

NEWS RELEASE

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Two Center interior designers pass professional exam, advance careers supporting Corps' mission

By Jo Anita Miley

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. – Two U.S. Army Engineering and Support Center, Huntsville employees have joined the ranks of the professional interior designers.

Lauren McCaul and Lauren Ploetze of the Huntsville Center Engineering Directorate's Architectural Branch Interior Design Section passed the National Council for Interior Design Qualification Examination April 1 and 2.

Reaching this milestone in their careers is part of a five-year process from acceptance into an interior design program to completion of interior design licensing requirements.

An interior design practitioner offers or renders services in connection with the creation and design of spaces that protect the health, safety, and welfare of people in the finished space within the site surrounding the buildings that its principal purpose is human occupancy for use.

Licensed interior designers are trained to functionally create spaces that meet building codes, life safety codes, and the standards set by the American's with Disabilities Act.

McCaul said the NCIDQ protects public health, safety and welfare by identifying interior designers who have the knowledge and experience to create interior spaces that are not just aesthetically pleasing, but also functional and safe.

“While most people think interior designers just “decorate,” we have to be able to take a new or renovated building and lay out the interiors so that all codes are met and the end users needs for things such as private offices, cubicle spaces, break areas, restrooms, corridors and egress are met as well,” McCaul said. “This must be done while staying within the parameters of a building,” she said. “The work we do can be compared to a giant puzzle- we’re given the pieces and have to make them all fit.”

McCaul said gaining ample real world work experience prior to taking the NCIDQ exam is very important. Interior design is a profession you have to practice to improve. It is not something you come out of college ready to do. A lot hinges on the experience you gain from the (interior design) businesses and the number of hours of qualifying experience in interior design work. Candidates must obtain a bachelor’s degree from a school that participates in the Council for Interior Design Accreditation accredited interior design program and have 3,250 hours qualified hours of interior design experience while under a registered interior designer or registered architect before they are eligible to take the exam.

The 16-hour NCIDQ exam is given twice a year, and consists of four hour multiple choice question section and an eight-hour hand-drafted practicum. The exam can be taken in separate parts or all at once. McCaul and Ploetze said they wanted to get it over with, so they took the entire test at one time.

The exam has three parts; two - four hour multiple choice question sections and an eight-hour hand-drafted practicum that tests the knowledge of interior designers and deems them capable of creating and

designing spaces that protect the health, safety, and welfare of people in the finished spaces. Candidates must pass all three sections before they are given a certificate.

McCaul has been with the Corps of Engineers for the past two years. Upon graduating Auburn University's College of Architecture Design and Construction with a bachelor's degree in interior design in 2008, McCaul took a job with the government working as an interior designer at Huntsville Center, using her work experiences to prepare her for the exam.

"My past projects have helped to prepare me for the exam, McCaul said. "I've already worked on two major programs at the Center.

McCaul said NCIDQ is very specific about what is required to take the exam. Getting the right experience is a plus. She used the experience she gained while supporting Huntsville Center's Centralized Furnishings Program and Integrated Modular Medical Support Systems Program in the Installation Support and Programs Management Directorate gave her the specialized experience she needed.

Ploetze, who also received her degree in interior design from Auburn University, began government service with Huntsville Center as well as an interior designer on the Center's ISPM's furniture team in 2009.

Ploetze said working at Huntsville Center the past two years has been similar for her, due to an added focus on professional development.

"Working for the government has given me more opportunities for complete professional development," Ploetze said. "I was given ample time to pursue my license and afforded the opportunity to work on diverse projects."

Ploetze said working on Huntsville Center's Centralized Furnishings Program afforded her the opportunity to work on projects that involved solving unique interior design issues. This has prepared her for a career where she can be utilized in any interior design capacity and makes her a strong asset to Huntsville Center.

McCaul and Ploetze said working in Huntsville Center's Architectural Branch is very conducive to the licensure process. They had the full support of their supervisor's, Todd DuVernay, chief of the Architectural Branch and Carol Elder, supervisor for the Interior Design section at Huntsville Center. The Architectural Branch purchased study materials for their sections use and sponsored a study workshop in Huntsville to help them prepare for the exam.

McCaul said the professional development training doesn't stop with passing the exam. There is also a continuing education requirement that has to be fulfilled to maintain their licensure.

There are currently four licensed interior designers in the Huntsville Center Architectural Branch including McCaul and Ploetze. The others are Amy Webb and Stephanie Woods.

Although there is no requirement at Huntsville Center for interior designers to become licensed, is recommended for professional development. McCaul and Ploetze elected to take the exam as soon as they were eligible, to further their careers.

McCaul and Ploetze both said they also highly encourage other interior designers to pursue their professional licensure. Currently, several interior designers within their section are in the process of pursuing NCIDQ certification as well.

“Having this designation just says that we have been tested and proven to be able to protect peoples’ lives through our designs,” McCaul said. “It really doesn’t really change what we do in our job,” she said. “It just certifies that we can do it better.”