

Getting Your Letters

ELAINE BOURNIAS, TMF, OF LAINIE'S IN HOUSTON, decided a few years ago to become a certified Texas Master Florist (TMF) to further her education. But getting those three little initials after her name also helps her gain credibility with potential clients. "I make them aware of my credentials," she says. "I point it out on my letterhead and on my business card."

Certifications convey professionalism and expertise, according to the associations that administer them and florists who've earned them. But earning any floral accreditation takes time. And don't forget about the money for travel to the testing place, the "induction" or both. Is it worth it? And what's your response when your employee asks you to sponsor them in their efforts to get certified?

A Higher Degree: State Certifications

Some states, including Michigan, Texas, Arizona, Arkansas, Illinois, Ohio, Oklahoma and Tennessee, offer "master florist" certification (and California has an assessment program in the works) that have a strong design element as well as some general floristry requirements. It's "the closest we can get to in our industry to getting a doctorate — so it adds credibility," says Jerome Raska, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, MCF, CAFA of Blumz ... by JRDesigns, of his Michigan Professional Certified Florist certification (MCF).

But should you be the one to sponsor employees interested in earning their state certification? Elaine Bournias of Houston, an event florist who hires part-time help when she needs it, says if she had full-time employees, she "would definitely send them (to get TMF certification). It really makes a difference to potential clients once I tell them more about it."

Raska says he would gladly pay the \$300 for the Michigan program. But he likewise acknowledges that floral industry employees "in many cases, are very transient, moving from one shop to another, so I give stipends with stipulations, like 'You pay, and we'll reimburse you.'" Raska and partner J. Robbin Yelverton, AIFD, PFCI, MCF, have 15 employees at their two retail outlets in Detroit and Ferndale. "We encourage that sort of thing, but the employee has to buy into it, too," he says.

AIFD: Granddaddy of Design

Many florists agree that the highest honor for a floral designer is to earn designation from the American Institute of Floral Designers (AIFD). Each year, immediately prior to its National Symposium held in early July, AIFD conducts accreditation evaluation sessions for floral designers hoping to become members. During these evaluation sessions, participants are required to demonstrate their design artistry and complete testing.

Carol Caggiano, AIFD, PFCI, of A. Caggiano Inc. in Jeffersonton, Va., says making the investment in getting

Get More Info

On AIFD: www.aifd.org, or call (410) 752-3318.

On PFCI: www.safnow.org, or call (800) 336-4743.

On state certifications: Call your state association. If we missed you in the listing of states that certify, contact Mary Ann Barton at: mbarton@safnow.org.

— M. A. B.

employees AIFD-certified is money well spent. "I would help employees with certification," she says. "To attain AIFD accreditation is a growing and learning process that truly benefits and inspires the employee. It is impossible to get inspired work from uninspired employees. Your employees make your business what it is."

"An AIFD designer can be expected to think creatively and be willing to tackle challenges that others will shy away from," says designer Tami Lyons, AIFD, of Griffen's Flowers Inc., in Hannibal, Mo. "They are self-motivated and can be depended on."

But there is one reality business owners may have to swallow: "Once (designers) make it into AIFD, we usually find them moving on to bigger solo positions," says George Mitchell, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, of Mitchell's Orland Park Flowers in Orland Park, Ill., who says he's trained at least four employees who've earned their AIFD accreditation.

PFCI Helps Florist Talk to Community

PFCI-accredited members earn their designation by showing industry leadership and strong education and communications skills. They're known for their strong speaking and education skills. "PFCI spotlights the need to educate and educate well," says 2004 inductee Lisa Greene, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, of Nunan Florist in Georgetown, Mass., who says PFCI is the perfect complement to the AIFD accreditation. "I have been trying to explain to wholesalers when they choose a presenter that they should be looking for PFCI in the designers' credentials," Greene says. "It is as important as the design credentials."

Greene, a longtime manager of Nunan Florist, paid for her own accreditations, "because I believe in their value to my career," but she appreciates the support she's received from the top. "The owner of Nunan has always supported my decisions to pursue accreditation. It keeps me happy, and if I am happy then everyone is happy." But it's paid off for the company as well: Nunan's name has appeared in more print publications because of Greene's professional accreditations, Greene says: "Membership has its privileges and Nunan has definitely reaped many." 🌿

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