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## THE ACADEMY OF BUILDING CONSERVATION: A “MOTHERHOOD AND APPLE PIE” CAUSE

by Gersil Kay, IESNA, AIA

Not enough gratitude is given to our returning military veterans—volunteers who left their stateside positions to serve their country. It is heartbreaking to see them reduced to begging on city sidewalks.

These unemployed veterans face a paradox. There is a huge demand for those who can do the work of conserving and upgrading the energy systems of millions of viable buildings that were erected prior to 1940. Owing to the lack of empty space in cities, wise developers are now profitably revitalizing these well-located, -designed, and -constructed pre-1940 buildings. But unemployed workers—including our vets—lack the skills needed to for these jobs.

People cannot be just brought in from the streets to do this unfamiliar work in buildings constructed with earlier methods and materials. They must be properly trained. A dependable, knowledgeable workforce, capable of correctly executing professionals' plans and specifications and completing work on time, on budget, and with respect for original design and fabric, is essential to achieve the expected results.

To meet this challenge, Building Conservation International (BCI), a nonprofit educational organization, is helping to launch the serious, free, and hands-on Academy of Building Conservation, designed to serve returning military veterans who are seeking to acquire the skills needed for gainful civilian employment.

Modeled after Philadelphia's eminently successful Academy of Applied Electrical Science, created over thirty years ago, the holistic curriculum of this new Academy covers the fundamentals, from roof to foundation. Five mornings, a week, dedicated

volunteer teachers will give STEM and other internationally-accepted, relevant academic instruction in five classrooms that have been donated by architects, engineers, contractors, interior designers, and professional construction organizations.

The Academy will concentrate on the conservation skills needed in commercial, institutional, industrial, hospitality, theatrical, and high-end residential buildings, as well as landscape and water features. It is not intended only to train resident superintendents for small residential properties, but to satisfy the great demand, both here and abroad, for wide-ranging expertise in every trade and discipline required for older structures.

After two semesters of study, Academy attendees may choose a specialty, and the G.I. Bill will provide for higher education after graduation.

Contrary to false ads that claim, “No Maintenance Required”, *everything*, from human beings, animals, and plants, to buildings, equipment, and programs, needs careful and regular attention. Scheduled maintenance, repair, and replacement are vital if expected performance is to continue, and imagination is needed to sustain historic venues. A special feature of the Academy is training in the installation and maintenance of modern mechanical/electrical (M/E) systems, which today are expected to be present in buildings of any age. Graduates of the Academy will be ready to do this vital work.

To acquire proficiency in construction, nothing takes the place of hands-on fieldwork under competent supervision, so, afternoons, insured pupils will work on real projects, sponsored by willing owners and developers. The pupils will receive token pay, so they can afford to attend daily, and lunch and transportation will be provided. There will be no fees charged to the students.

Because learning about building conservation takes time, full attention, and actual experience, enrollees who are not fully involved will be dismissed from the program.

In this win-win Academy program, our society will save energy by not knocking down old buildings and replacing them with often-inferior structures; Academy students will get invaluable job experience, leading toward lifetime, lucrative careers; contractors will have a source of well-trained labor; owner/developers will get high quality work at lower cost; the local economy will be improved with jobs and tax revenues; and the quality of life will rise for all.

While we already have an internationally-accepted initial curriculum and a roster of experienced volunteer teachers and job supervisors, we still need start-up funds to

buy materials that have not been donated, rent-free classrooms with equipment and supplies for morning courses, and owner/developers who will allow insured students to work afternoons on actual conservation jobs, in return for token pay.

Please contact the author if you are interested in helping: [bciorg2@yahoo.com](mailto:bciorg2@yahoo.com)

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