

LET'S REMODEL

Designs help disabled become self-sufficient

"A disabled person is only handicapped if they choose NOT to do something about it."

Q. My mother recently became disabled, and we are considering how best to adapt her house so that she can continue to be self-sufficient. Can you help?

A. We receive calls daily from family members, health care representatives, insurance companies and individuals whose lives have just been altered by a catastrophic accident, terminal illness, medical emergency or the individual getting older. Although situations are disabling, they should not become a "handicap."

Your situation is not uncommon. any people find their family members released from a hospital or health-care facility and go home to an environment that originally was improperly designed for what we call "Life Growth."

Thanks to federal laws, state laws and companies who design environments for the disabled, both commercial and residential spaces are becoming more accessible and inviting for the physically challenged. The "Universal Design" approach pays strict attention



to the growing needs of a family. It redesigns a house according to the needs of everyone in the family and addresses the changing needs for the future — the Universal Needs ranging from the child to the older individual. Home renovations for the disabled often benefit everyone who lives there. Following I have listed some of the types of renovations and products room by room that can enhance and make living conditions easier.

On the Outside: Exterior landscaped concrete ramps that conform to the architecture of the house with a terrace or deck for relaxing or turn-around, can be

appealing to anyone. Lightweight aluminum ramps can be folded or removed are excellent for wheelchair access.

The Inside: The inside of the house requires them most renovations. Doorways should be at least 36 inches wide to accommodate a wheelchair or walking aid. You can buy "fold-a-way" hinges for interior doors that enable the door to lie flat against a wall when opening. Door thresholds should be no higher than 1/4 inch or less. Thining of how easy it is for the elderly and toddlers to trip over these. Instead of the round door knob, use a lever, handle or knife-shaped handle. This allows a person with grocery bags to open the door with an elbow. Other general changes may include non-slippery floors such as rubberized tiles, windows that are low enough for people to look out of, brightly colored tape at the edge of each step, higher furniture for those with difficulties rising from a sitting position and barrier-free lifts mounted on ceiling that help transfer people independently into bed or the bath.

Kitchens can present several challenges. Thing "low" when you store items in the kitchen. Rollout shelves and baskets are helpful. Countertops and cabinets require leg/wheelchair

space underneath. Mount the oven at eye level when sitting, and there are ovens with doors that open sideways. Stoves need burner controls on the front side to avoid burns.

There are numerous manufacturers and design firms that specialize in solutions for easier living. You can find books and periodicals on the subject at the library and bookstore and design firms in your telephone directory.

Cary Greenberg, Design Director, Quality construction/INRECON-Universal Design Division Dearborn, 313-846-6735.

If you have home-improvement questions, call Gayle Walters at the Michigan Remodeling Association (MIRA) at 810-335-3232 or, send questions to "Let's Remodel," 2187 Orchard Lake Road, Suite 103, Sylvan Lake MI 48320. Answers are provided by members of the MIRA, the local chapter of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI). Members include professional contractors, manufacturers, wholesalers and lenders representing all facets of residential and light commercial remodeling. For more information or a free copy of our membership roster, call 810-335-3232.

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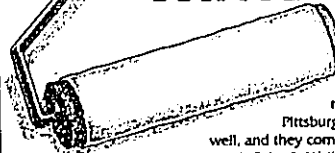
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