

STRENGTHENING CREDIBILITY

# PROFESSIONAL LICENSE YIELDS REWARDS

BY JANE HILL



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Only a century ago, Charles Bellamy earned the nation's first professional engineering license from the University of Wyoming. Today, he would be amazed at the ways in which the industry has changed.

A government surveyor in the Rockies in the late 1800s, Bellamy also made history for naming most of the lakes and streams in the Rockies. After Wyoming led the charge, other states followed and now engineers in any state can sit for a licensing exam and become a professional engineer, or P.E.

Prestige and privilege come with adding “P.E.” to your name. For example, if you wish to hang a shingle and offer services as a consultant or private practitioner, you need a license. Licensed engineers can appear as expert witnesses and sign and seal engineering plans.

Money also is part of the reward. Licensed engineers earn, on average, 20 percent more in salary than engineers without a license, according to the Engineering Income & Salary Survey, sponsored by the National Society of Professional Engineers (NSPE).

“Even if you're not required to sign or

seal plans, the license is viewed as proof of competency [and] adherence to ethical conduct and it shows you're willing to take that extra step in your professional career,” says Lawrence Jacobson, NSPE executive director. “The fact that it also puts more money in your wallet is just icing on the cake.”

After studying for three months, civil engineer Angela Lang Matthews passed the P.E. test. She wanted to prove to herself and her colleagues that she could work at that level, she says. Plus, the license will help her advance in her career at Carter & Burgess in Dallas, where she designs water and wastewater treatment systems.

To earn a Professional Engineering license, you must become an engineer intern by passing the Fundamentals of Engineering exam, then gain professional experience by completing four years of qualifying engineering experience, and finally, pass the state professional engineering exam.

Most of the problem solving on the tests is conceptual, but there's also an ethics component that reflects the grey area in the ever-changing business of engineering, says Arthur Schwartz, NSPE deputy executive director. With increasing globalization, for example, interpretation of what's ethical has been pushed and pulled in ways that Charles Bellamy couldn't have imagined, such as when U.S. engineers operate in countries where

“gift giving” or bribes are a culturally accepted way of doing business. But the clear goal that governs all engineering hasn't changed in 100 years.

“Our code of ethics doesn't say we have to be mindful of safety, health and welfare of the public. It says we shall hold paramount those issues,” Mr. Schwartz says. ■