

Architects work to help seniors "age in place"

By Janice Brunson
Staff writer

Ageing in place, a new concept based on a long tradition, helps people who are growing older to remain in their own homes for as long as possible by tailoring home environments to meet the needs of the elderly.

The concept, a response to people living longer than ever before, is a timely practice with a snappy new name and a slight difference.

Housing is remodeled or built new with features that make independent living easier for those who have such diminished physical capacities such as reduced hearing or less endurance.

"By the year 2000, 25 percent of our population is going to be over age 65. The fastest growing segment is 80-year-olds," said J. Robert Gil-

lette, president of American House Retirement Residence, a network of homes for "trial" older people in such communities as Rochester Hills, Birmingham, Farmington Hills, Livonia and Westland.

Expansion at the Rochester Hills facility highlights aging-in-place features for residents who, while physically restricted, are mentally alert, Gillette said.

THE EXPANSION includes 22 new apartments, each at ground level with an enclosed patio. The protected patio area permits outdoor living free of wind, sun and other harsh elements that pose problems for many elderly people, Gillette said.

All carpeting permits easier mobility for people using wheelchairs or walkers. "Those things are part of the aging process. We welcome them,"

Carpet, walls and cabinets consist in color. Color schemes include blue-gray carpet, white walls and wood or brown cabinets.

Other modifications include cabinets lower than normal and counter tops higher than normal, electrical plugs higher than normal and light switches lower than normal.

Freedom Square, a Michigan Housing Development Authority project by Piper Realty in Farmington Hills, is "affordable" housing for the physically impaired people or people older than 61. The project is expected to be ready for occupancy by mid-October.

Of the 112 units arranged in clusters, 10 percent are barrier free to accommodate wheelchairs, walkers and similar devices. Each unit has an emergency call system in both the bathroom and bedroom, a washer and dryer and a private pa-

tio.

"THEY'RE LIKE condominiums. People seem to like them. We've had quite a bit of success with this style," said Robert Bessert of Piper Realty. Freedom Square is the firm's fourth housing development for senior living.

Forty-six more units in the project are in a two-story apartment building. The second floor is accessible by elevator. A small market provides basic on-site shopping.

Freedom Square and American House are examples of housing especially designed to accommodate older people. Similar results may also be obtained by remodeling existing houses in which older people already live.

"A Comprehensive Guide to Retrofitting Homes for a Lifetime," published by the National Associa-

tion of Home Builders' Research Center in Maryland, offers remodeling tips based on studies of transformed housing in Tucson, Miami and Winston-Salem, N.C., said Lenny Rickman of the research center's special-needs housing program.

The center is in the forefront of remodeling tips, Rickman said. "The most important areas to modify, the best places to start, are the kitchen and bathroom. They are the areas most important to safety and comfort," Rickman said.

The biggest improvement, he added, are support bars in the bathroom, both by the tub or shower and the toilet. Installation may be minor or major, depending upon wall support systems.

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS are flexible shower hoses and heads that can be manipulated by hand, sinks

with single-handle faucet systems and stoves with controls at the front so the user doesn't have to reach over hot burners or a heated oven.

Hartford House, a traveling exhibit designed by the Hartford Insurance Group, is meant to increase awareness about how physical environment can be modified to accommodate the changing needs of an aging population.

"It's all about the longevity revolution," said Sandra Sharr, spokeswoman for Hartford Insurance. One-fourth of today's population is older than 50, she said.

"In practical terms, living longer means people stay in their home longer. When planning home improvements then, we should think not only of our needs today, but our future needs," noted a booklet that accompanies the Hartford House exhibit.

Get the most use from energy dollar

An energy audit of existing house is costly. Your house is one of the difficult to do the best ways to ensure that energy. A contractor uses much warmer, reduce heat loss and conserve fuel. If you do this, you must also insulate any not obstructed.

However, if your plan to insulate your house, in heat or water pipes in the basement.

The energy efficiency of your house depends on the insulation of the house. Insulation on the four-

Insulation on the four- sides of the house, whether you have a basement, crawl space or slab foundation, is often overlooked. Insulation applied at 68 degrees Fahrenheit on the house exterior to cover the exposed foundation and to extend one foot below ground level is effective.

OTHER ENERGY conservation measures for thermostat, which automatically lowers the heat when you're in bed and have the equipment tuned.

up and its efficiency checked annually. If the burner is not a flameless burner, consider replacing it. You should periodically inspect the burner for oil leaks.

Have your water heating equipment, have or — the second largest energy consumer in the home — drained periodically to remove built-up sediment. Insulate the hot water pipes and the water tank. On gas and oil water heaters, be sure to fire properly because gas ports can become clogged with rust or dust from the pilot light and clean or replace air filters once a month during heating season.

Finally, consider the If you have oil-fired radiators or baseboard heaters, you should in shower heads and have the equipment tuned.

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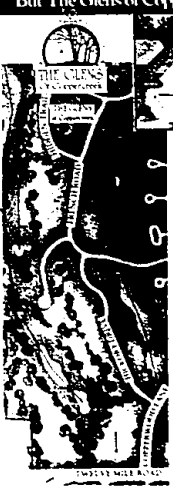
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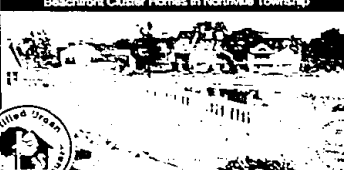
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