapes Association

Michael Schuller, PE, Atkinson-Noland & Associates

Dale Yarbrough, PE, Level3 Design Associates

H.R. “Trey” Hamilton, III, PhD, PE, University of Florida

Richard Bennett, PhD, PE, University of Tennessee

J. Patrick Rand, FAIA, North Carolina State University

Christina Subasic, PE, Consulting Architectural Engineer

Bob Dusin

Ross Gary

Joseph Canitano

Jody Funk

Michael Callahan

Doug Burton, CME, NCMCA Past President; Chairman, Certification Board of  
Governors

Thomas Davis, Attorney at Law

Danks Burton, CME, NCMCA Past President

Robert Carmack, AIA, Smith Sinnett

Mark Hinderliter, PhD

Jason Thompson, PE, Coltivomae, LLC

In the first series of classes, it was notable that many of the most successful, respected and experienced masonry contractors in the southeast were participating in sessions being instructed by some of the most respected academics in the masonry fields. More than one class instructor commented about learning as much from those class participants as the participants learned from the instructor. (“Maybe more.”) That was especially true for the first series of classes but the interaction between instructors (“academic knowledge”) and class participants (“practical experience”) has always been an important benefit of the classes. Encouraging interaction among peers

as well as with instructors is a primary reason the program has resisted offering certification classes online, as is now common practice among similar programs in other states.

Over the years, many other respected presenters have participated in certification continuing education sessions that are required for individuals to maintain personal certification.

In addition to the grants from Holcim, additional funding for certification programs has come from TriSure Corporation and from McMahan Insurance/Mountcastle Insurance. McGee Brothers Company made a major contribution to the program by providing their training facilities for the majority of the classes at “no charge” to the Association.

Governance of the NCMCA Masonry Contractor Certification Program is by a Board of Governors made up of the chairman appointed by the NCMCA president, an appointee from the brick industry, an appointee from the concrete masonry industry, an architect appointee by NC AIA, an NCMCA associate member “at large,” three masonry contractor NCMCA members, and the NCMCA executive. The Governors as of June 2024 are:

Doug Burton CME, NCMCA President’s appointment for Chairman  
Calvin Brodie, CME, NCMCA contractor nominee  
Tim Manning, CME, NCMCA contractor nominee  
Robert H. “Bob” Gates, CME, NCMCA contractor nominee  
David McQueen, CMP, NCMCA at-large nominee  
Tony Lineberry, AIA, NC AIA nominee  
Bryan Light, BIA Southeast Region nominee  
James Cain, Southeast Concrete Masonry Association nominee  
Ryan Shaver, CMP, NCMCA Executive Vice President

Although NCMCA always considered the certification program as first and foremost a program for professional development and continuing education, there was always the secondary goal of making NCMCA Masonry Contractor Certification a premier method for prequalifying masonry contractors. Several years after the program began in 2006, enough individuals and companies had earned certification to begin

promoting NCMCA certification for prequalifying masonry. As of April 2024, some 830 individuals and 113 companies have participated in the program. 277 individuals have achieved CMP status and 129 have earned CME. Twenty firms are presently NCMCA Certified in “good standing.”

With the assistance of many associate members, especially those who regularly call on architects, NCMCA is seeing positive results of promoting certification for prequalification of masonry contract bidders. Among those associate members advocating for the inclusion of certification requirements in specifications, none have done more for the cause than has David McQueen. David was awarded the Eleanor Upton Award in 2018 in large measure for his dedication to the success of NCMCA certification. Specifications requiring certification are becoming more and more common for projects across the state.

As a prequalifier, NCMCA certification continues to face challenges. There is often resistance to the specification from general contractors and from masonry firms that are not certified. Occasionally the specification is “broken,” but that happens less and less as time passes and certification is proving its worth. There is also the challenge of maintaining a standard of workmanship and professionalism that reflects well on the program. For now, “peer pressure” among certified firms and individuals would seem to be the best way to maintain the reputation of certified companies and the certification program.

Doug Burton has served as chairman of the Certification Board of Governors since the program began. He says, “Our association saw an opportunity and felt an obligation to our member companies and employees to advance our industry by offering classes on masonry specific topics. We searched and interviewed all the current and past certification programs across the country, some that had failed and some that had flourished and put together our own NCMCA program.

“By design, our instructors are renowned across the country, which has added value to all those that have participated. Our classes have adapted to the changes that have occurred in masonry since our first class seventeen years ago.

“The commitment of our membership, our leadership and our governors over the years has made it the success it is today. The current class, our eleventh, has eighty-

plus participants which is testament to the program's success and to our association's strengths. There have been companies that didn't participate initially that now have many graduates and continue to put employees through the program.

"Tuition, travel, wages paid away from work, we have calculated the cost to send someone through the eight classes at \$4,200; quite a commitment and expenditure that a thousand-plus have elected to do.

"This year we are introducing a specific residential component with two classes that will focus on codes and best practices.

"Money well spent by the association and member companies to put our employees through the classes. The strength of masonry in NC today is because of these opportunities we have offered."

Lynn Nash often said that his goal for certification would be for the masonry contractor to always be the person most knowledgeable about masonry on any given certified project. He says it always gave him great satisfaction when a certification participant would tell him that something they learned in a certification class turned a jobsite disagreement in the masonry contractor's favor.

In 2006, it's unlikely anyone would have predicted that in 2024, the certification classes would still be attracting such large numbers of participants. It is an undisputed fact that the NCMCA program is the most successful and respected masonry certification program in the country. NCMCA's first president, Glenn W. Sipe, was often heard to say, "An educated competitor is a friend, not an enemy." Mr.

Sipe would no doubt be pleased to learn that as a result of NCMCA's masonry contractor certification program, North Carolina can accurately boast of having among the most educated masonry contractors in the country. Credit the NCMCA Masonry Contractor Certification Program as another component of the remarkably strong fraternity that exists within NCMCA.

Article Written by Lynn Nash

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(Left-right) Chris and Andy Barnes, Danks Burton, and Joey Barnes watch as Gary Joyner (at the computer) demonstrates his estimating spreadsheet program during NCMCA's lump-sum/turnkey masonry bidding workshop in February (2000.) From the March 2000 NCMCA quarterly newsletter.

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NCMCA leadership met with representatives of Boney / LS3P Architects in Charlotte in January 2005 to discuss prequalification of masonry subcontractors for public construction projects. Shown (left to right) Joe Anastasi and Chris Bruner of Old North State Masonry; Paul Boney; NCMCA President Danks Burton; and Phil Kabza and Ronn Shank of Boney / LS3P. Also participating were Calvin Brodie, Brodie Contractors; Gary Joyner, Joyner Masonry Works; and Lynn Nash, NCMCA.

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Kenneth Duncan (left) of Holcim (US) Inc. presented the Association with a \$5,000 grant for the start up of the NCMCA Masonry Contractor Certification Program at the April 2006 convention debut of the program. Certification Chairman and new NCMCA President Wayne Starr (middle) and President Danks Burton (right) accepted the grant on behalf of the Association. President Danks characterized the grant as evidence of Holcim's commitment to the strong future of masonry construction. From the June 2006 NCMCA quarterly newsletter.

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Bill Parsons (left) visits with Rodney Miles (middle) and Bob York when he instructed the first NCMCA Masonry Contractor Certification Program Class, Module One “Occupational Safety Management” August 2006 in Charlotte.

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Participants in the August 2006 certification class at Charlotte.

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Members of the Certification Program Board of Governors in 2007. Top, left to right, Wayne Starr and Paul LaVene. Middle, left to right, Doug Burton, Tony Lineberry, and Gary Manning. Bottom row, left to right, Danks Burton, Gary Joyner, and Mike Rogers.

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Certification class participants in March 2010 at McGee Brothers Company in Greensboro. McGee Brothers provided facilities for the majority of the classes thus far and at no charge to the Association.

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Professor Dr. Richard Bennett, PE, of the University of Tennessee instructs Module Three in March 2019. Dr. Bennett is among class instructors who “wrote the book.”

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Consulting architectural engineer Christina Subasic, PE, of Raleigh instructing Module Two in December of 2019. Ms. Subasic is a past-president of The Masonry Society.

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Left to right, Lisa Gilgeours, Tim McManus, Doug Burton, Jr., and Ben Price work on a team building exercise during Bob Dusin’s August 2022 Module Ten class.

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PS: In the January anniversary article “In the Beginning,” it is noted that the name of the Association was changed from “North Carolina Mason Contractors Association” to “North Carolina Masonry Contractors Association” but the January article wasn’t clear about when or why the name was changed. The name change proposal first appears in the minutes of the November 1989 board meeting in a discussion of the need for the Association’s Articles of Incorporation “to be restated and that the records in the Secretary of State’s office need to be updated.” The change occurred with a bylaws revision that was approved at the April 21, 1990 Annual Meeting. In the minutes of that meeting, Attorney Perry Safran explained that the name change was needed “in order to clear up confusion with others, especially the legislators.” He also noted that the licensing bill refers to the NC Masonry Association.” (There apparently was some minor member opposition to the name change.) Mr. Safran filed the amended bylaws with the NC Secretary of State and the Articles of Incorporation were updated.

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