CERTIFICATION GAINS TRACTION IN HAWAII

Hawaii started certification testing in 1999, and since then the program has continued to gain momentum. Not to say it’s been easy, according to Garrett Webb, Landscape Industry Certified, certification test administrator and President of the Landscape Industry Council of Hawaii (LICH). “Training for certification has always been a big part of the Technician-Exterior program in Hawaii, and each of the four islands with Technician-Exterior tests has a slightly different approach about how to run the training programs. People who administer the test in other states understand, too, how much labor is required to do the hands-on testing.

In most cases, here, members of the local landscape associations organize volunteers to help.”

With that said, Hawaii has done exceedingly well since Webb administered the first test. This year, at least 60 candidates will take one of the Landscape Industry Certified Technician-Exterior tests administered throughout the islands. There have been some important “wins,” as well.

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The Hawaii Department of Transportation (DOT) includes certification (someone on staff) as a requirement to work on its highway maintenance projects. Many companies, including a large resort in Kona, also have certification requirements in their specifications.

Webb points to several reasons for the growing popularity of the program, from both a landscape professional’s perspective and that of a property manager, property owner, or others looking to retain a landscape contractor.

“We’ve aggressively promoted the value of certification in our bi-monthly magazine, Hawaii Landscape, and that’s helped. In fact, Maui started testing three years ago after reading about the program. Of course, several companies encourage employees to participate by paying for all or part of the certification costs. More recently, the Hawaii State Department of Labor (DOL) Workforce Development Division has named LICH as an approved Employment and Training Fund vendor, which means the DOL will pay for half a candidate’s class and test fees.”

Advocating for and getting certification into bid documents have been challenging. “A Landscape Architect was responsible for putting certification into DOT bids after we had made a presentation to the department,” said Webb. “Getting a high profile resort to acknowledge certification has helped spread the word. We’ve also promoted the value to property managers and just now are in the midst of launching a marketing initiative to them, listing all the companies in the state that have industry certified employees on board.”

Webb added that an ongoing challenge is arranging for test sites on the different islands. To date, there is no permanent site, but LICH has just become an Affiliate with the Hawaii Community College-Palamanui under construction in Kona. The college is committed to building a permanent Technician-Exterior site for training and testing.