



# Spring



# Home IMPROVEMENT



Special Advertising Supplement of the  
**TIMES HERALD-RECORD**  
March 15, 2008

Why shouldn't everything in a home, from the layout of each room to the design of the furnishings and appliances, accommodate all of its residents? The logic of designing a living environment to be safer, ergonomically superior, easier in which to maneuver, more intuitive and, in general, equally efficient for a healthy 10-year-old, a fully capable 35-year-old, a 55-year-old with arthritis, a blind 75-year-old or a mobility-challenged 100-year-old is fueling the growing appeal of universal design.

Universal design is human-centered design, based on the real-world differences between how people move, how strong they are, how large or small they are, and how their abilities and needs change throughout their lives, says Susan Mack, founder of Homes for Easy Living Universal Design Consultants, Murrieta, California. Universal design is not just for a subsection of the elderly or physically handicapped. It is a multi-disciplinary design principle aimed at creating products and environments usable to all people.

### Accommodation, accommodation, accommodation

Imagine living in a home that is set up to help you accomplish everyday tasks more safely and efficiently. That may not sound like too much to ask of what is arguably a family's largest lifetime investment, but many homeowners acknowledge that even today's most curb-appealing house can be a nightmare when it comes to everyday living — especially for someone with a disability.

When Linda Ropiecki moved to a house over 100 years old in Central Valley, New York, it seemed like an ideal home to raise a family. But the same features that made it pretty to look at, made it next-to-impossible to

# Design for the Ages

By Gloria Smith Zawaski, including content from CTW Features

"User friendly" universal design is changing the landscape of homes, infusing accessibility and function with beauty and style.

Below and right: Linda Ropiecki of Central Valley had a special track system created for her universally designed home addition, to further facilitate the care of her disabled daughter Jackie. Far right: Bathrooms developed through universal design (UD) allow for a five-foot turning radius, step-free shower, non-slip floors and higher electrical receptacles. In a UD kitchen, features such as a high-contrast backsplash and open cabinets provide visual clues to what is where.



navigate when it came to accommodating her daughter Jackie's special needs.

Jackie first exhibited signs of Rett Syndrome when she was only 15 months old. The condition progressed and today, at age 21, Jackie doesn't have use of her arms or legs. She cannot sit up without assistance. Although she weighs only 75 pounds, it's a lot of weight to lift several times a day. A single mom, Linda has nurses come in to help care for Jackie, but manpower isn't all that is needed to enable her to care for Jackie at home. Four years ago, she took out a loan to build a downstairs addition for

Jackie's bedroom and bath. The stairs had landings and columns, which made it impossible to add a lift, she says.

Although the downstairs addition had universal design features like wider doors for a wheel chair and a barrier-free bathroom, transferring Jackie from bed to wheelchair and back again was becoming near to impossible.

"I learned about ceiling track systems that could help me move Jackie, but I felt adding one would be another extensive, expensive renovation project," Linda says.

Family Empowerment Center in Middletown recog-

nized the urgency of the situation and helped her find financial assistance. They also recommended the services of a specialist in making environmental adaptations to the home — Ed Foddrill, VP of Facilities at Inspire in Goshen.

Foddrill knew that the solution for Linda was literally close at hand. Pine Island, New York is the home of SUREHANDS® Lift & Care Systems, the exclusive US distributor of overhead lifts for the disabled for transferring, bathing and more.

"He had to anchor it to a beam, but nothing major had to be ripped up or torn down," says Linda about the installation of the ceiling track system. "If I ever move from here, it can even be taken out to move with me."

"It's all about choices," says Ellen Giuliano, Long Term Care Services Manager with Independent Living in Newburgh, New York — an organization advocating for the rights of people to live independently for over 25 years. According to statistics, 85% of all people become disabled or will experience a disability in their lifetime. Giuliano emphasizes that it costs 33% less to provide services to a person in their home.

"If it's far less costly to care for people in their home and if people prefer to stay there," she says, "why shouldn't they be able to do just that?"

The evolution of the concept can be traced back to the end of World War II, when thousands of wounded veterans returned from the war requiring accommodations in order to live at home independently.

Over the decades, thanks to the hard work of advocates for the rights of people with disabilities, concepts like barrier-free design and architectural accessibility have come of age.

### The times, they are a'changing

World War II also gave birth to the biggest and most demanding population segment of modern times — the baby boomers. Now, they're aging with a vengeance and making it known that they'd like to continue to do so right where they are — at home. According to a survey conducted by the American Association for Retired Persons (AARP) a whopping 80% of people over 50 want to live at home for as long as they can.

"We've gained about 30 years in life expectancy in the last century — up from 47 a hundred years ago to 77 today" says Pulitzer-prize winning author Robert N. Butler, M.D., founder of the International Longevity



Photo: Gregory W. Buff

Center (ILC) headquartered in New York.

The ILC is the first nonprofit, nonpartisan, international research, policy and education organization formed to educate individuals on how to live longer and better, and advise society on how to maximize the benefits of today's age boom. Since the population didn't generally live very long, "the typical home wasn't built to help dwellers grow old in familiar surroundings," Dr. Butler continues. "Living in a poorly designed space adds stress that can speed up the aging process. Homes that feature

night lights, non-slip floors, step-free showers and step-free entries can be a lifesaver and a life extender by helping to prevent falls," he says.

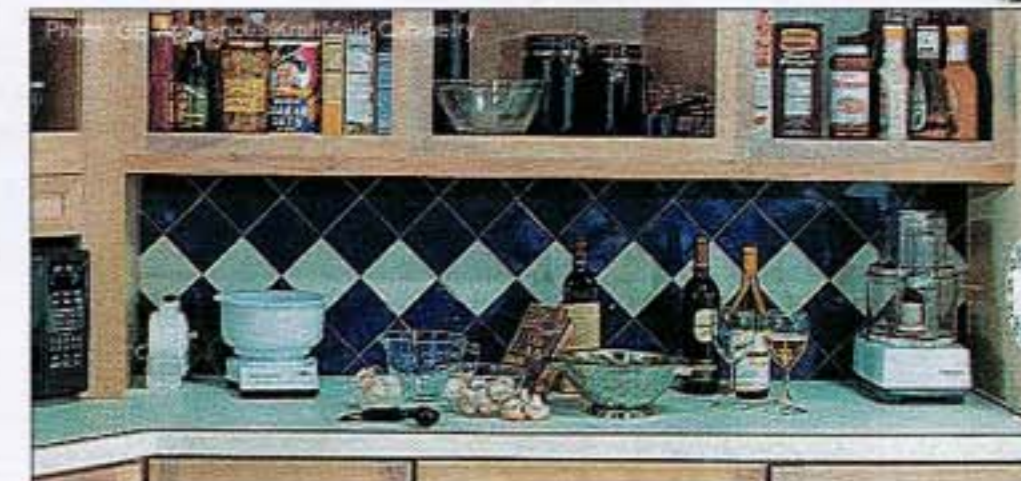
Dr. Butler emphasizes that universal design principles apply to people of all ages — not only the elderly or those who have disabilities. "The safety of flooring is equally appropriate and valuable to the elderly as it is to a pregnant woman or a child who is 17 with a broken leg," he says.

place. It also revealed that a significant number of AARP members mistrusted the tradespeople they'd need to consult with in order to make adaptations to their homes.

In 2001, the Remodelers Council of the National



Photo: Kohler Co.



"The baby boomer market is the largest in history, has significant disposable income and is incredibly diverse," says Esther Greenhouse, an environmental gerontologist and a Certified Aging in Place (CAPS) specialist living in Dryden, New York.

She explains that the AARP survey conducted in 2001 did more than quantify the baby boomers' desire to age in

Association of Home Builders (NAHB), in collaboration with AARP, developed the Certified Aging in Place Specialists (CAPS) program to help those who could provide services to this market develop the necessary skills.

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