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Code will boost demand for qualified inspectors

By: Angie Santello, Herald-Standard
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John Over, president of K2 Inc. consulting Engineers & Construction Managers of Uniontown, is a man wanted for his expertise now that municipalities must begin to enforce the state's Uniform Construction Code. Randy Laskody/Herald-Standard

Enforcing the Uniform Construction Code (UCC) will begin with the building code officials who will inspect newly built houses and major renovation projects.

And with a shortage of UCC-certified code officials reported throughout the state, local leaders are working to find people qualified to handle the job of overseeing how residential and commercial buildings are constructed.

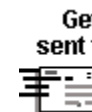
That makes people like John Over, president of K2 Inc. Consulting Engineers & Construction Managers in Uniontown, a wanted man.

Over already has been hired as the building code official (BCO) in Menallen Township in Fayette County and in Cumberland Township and the Jefferson-Morgan Council of Governments in Greene County. And, others are considering his firm for BCO duties.

"There will be some growing pains for townships and boroughs as well as builders and contractors," he said. "There will be a learning curve for everybody, but consumers and residents who are building these houses and buying these commercial structures, in the long run,

will be receiving a better quality structure."

Over has a Class 17 license, which allows him to inspect residential and commercial properties and issue certificates of occupancy, giving the home or business owner the OK to move in. Over is also certified to be a third-party inspector, allowing the state or individual residents to hire him as a BCO in those communities that opt out of enforcing the UCC. According to Ray Polaski, executive director of the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority, some 12 people in Fayette County are qualified to do some type of inspection work, while only about six of them have Class 17 ratings. Most of them



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have only residential licenses, not commercial, said Polaski.

He said Fayette County, which has agreed to oversee administration of the UCC for its municipalities, is looking for individuals who possess the all-inclusive certification.

Polaski said whether the county will hire one or several BCOs has not been determined.

Over recommends that municipalities opt in and enforce the code themselves, form a regional co-op with other municipalities to enforce the code, or, in Fayette County, let the county handle the enforcement.

While opting into the code will provide municipalities and residents with a local, certified inspector, doing so also might allow local officials to control, to a degree, how much they must pay an inspector, according to Elam M. Herr, assistant executive director of the Pennsylvania Association of Township Supervisors.

He noted that due to the demand for qualified people, the first UCC inspectors could set the standard rate of pay.

"So that's one reason municipalities should opt into this," Herr said.

"They may be able to stop this by hiring their own code enforcement officials and setting their own rate."

A municipality can pay for code enforcement training and consider it an educational expense, Herr added.

In addition to his fire call duties, Uniontown Fire Department Chief Myron Nypaver acts as one of the city's chief code enforcement officers. Nypaver, who like Over possesses a Class 17 license, said he and five others working for the city were "grandfathered" into the UCC.

Grandfathering allows all current code administrators to continue performing code-related work, such as plan review and building inspections, for a period of three years for residential projects, and five years for commercial projects before they must meet the certification requirements of the UCC, according to the state Department of Labor and Industry.

Uniontown, already operating under the 2000 BOCA code, should not have a problem keeping up with the new regulations, Nypaver said, and new BCOs will have the coming years to receive the necessary training to keep up with UCC inspection requirements.

"Uniontown is already established. They have their own appeals board and everything," said Nypaver. "We've been doing it for years. We say if it's not broken, don't fix it."

The need for the UCC, especially the inspection process, is great, according to Norman T. George, a certified residential inspector and building code official who lives in Greene County.

He said he has found faults affecting the structural integrity of a home, even in those priced in the \$150,000 to \$300,000 range, faults that might have been corrected had someone inspected the work.

"Nobody's watching them," he said. "Can I be the first one to admit that if I'm not being watched I'm going to cheat? It goes on every day, but it's not seen. It's a problem people accept."

With the UCC, though, George said that once an inspector or builder's record is tarnished by a violation, that violation would stick, becoming a matter of public record.

The BCO exam and pre-test training is available through the Pennsylvania Construction Codes Academy, which holds classes throughout the state.

To make arrangements to take training or the BCO exam, call the academy at 717-763-0930.

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