

Why are no mandatory programs in place for learning, training or administering examinations to become a professional Home Builder or start a construction company in Illinois?

Does any potential home owner ever consider a home builder's qualifications when buying a home? We only hear...Location...Location...Location. Location is probably the most understood opinionated quality of value when purchasing a home.

What follows next on the list of house attributes? Is it curb appeal, house layout or outstanding design by a famous architect or is it a modern kitchen or bath or the reasonable listing price?

To list the rankings of home attributes in order of importance after location can be heavily debated.

I feel the next important attribute is by what construction details/methods the house is built with to increase its value and maintain sustainability and who is responsible for including and correctly placing these competent assemblies?

What qualifies a builder to proclaim himself a professional builder or remodeler or contractor? The following is what is required in Illinois to become a licensed barber:

Complete a minimum of 1500 hours of Barber Training

General classroom theory: 150 hours

Theory and practice: 1,350 hours in the following classes:

Barber history

Bacteriology

Infection control and safe work practices

Implements, tools and equipment

Anatomy and physiology

Chemistry

Properties and disorders of the skin

Facial and scalp massage

Shaving and facial hair design

Haircutting and styling

- Submit an application for National Barbering Written Licensing Exam
- Pass the National Barbering Written Licensing Exam
- Submit an application for an Illinois Barber License

Here in Illinois there are no accredited education requirements, credentials, examinations, licensing or qualifications to legally assert yourself a builder or remodeler!! No public body is governing you as a professional builder in Illinois. You can buy a lot or find a client, start building or remodel a house or a commercial building and be identified as a builder instantly!!

Page two

People respect doctors, lawyers, architects, financial planners, pro athletes, engineers, dentists and teachers because they have degrees/schooling and professional background/training. All building related construction companies should command the same respect if they are schooled to achieve proficiency needed to demonstrate professionalism.

People don't question builder's qualifications/education in purchasing a house and they don't question the structural components, air/moisture control barriers, thermal bridging, floor thickness, or proper sequencing in building detailed construction assemblies and they should.

When one purchases a home in Illinois, you are essentially rolling the dice. You have no clue what incorrectly built assemblies are hidden behind the walls or what important building components are omitted or intentionally omitted?

I feel builders are entrusted with grave responsibility in constructing a properly built home that accurately heats, ventilates (providing indoor air quality), does not allow moisture buildups (mold), leaks, squeaks, major settling later on, cracks, structural failures, enjoys proper lighting, door swings, switching, drainage, electric panels, to name a few potentials as there are many.

The State of Florida administers their potential contractors to be licensed through their Business & Professional Regulations/Bureau of Education & Testing by these measures:

- Pass an Examination
- Experience/Education.....over 36 schools offering classes
- Financial Stability
- Fingerprints
- Insurance
- Fees

You can't receive a building permit in Florida without enrolling and completing the required education classes and pass the examinations first and expect to build.

Us professional builders enjoy our education and construction backgrounds and spend time learning more about building through webinars, focus groups, continuing education classes, video, books, magazines, blogs, websites, attending seminars, demonstrations and attending the national builders show & other related shows (there are many).

Companies are inventing new building products all the time to improve the quality and performance in their specific applications. Builders are invited to attend their webinars/seminars to demonstrate/launch their value.

This composition mainly focuses on the building of quality projects (homes) by "professional" builders.

Page three

Also included are the build to suit opportunities (owner hires a builder) and large subdivision model homes (repetition, track homes) built by professional builders who are a big corporation. And the attempted builder involved in remodeling for residential and commercial buildings.

When a building structure is built properly no matter how extravagant it should maintain without moisture issues, enjoy indoor air quality, and proper HVAC layout and equipment. If a project is built with every convenience available but the construction materials, sequence or details are installed incorrectly, it will exist with the defects and the occupants will suffer and the future owners will pay later to repair all the deficiencies.

There is a methodical process to build a new home without encountering any major defects later on. Speed is one factor that impresses everyone, but speed can cause major flaws in the continued life of the home.

When a home is built “too fast” moisture is trapped and trapped moisture causes many issues. By building deliberately and meticulously the building process allows moisture management to naturally occur. The framing lumber is around 85% kiln dried when delivered and the remaining moisture is released during the construction time, so building “too fast” causes settling in walls and floors. Also, outside the lawn and under sidewalks the ground will settle (cave in).

The process of the pouring the foundation and allowing concrete to reach 99% of its compressive strength takes 28 days and I’ve seen foundations being backfilled within 10 days only reaching about 75% strength. Backfilling too soon creates an opportunity for the foundation to be subjected to cracking. Also proper shoring of the concrete walls will prevent cracking. Cracked foundations create opportunities for water/vapor intrusion.

If you find a home with luxurious architectural design, built with a structural engineer’s review/approval, is richly appointed, a great location, landscaped well and built by an experienced professional builder, you have found a winner.

So first on the attribute list is location, next is properly constructed and now comes the layout/design. Many professional builders have progressed through their young carpenter years as he designs the house layout (flow) on his drafting table as if he is building the home in that moment. He has his crew in mind as the walls are built on the floor and rise in place with each stroke of his pencil. The result is no wasted space and no wasted time in carpenter labor. Once the layout is conceptualized, the layout now needs an architect’s talent. The architect’s imagination transforms the design into an exciting place to live and build!

Some builders start from a proven successful plan and improve the layout, then hands his drawings to an architect for further creativeness and thought and for producing the working drawings, last is the structural engineer’s review and input.

Page four

The working drawings (contain much information) are submitted to the governing authority to be reviewed, commented and approved before a building permit can be issued.

The design sequence continues as an interior/kitchen designer becomes involved with kitchen cabinet/appliance layout, vanity and plumbing fixture layout. Also a lighting and technology (Wi-Fi) specialist should also be consulted.

In the attempted builders scenario: The only aspect covered by a professional beyond the architect is the civil engineering because the local building authority demands a topographical survey prepared by a registered civil engineer. The attempted builders construction process can be termed as wide open, a free for all...anything goes!!!!

A topographical survey is the proposed house placement (not to encroach on the front yard setback, side yard setbacks and rear yard setback) and driveway on the lot with the top of foundation and grading contours, so water travels away from the foundation....not towards.

The only opportunity available for the future home buyer during construction that ensures them of receiving some quality control is the mandatory inspections performed by the local building officials; their quick review procedure occurs at the following progress stages:

Topographical survey: submittal (proper placement and correct elevations of foundation) before backfilling of foundation

Before backfilling: gravel over and drain tile, sump pit, damp proofing

Rough underground: floor drains, future or bathroom plumbing

Rough plumbing, above ground: before drywall

Electric Panel: before Comed buries the electric lines

Rough electrical: before drywall

Before any flat concrete pour, basement floor, garage floor, sidewalks

Rough framing: before drywall

Insulation: before drywall

Then at final inspection: Rough grading performed by a surveyor

Final electrical

Final plumbing

Final house inspection When all items drawn on the "working drawings" comply with local building codes, the governing authority then issues a "certificate of occupancy". The home is ready to be legally lived in. If any of the inspections fails, a re-inspection fee is required and the work must be corrected to the satisfaction of the building official. These building officials must pass examinations to be qualified.

Some attempted builders don't even apply for a building permit, so their work is not inspected! So no matter how it's built it's OK, very scary!

Page five

Most attempted builders work from a stamped print previously drawn (proven design) by an architect (the architect has many available home prints for discounted pricing for these low budget builders) or from magazines boasting house plans ranging from 2,000 to 4,000 square feet to build a spec home.

So these attempted builders go forward with limited experience expecting to complete the construction process in a professional manner with no formal education or training.

Some attempted builders actually hire an architect for them to design a custom home from conception. Those homes are more impressive looking from the outside, but again an architect designed home may only enjoy the many basic structural components but not enjoy the bonus construction techniques learned by professional builders and tradesman.

Some negative construction possibilities by attempted builders are inferior building materials as in windows, shingles, cabinets, switches, light fixtures, floor plywood (thickness and type), structural wood species, correct circuits, items on sale that week at local big box stores, level floors, plumb walls, drywall, door locks, proper insulation, imagination and craftsmanship as the list goes on.

Another important builder quality is proper purchasing of materials and supplies. There is only one source for professional grade products.....a professional supply dealer, an actual lumber yard with salesmen and not at the many big box stores.

Let's mention the expected skill level of the work force needed to build/remodel an existing home or commercial structure.

Here in the Chicago land area we enjoy organized trade unions that administer apprentice programs that train each member to learn the construction craft so their work is performed in a professional manner. And this 4 year training program is regarded as the hallmark of their union where people who have successfully completed the process are emerging with pride and confidence.

There are many foreign builders who perform trade work themselves....everyone has heard the term, "jack of all trades and master of none". Well, why would anyone want a house built or buy a house built by a jack of all trades? (A handyman) No matter what the task is professional tradesmen will complete the work to a professional conclusion over a "jack of all trades"! Through using common sense (utube video) you can perform a building solution.....but does this action resemble a professional trade result?

And these attempted builders are usually young men packed with energy. So they work after hours and on weekends without insurance. And their unskilled friends may also help out after work and on weekends without insurance.

Page six

And tradesmen are equipped with professional functioning tools, ample sharp blades and the acquired skills to use them. And non-professional attempted builder's work is paid through an inferior pay scale. The various unions set family sustaining wages and important benefits.

The chief motivating factor in people becoming attempted (or part time) builders is creating an opportunity to make big money.....Greed! So your builder's only interest might be to receive that big check at the closing. So how much genuine interest can they generate toward a passion for building? So do they even respect the task of building a performing new home??? Their motivation is not passion to build but to discover means to receive a check in building a spec house as cheap as possible and still have a happy home owner.

And when plans don't work out (as happened from 2005-2012) where the attempted builders encounter vast debt, they then terminate the current company, form another company and find different subcontractors (do not honor previous labor responsibilities) to start with all over again. Or they return to their previous occupation or go back to Eastern Europe.

Some attempted builders build homes on the side as a part time project. (Not their main focus) As they show up in the morning before work or after work to answer questions at the site for their subs or get needed advice from the subs how to build correctly. And more recently the convenience their equipped cell phones provide to communicate so the subs perform their respective responsibilities.

The subs consequently look out for their absent builder (and themselves to be paid) and perform their assignments so the house gets built.

The most opportunistic period for the attempted or temporary builders to be active is during favorable economic times. The years of 1977-1978 were absolute gang-buster times. I was told if you drove down a street with homes under construction in Naperville there was a different builder's sign on every lot. And again from 1998 -2005 (people became builders overnight fueled by greed) and during this favorable phase home prices were projected (in 2002) to reach one million dollars for every home in DuPage County by 2010. But the housing market reached saturation in 2005 where it took 15 years to sell off the enormous inventory. Home prices dropped from an asking price of \$1,350,000 in 2004 to \$550,000 after 2010. Realtors have invented the term, "Mc Mansion", to define the overpriced homes of that time segment.

Professional builders exist and strive in all economic times as their work ability encompasses all types of available construction projects they are invited to bid.

In the public building sector: The owners always request a performance bond before the work can begin which guarantees a successful project completion.

Page seven

The performance bond is issued by a surety company which will only issue the performance bond if the contractor has demonstrated competence and established satisfactory capital through an impressive track record of completing public projects on budget and on time.

We prefer the performance bond demand as it makes it more difficult for the attempted builder to bid on public projects they just discovered and decided to be a builder that morning.

Another obstacle the attempted builders face in the public work sector is the "Prevailing Wage" act. On all public contracts, the construction workers must be paid the "Prevailing Wage" which is determined by union labor wages. So a low budget contractor can't have his minimum wage buddies perform work and undercut professional skilled tradesman. It is required when requesting a payment to submit a "certified payroll" form to prove prevailing wages are paid and documented.

The worst case building scenario is: Your home is built by a young attempted builder (who began in building last year) who is greedy & smug, knows very little but is somewhat familiar with construction, hires non-professional people which get paid very little (versus tradesman) or performs tasks himself as a jack of all trades (like a handyman), buys items on sale or close-out specials. But he does employ the wisdom of location, location, location so the home is desired and is sold for a decent profit because of location (but the home has issues that will not appear until later).

Allow any professional builder one minute inside any home or remodeling project and they can tell you quickly if the project is constructed by an attempted builder or a professional builder.

There are many situations where investors (people earning big money have money) hire knowledgeable builders (there are many educated/qualified builders) to create an investment opportunity....build and sell custom homes. These investors are smart people who know all about location, hiring a good architect, interior design, square footage, amenities and landscaping, to name a few important aspects.

Important tasks performed by these investors are negotiating the following: discovery and purchase price of the property to build on (know good leads), construction financing, the realtor commission, builders risk insurance, subcontractor agreements and payments, attorney participation & fees, and the title insurance policy through "Chicago Title Insurance" (the best).

One good thing about investor situations is they demand quality work which places them above the "jack of all trades" builder. The jack of all trades builder usually can't afford to purchase an expensive lot and borrow the funds to build a high profile home in a high profile neighborhood.

These investors are only in it for the money, they're not passionate builders. But they know they must build a quality home to receive the value they're anticipating upon the sale.

Page eight

These investors also enjoy a high level of connection with the potential buyers as both parties earn a high salary to afford these prestigious homes in prestigious neighborhoods. These buyers are also aware these investors are hoping to make a big profit (unless the investor is a silent partner), so the custom home package has to support an obvious expected value.

The big corporation builders employ only professional crews. There is no evening or Sunday work being performed like the attempted builder's neighbor assisting with some painting or tile setting. All materials are purchased and delivered through professional distribution. No close-out specials or discontinued items are installed.

Corporation builders sell their homes before the excavation begins. The owner has the opportunity to inspect the weekly progress so nothing can be or is attempted to be hidden.

All types of selections are available to the buyer. There might be several different design options available. Usually the owner works through a sales representative who is involved every step of the way. The construction process is scheduled and stays on course.

There is less chance that a corporation builder constructs a home with many flaws. And any flaws that happen occur are from a mistake, not from inexperience that attempted builder's display. The only negative might be building "too fast". So request the house sit idle for a month before any drywall installation.

So you have two potential types of issues from attempted builders: mistakes (since they're green as grass) and many unwise construction assembly decisions because of their lack of experience. There is no replacement for knowledge.

The best scenario for the home owner: is when an able architect designs a home for a client who already owns land for its completion and are not in a rush to move in. The home design fits the land perfectly. At least 5 builders are pre-qualified to submit a competitive bid. The lowest bid is awarded the contract. And the architect is involved in the construction process to a successful finish.

It's hard for the attempted builder on a build to suit project to perform work after hours and Sundays exposing their inferior labor force when the clients can appear at any time. And it's hard for the attempted builder to install close-out or on sale items when the client is watching.

So the buyer should be more aware of all the potential issues lurking inside of every home. It would be prudent for the buyer to hire a consultant to inspect and review the construction process or to inspect existing homes being considered for purchase. There are many home inspectors available to perform this vital service before the purchase of an existing home. Professional builders are good (We put forth the effort), and we build without major flaws and less frequent deficiencies, but it's hard to be perfect in every situation.