

# They're building new careers at Germanna

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The National Association of Home Builders reported on May 19 that the number of new homes for sale has fallen 60 percent since mid-2006.

To survive, many builders are trying to stay competitive in a shrinking field or are finding other occupations.

## **Diversifying**

For those who stayed in the industry, the first step was usually to try to expand services.

Bea Phelps, executive vice president of Fredericksburg Area Builders Association, said many members have increased their range of services. Some are turning to remodeling.

Glen Raymond, president of Goglia Builders Inc. in Fredericksburg, had built some additions in the past but had to react to the slowed economy by adding remodeling to the business plan.

"Many had gone out, gotten licenses--trying to get into that field," he said.

However, the remodeling industry was slowing down, as well, just as competition increased.

"It's been difficult for most of us because we're trying to compete with those that have already been in it," Raymond said.

## **Certifications**

Another alternative is to pick up more marketable skills.

**Germanna Community College** offers certification in various building-related subjects.

"What we're trying to do is give people that have been in construction trades more tools," said Russell James, dean of Business & Workforce Services at Germanna's Daniel Technology Center.

A certificate can be earned to be qualified as an indoor air quality manager, home inspector or sustainability professional.

Courses range from 30 hours to 400 hours of training and cost anywhere from \$595 to \$1,195.

James said these certifications just add more marketable skills.

If you're able to inspect homes and also offer the services to fix any issues, "that's something you can sell," James said.

James said he hasn't looked carefully at the demographics coming into such courses.

Most construction workers actually come to Germanna for the truck-driving certification class, said Jeanne Wesley, vice president for workforce development and community relations at [Germanna Community College](#)

"Truck driving is an ideal fit," Wesley said. "It takes a certain kind of skill set."

Sean Martin is the director of operations for four state truck-driver training programs, including the one at Germanna.

He said construction workers are used to shifting locations for projects, and some area truck-driving jobs don't require nights away from home.

Workers are also used to operating or being exposed to heavy machinery. Martin said a truck-driving certificate can make someone even more marketable in the construction industry by giving them those operation skills.

However, most who start truck driving don't go back to the construction industry, Martin said.

Many trucking companies will hire someone contingent on gaining certification

"It's not uncommon for our students to have anywhere from one to five offers before graduating," Martin said.

Truck driving also comes with a starting salary of \$36,000 to \$42,000 for the first year and more than \$55,000 after that

"Once people start realizing the money, it becomes permanent," Martin said.

### **Other employment**

Beyond trucking, there are other fields that appreciate construction experience.

Raymond has seen many fellow construction workers make their way

to construction-related retail, such as Home Depot or Lowe's.

Jennifer King, spokeswoman for Home Depot, said that while there aren't specific numbers, many branches have seen an increase in staff members who were formerly in the construction industry.

Although not all positions at Home Depot require a building background, some experience is needed, especially in the plumbing or electrician divisions.

"They really bring in a wealth of expertise," King said.