

Open floor plan: (Top and left photos) The living room/dining room of the Rabideau home, shown here in two views, looks out onto the lake. The two-story ceiling creates a spacious feeling.



Two in one: Marge Rabideau's mother, Margaret DeMarke, lives in a separate barrier-free suite with its own view of the lake.

On the cover: Photos show the Rabideau residence on Lake Oakland before (right) and after (far right) Bloomfield Township architect Michael Trautman turned it into a multi-gabled home.



Renovation removes barriers in house

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
Special Writer

When Irv and Marge Rabideau decided to convert their one-story home on Lake Oakland into a 3,500-square-foot dream home, they knew the first floor must be readily accessible to Marge's 86-year-old mother, Margaret DeMarke. Margaret had hip replacement surgery in 1984 and presently walks with the aid of a cane. A barrier-free floor plan was a must.

Previously, the Rabideaus owned a spacious 5,600-square-foot house in Detroit's Palmer Woods, so moving from an 18-room residence to 900 square feet in Waterford Township was unacceptable.

"We had that spaciousness we didn't want to lose. Because lake property is difficult to acquire, we decided to tear down and rebuild. We wanted a view of the lake from as many rooms as possible," said Irv Rabideau, formerly a librarian at Madonna University in Livonia.

The first step was to contact Michael Trautman, a Bloomfield Township architect who specializes in bar-

rier-free design. As part of Albert Kahn's staff in the early 1970s, Trautman worked on Children's Hospital in Detroit. Since then he has designed homes for paraplegics, clients with closed head injuries and quadriplegics in wheelchairs. Trautman took the Rabideaus' asbestos-sided cape cod and turned it into a multi-gabled home that was readily accessible to Margaret.

After their first meeting in March 1994, work began one year later to remove existing architectural barriers and demolish about one-half of the house built in 1950. Only the shell and footings of the existing structure survived after completion. The house was then raised 16 inches to allow for a walk-out basement to the lake.

"One of the criteria was budget considerations. It's less costly to use the existing facility as a starting off point. There's been a savings of 60 to 70 percent of what it would have cost new," Trautman said.

A wall of windows, running the length of the living room, opens onto a 12-by-50-foot deck. The two-story ceiling combined with the windows creates a magnificent view of the lake.

"I like the openness and the trees are beautiful. It

reminds me of where I grew up," Rabideau said.

The barrier-free mother-in-law suite complete with walk-in closet, bathroom and shower is all one level without raised thresholds between rooms. The sleeping area has direct access on the deck.

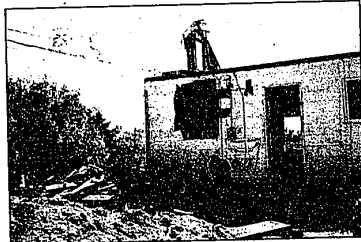
A gradual incline formed from earth creates a natural ramp for Margaret to enter the home easily.

"What I like about designing barrier-free structures is the impact you can have on someone's life. They improve immediately because they have more control over their environment. They take more initiative to move around," Trautman said.

"The first floor is essentially barrier free. It's what we refer to as a three-generation home."

Since the project was open to modifications while work was in progress, a wrap-around window in one wall was added to the architectural plans. It extends the view from the wall of windows opening onto the deck in the mother-in-law suite.

"The windows turn the corner so you get so much more of a view. The vista you get of the lake is pretty grand," Trautman said.



In progress: Walls were torn down and the house raised 16 inches to create a walk-out basement.

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