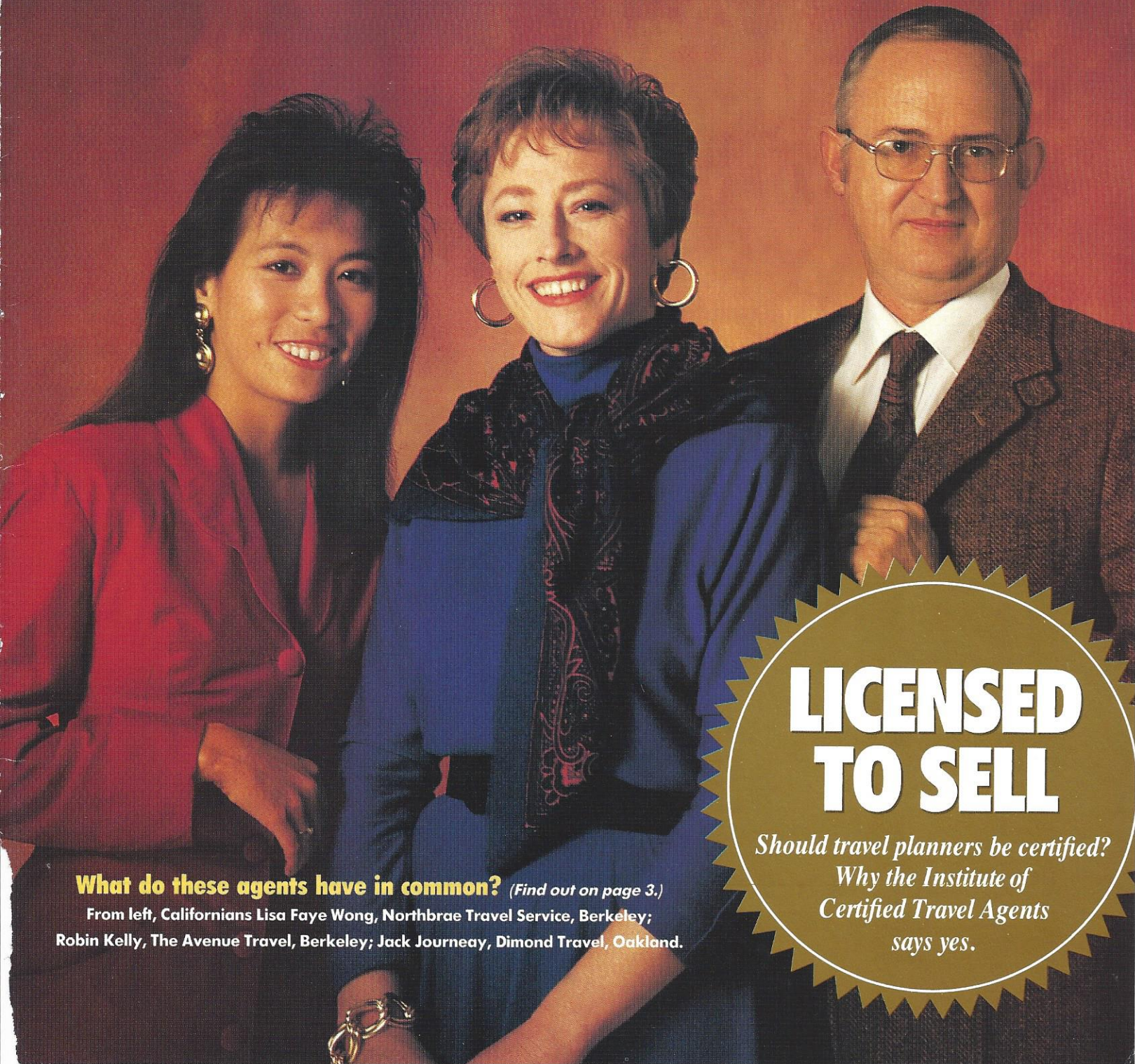


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THE MAGAZINE FOR TRAVEL PROFESSIONALS

MARCH/APRIL 1990



**LICENSED
TO SELL**

*Should travel planners be certified?
Why the Institute of
Certified Travel Agents
says yes.*

What do these agents have in common? *(Find out on page 3.)*

From left, Californians Lisa Faye Wong, Northbrae Travel Service, Berkeley;
Robin Kelly, The Avenue Travel, Berkeley; Jack Journey, Dimond Travel, Oakland.

IN 1988, SHERYL SAPRIEL SPENT \$25 each month to have her hair styled by a licensed hairdresser, \$500 to have her tax return prepared by a certified public accountant, and \$1,200 in fees to the licensed real estate broker who showed her and her husband the apartment they ultimately rented in Philadelphia. Her largest expenditure that year (around \$2,500), however, went to the travel agent who arranged her family's one-week Caribbean cruise—a professional who, though competent, was not required to be licensed or certified to practice her trade.

According to the U.S. Travel Data Center, Sapriel's vacation dollars were part of the \$313 billion spent on travel in the U.S. in 1988. Travel was the third-largest retail industry that year (and many predict it will become the country's largest by the year 2000). Yet, ironically, it's a commodity almost anyone can sell.

"Smaller industries that aren't always considered professional have mandatory certification programs, but the travel industry does not," observes H. Wayne Berens, chairman of the Institute of Certified Travel Agents (ICTA), a nonprofit educational organization in Wellesley, Massachusetts, devoted to encouraging professional excellence in the travel industry. ICTA's 26-year-old Certified Travel Counselor (CTC) program is strictly voluntary and relatively small-scale.

But in a time when professionalism and sterling public image rank high on agents' wish lists, the question of certification for travel-industry personnel is particularly timely, and ICTA's CTC program stands out as a potential model for the travel-consulting future. Should uniform training or certification be required for those who sell travel, as it is in other trades? What would be the benefits to you and your clients?

**For today's
travel agents, certification
is an optional status symbol.
But visionaries at the Institute of
Certified Travel Agents foresee
a stronger, smarter industry
in which everyone is**

LICENSED TO SELL

BY DAWN M. BARCLAY

BERENS BELIEVES THAT more stringent licensing of travel agents is inevitable. "Up to now, travel has been an evolving industry, and many professionals have fought against government intervention," he says. "But consumers today are more sophisticated. They want to feel comfortable and secure working with travel agents, especially when they keep hearing about airline and tour-operator bankruptcies. These problems will be the catalysts toward establishing some type of identifiable industry standards."

Such regulation could follow the lead taken by the province of Ontario, which in 1975, after a series of financial failures in Canada's travel industry, established the Travel Industry Act,

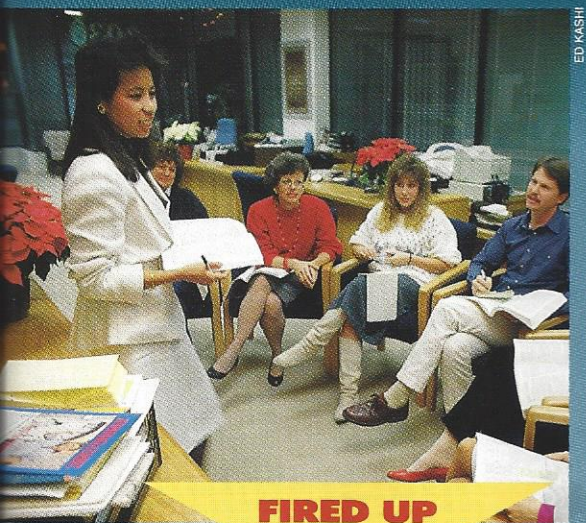
a form of consumer protection that requires agents to adhere to certain standards, though it makes no educational demands. British Columbia and Quebec have adopted similar legislation. Or regulation could mimic the example set by West Germany, where agents must complete a rigorous three-year educational program, during which they spend two or three days studying tourism in school and the rest of the week apprenticing with local agents. Only after the German students pass an exam and receive diplomas are they allowed to call themselves travel agents.

What little regulation of travel agent eligibility exists in the U.S. today is on a state level. Rhode Island, for example, requires prospective agents to pass a 100-question exam that

DIFFERENT STROKES

Four divergent CTC viewpoints

BY MARY HOPKINS



FIRED UP

If ICTA were to start a fan club, its president could be LISA FAYE WONG, a certified travel counselor who is manager of the corporate department of Northbrae Travel in Berkeley, California. Wong, who's been an agent for six years, is certain ICTA's program has bolstered her career. She was certified a year ago and has worked as a CTC study-group coordinator with Oakland-area certification candidates since 1985.

Networking is 29-year-old Wong's most valued CTC benefit. Agents who participate in the study groups work shoulder-to-shoulder with competitors, Wong says, allowing them to exchange ideas, experiences, and contacts in a supportive atmosphere. "You learn that everyone is working toward a common goal—professionalism."

A manager before she entered the program, Wong feels she's become a better supervisor since certification. "I was prompted by the program to start a direct-marketing campaign for my agency that's clinched several new bookings," she says. "I've also learned a lot about stress management."

Wong believes that CTC coursework should be mandatory for all agents. "It teaches essential ethical principles, and because it is such a big commitment—time-wise and monetarily—it fosters dedication and professionalism," she says.

In five to 10 years, Wong hopes to be involved in advanced training for travel agents or possibly working for a travel agent placement firm. But she plans to stay involved in the CTC program as a study group coordinator no matter what she's doing. "It takes a lot of my free time, but seeing students blossom keeps me going back."

covers geography, office management, and general travel questions, such as duty-free allowances. Only candidates over 18 who can provide references attesting their honesty are permitted to take the \$10 test. Or applicants may pay \$5 for a six-month apprentice's permit that doesn't require examination. Ohio, Hawaii, and California are among the other states that set standards.

During the Carter administration, some members of Congress, pushing for greater consumer protection, moved to have the U.S. Travel and Tourism Administration license travel agents, says the American Society of Travel Agents' (ASTA) vice-president of government and international affairs, John Bennison. But after being reviewed by the Office of Management and Budget, the plan was shelved. "Leaving enforcement up to the states reduces federal costs," Bennison says.

ASTA takes no stand on national licensing, according to Bennison, because in spite of its desire for high industry standards, it doesn't advocate federal-government interference in small business. "We feel that individual chapters are in the best position to judge the legislative needs of their states and to determine the best ways to regulate their trade," he says. The society will work with individual chapters to fight for or against legislation in a particular area and has written a model bill that the chapter can use, amend, or rewrite. (Bennison estimates that 20 to 30 chapters have requested copies of the bill.)

Nor does the Association of Retail Travel Agents (ARTA) take a position on national licensing, echoing ASTA's assertion that federal government should take a hands-off approach to small-business regulation. Although the organization helps local chapters fight various state licensing bills that it considers to be over-regulatory, ARTA chairman Sal DePace says the group does advocate some kind of nationwide travel agent

registration that would help combat scams. The group is also pushing for higher travel agent training standards, and by fall, DePace hopes to implement a travel school evaluation program.

Those who advocate regulation for agents in the U.S. say that satisfying all of the interested parties while establishing reasonable standards is tough. "Certification would have to exist on many levels," says ICTA's president, Judith C. Zacek. "You would need to decide on the basis for awarding a certificate. Would you be testing the ability to write tickets or to read a map? The ability to understand a tariff, to manage a reservations system, or to handle money? One certificate would have to identify basic skills, another, something more conceptual."

Agreement on definitions is but one reason the travel agent world has not been able to come to a consensus about mandatory certification. How to deal with public reaction is another factor. "On the one hand, travelers would feel better protected when using agents," predicts Berens, "but they might also find retailers more difficult to negotiate with. More professional agents, equipped with better self-esteem and business savvy, would be more apt to charge fees for their services, less likely to give away the store to match the competitor down the street."

AT PRESENT, AGENTS WHO wish to increase their knowledge and distinguish their credentials must turn to voluntary certification programs. Trade organizations as diverse as Meeting Planners International, the Society of Incentive Travel

PAPER SCULPTURE BY SALLY VITSKY
PHOTOGRAPHED BY
LEE SALSBERY



Executives, the National Association of Business Travel Agents, the Association of Travel Marketing Executives, and the National Tour Association all offer such programs. For retail sales agents, however, ICTA's Certified Travel Counselor program is widely considered to be the most viable, progressive, and respectable.

"Rather than a moneymaker for ICTA, it is a legitimate standard of achievement," says Cord Hansen-Sturm of the New School for Social Research in New York City, which is a pioneer of graduate studies in travel and tourism management.

The CTC program, open to all industry members, is designed to improve travel-management skills and boost one's knowledge of the industry. Candidates are required to master a five-part travel management program and to pass four essay exams within 18 months to three years. They must also write a lengthy travel-management paper.

ICTA's curriculum, which has been hailed as comprehensive by industry leaders, is the result of a continuing metamorphosis, says Zacek. "Milton Marks, our past chairman, and other leaders launched the CTC program in 1964 because they saw a need for education and professionalism in travel—a demanding profession with a glamorous image." To get the program off the ground in 1965, ICTA awarded honorary CTC designations to 470 handpicked "founding members"—agents who were known for their character, financial stability, and ethical business dealings.

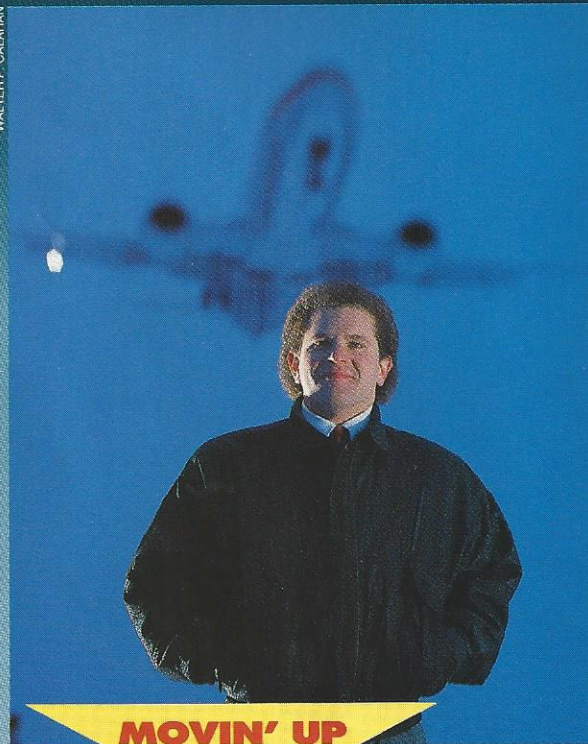
Then, between 1966 and 1968, ICTA offered a Senior Certification Program. One hundred fifty travel agents signed up to participate. All were screened to ensure that they had excellent reputations in their communities before being given a two-hour exam

covering all phases of travel agency management. Each also submitted a 2,000-word research paper. In 1969, the CTC program adopted the training format it follows today (see "CTC at-a-Glance," page 14) and was opened to all members of the industry. Travel suppliers were limited to receiving a Certified Travel Associate (CTA) designation in lieu of a CTC award until 1980, when the two designations were merged.

ICTA has occasionally been criticized for its management emphasis. Some complain the curriculum is more attractive to those with ambitious career paths than to those simply interested in selling travel. Counters founder Milton Marks: "[Management training] is essential to meet the increased public demand for professional service incident to travel and tourism." Partly to address a broader constituency, the institute has diversified its curriculum in recent years by offering two new programs: The Travel Career Development (TCD) award, which was started in 1983, goes to entry-level employees who pass a basic skills course and complete one year in the industry. The Destination Specialist (DS) designation, launched in 1988, is awarded to those who have at least one year of experience and who complete intensive studies of geographic regions.

TO DATE, ONLY A FRACTION (around 6 percent) of this country's 200,000 or so travel agents have invested the time, money, and effort to earn their CTCs. Berens and Zacek attribute low enrollment to three main reasons: the industry's high turnover rate (around 18 months, according to Zacek), the 10 percent exam-failure rate (candidates may retake), and the fact that many owners don't financially support front-

WALTER P. CALAHAN



MIKE PAGNANELLI,

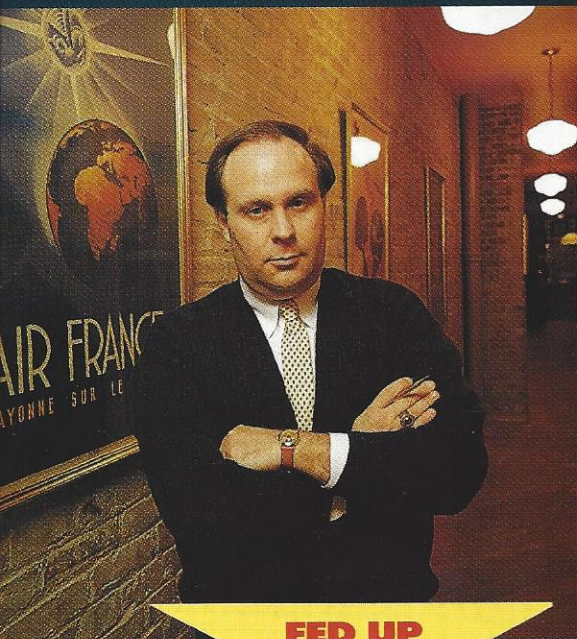
28, is climbing the travel-career ladder. Five years ago he completed a six-week travel course at Southeastern Academy in Kissimmee, Florida. After two months with a ground-service company at National Airport in Washington, D.C., he was hired by Omega Travel as a leisure-travel trainee in its Greenbelt, Maryland, office. Three months later Pagnanelli was promoted to full-fledged travel consultant at Omega's corporate agency inside Johns Hopkins University. Now he's planning his next advance: he enrolled in ICTA's CTC certification program last January and hopes to complete the three-year coursework in an ambitious year and a half.

"I want to become a manager with Omega, maybe even a regional manager or a trainer at Omega's travel school in Virginia," Pagnanelli says. And he's so sure that obtaining his CTC will boost his career that he's willing to pay his own tuition. "Omega probably won't reimburse the cost, but this is still something I want to do," he says. "The CTC designation will help me get the position I want and give me more knowledge to train agents coming into the company."

His employer doesn't require managers to be CTCs, but Pagnanelli anticipates that the coursework will become a prerequisite to employment in the future. "I know my boss wants more of the employees to take the courses," he says. "Omega is just growing so fast right now, they can't seem to find enough agents who have the CTC designation."

For a young agent on the move, he says, certification is the ticket up.





FED UP

"Window dressing"—that's CTC BRUCE BISHINS' assessment of ICTA's certification program. "Those three initials after my name give me industry status," he says. "But the program didn't aid in the development of my career in any way. In fact, it doesn't make anyone a better travel agent, because the course material isn't specific to travel planners. The curriculum is geared toward managers and owners—of any business."

Bishins, 39, pursued certification in the late 1970s after working briefly as a consultant with Caprice Travel in Yonkers, New York, as a flight attendant and reservationist for several airlines, and as manager of travel agent training for TWA (where he taught fare construction, ticketing, and itinerary planning). Today, the former CTC study-group coordinator is executive director of the Airline Training Council in New York City, an educational group that provides continuing education—primarily technical-skills enhancement—for U.S. travel agents.

Although ICTA has refined parts of its program since Bishins graduated, he says he's reviewed those changes and still finds the coursework short on such technical-skills training as itinerary planning, fare construction, and geography. "The industry has hoodwinked the public into believing that certification by ICTA makes an individual a better travel agent," he says. "That's just not true, because the coursework doesn't provide the nuts-and-bolts job skills."

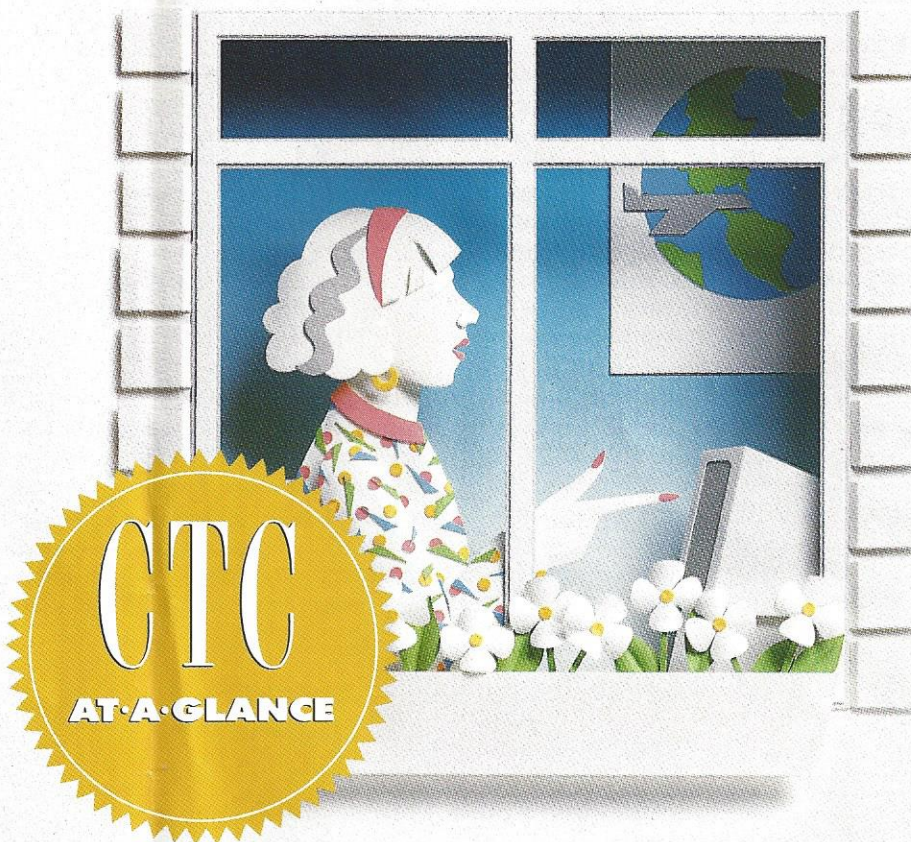
On a resume, though, Bishins thinks a CTC designation looks good. "It's the hallmark of the professional travel-industry employee," he says. But, he asserts, frontline travel planners who have no management ambitions need not apply.

liners who want to enroll in the program, fearing that agents will leave and open their own competing businesses.

The last point is a misconception, says Berens, and fighting it is one of ICTA's prime future challenges. He points to Omaha's Frank Dinovo, president of the Travel and Transport chain, one of the country's largest. Dinovo has paid the expenses for approximately 100 agents (one-third of his staff) to take the CTC course. And when they graduate, the agency automatically adds \$150 to their monthly salaries, in addition to their regular raises. Rather than losing employees, Dinovo says his staff is better educated and more professional, and his turnover rate is 80 percent below the industry average. "We save our employees," he says, "because

we invest in their futures and offer them a supportive place to grow."

As part of its push to increase recognition and to erase lingering misconceptions among noncertified agents and the public, ICTA's well-orchestrated public-relations department sends out to the consumer press news releases touting its membership in the guise of service topics such as "Advice for Traveling With Children." Notices are also mailed to local newspapers whenever an agent in the paper's area earns the CTC designation or attends an ICTA seminar; the CTC program is always mentioned. The campaigns seem to be working: more than 2,000 letters pour into ICTA each year from consumers asking the group to identify competent, professional travel planners.



◆ **CURRENT MEMBERSHIP:** About 12,000, with another 7,000 "in the pipeline."

◆ **NUMBER OF CTCs GRADUATED EACH MONTH:** Around 100

◆ **WHO APPLIES:** Among candidates who are travel agency personnel, 29 percent are owners or managers, 70 percent are in sales or other positions, and 1 percent of candidates' positions is unknown. Among graduates who are agency personnel, 56 percent are owners or managers, 41 percent are in sales and other positions, and 3 percent of positions are unidentified. Approximately 10 percent of those who seek or earn CTCs work for airlines, hotels, car-rental companies, cruise or rail lines, and tour operators.

◆ **PREREQUISITES:** To receive the CTC designation, candidates must have five years industry experience, but they can begin the program after two years in the industry.

◆ **CORE COURSEWORK:** Tourism, marketing, and personnel and business management.

◆ **INITIAL COST:** Candidates must take four courses that cost \$150 each (including textbooks, exams, and grading). They must then either write a resource paper (\$50 fee) or attend one of ICTA's Professional Management Seminars and write a 20-page paper about it (\$250 for tuition, materials, and most meals). After coursework is completed, there is a \$40 fee for certification processing.

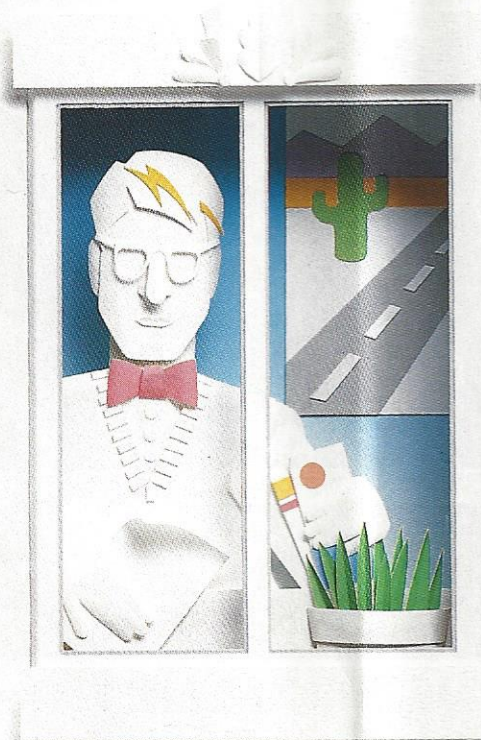
WHEN—OR IF—INDUSTRY-wide certification might occur is anyone's guess. Because industry members lack a universal point of view about travel agent licensing, no concerted push for it is under way. Debates persist.

ASTA national director Harold Berns cautions against viewing pilot programs such as ICTA's as a panacea for all that ails the industry. While education is an important part of promoting professionalism, he points out that ultimately agents are at the mercy of circumstances beyond their control. "No agent—with or without a certificate—can anticipate or foresee political upheaval or an act of God, like a hurricane," Berns says. Others on the fence note that practical experi-

ence can be as good a teacher as theoretical knowledge.

But even skeptics seem to believe that mandatory certification is one way to raise the caliber of those who sell travel and that if it does lie in travel agents' futures, programs such as the Certified Travel Counselor will help lead the way. ♦

Former travel agent DAWN M. BARCLAY frequently writes about the industry. She lives in New York City.



♦ **ANNUAL COST:** Once the CTC is achieved, no additional dues are required. To remain an active Institute member (more than half do), there is a \$95 annual charge.

♦ **CLASSROOMS:** Under local ICTA representatives' direction, the courses are pursued in study groups in the CTC candidates' own geographic areas. Agents meet weekly at a central location with a study-group leader and, usually, five to 10 fellow students. You may also study independently.

♦ **BENEFITS:** Once certified, travel counselors may add the CTC designation after their names (as they might an advanced college degree). ICTA representatives say the letters are respected by the entire industry and, ICTA hopes, increasingly by consumers. CTCs also report intangible gains: increased

knowledge, better management skills, boosted self-esteem, and pride in academic achievement. According to Susan Vannasse of Travel People Personnel, a Boston travel-placement firm, in a tight job market, a CTC designation might give a candidate an edge. And in some cases, ICTA course and registration fees may be tax-deductible (ask your accountant).

♦ **BENEFITS FOR ACTIVE CTCs:** Listing in annual directory, ICTA mailings and newsletter, yearly discount on the institute's Professional Management Seminars, discounts on selected industry textbooks, optional low-cost life insurance, eligibility to become officers in ICTA educational forums (alumni organizations), and eligibility to attend ICTA's annual national forum.

♦ **FOR MORE INFORMATION:** Write to the Institute of Certified Travel Agents at 148 Linden St., P.O. Box 82-56, Wellesley, Mass. 02181. Or call 617-237-0280 or 800-542-4282.

—D.M.B.

W. GEOFFREY HARTMAN



BOOKED UP

BETTA CARNEY admires the prestige of the CTC designation, but she isn't certified and doubts she ever will be. As president and CEO of World Wide Travel Service Inc. in Little Rock, Arkansas, the veteran agent says she stays too busy planning vacations for VIP clients, promoting her business, and expanding her 24-agency chain to apply. "I looked at the course's books, understood them completely, and asked if I could test out of the curriculum," she says, "but ICTA didn't agree to that." So Carney opted to skip the magical initials unless ICTA changes its requirements.

"I'm no less professional without my CTC," says Carney, 49, who entered the industry as World Wide Travel's assistant manager in 1971. She was also board chairman of the now-defunct Associated Travel Network.

"I learned the ropes in the industry by doing," she says. "I think ICTA should make a provision for people who have been in the business for 10 years or longer; we should have a vehicle for obtaining certification without having to take the courses." [According to ICTA president Judith Zacek, there are no plans to offer equivalency exams because the current coursework involves "exceptional dedication" and "valuable networking"—concepts she says are central to the purpose of the designation.]

Although time constraints prevent her from enrolling, Carney encourages her employees to pursue their CTCs and even pays for their courses. She is a proponent of industrywide certification because she feels it would bolster the image of travel agents. But, until such licensing becomes mandatory or until ICTA lets her take its certification tests without enrolling in the prerequisite coursework, she's satisfied to let her professionalism and experience speak for themselves.