

The Business Monthly

The Business Newspaper of Howard & Anne Arundel Counties and BWI Business District

A Disability Doesn't Mean Moving!

By Robert Wood



We all know that people are living longer and healthier than ever before. The challenge this fact of life presents to many baby boomers, however, is that many 50-some-

thing adults are facing health, mobility, and housing issues for their parents. In fact, while the 50-some-things are helping their parents, it is the perfect time to begin thinking about their own plans for living out their retirement years.

Whether planning for parents or themselves, key questions to ask include: Are we selling the family home and downsizing to a smaller home? Moving to Florida? Moving in with the children when the time comes? Or staying put and just modifying the house we have?

If, in fact, staying in the family home and "aging in place," whether it is for their parents or themselves, is the decision, working with a contractor who is not only experienced in accessibility modifications, but well versed in the requirements of the Americans With Disabilities Act, is a bonus.

While the ADA does not apply to residential construction, its principles of Universal Design are sound recommendations for anyone wish-

ing to build a home or modify a home to accommodate people with disabilities.

Whether you need to build a wheelchair ramp, build an entire suite on the ground floor for an aging parent, or simply want to modify your master bath to accommodate a wheelchair for "when the time comes" while you're renovating anyway, you will want to consider changes to standard heights and widths related to many house features.

Key areas to discuss with your contractor include:

- Lighting (light-switch types and height; lighting placement decisions inside and outside to prevent falling, including motion-sensitive lights)
- Door threshold heights
- Door widths to accommodate a wheel chair
- Door handle types and heights
- Counter heights
- Depth of cabinets
- Path of Access into the house (can you roll a wheelchair if needed?)
- Handrails
- How to get up steps inside and outside
- Non-slip flooring surfaces

- Sink decisions (pedestal sinks are easier for wheelchair access).

As you can imagine, it is important to think through the activities and chores a person does each day to anticipate how a sudden disability may impact his or her independence.

Think for a second about all you do in a day. If you were suddenly confined to a wheelchair for the next year, how would you be able to survive in your current home without daily assistance?

Would you be able to move around easily and reach what you need to prepare food? to bathe independently? to handle laundry? to clean? Can you even get in and out of the house without help?

Since remaining independent is a goal for most of us, now is the time to think through the "what if's" and think about modifying your home well in advance of the need.

Now is also the time, particularly in Columbia, to inquire about any building covenants or restrictions in your neighborhood so you won't have to do battle with the community association when you may actually need that wheelchair ramp or addition on your house.

Bob Wood is president of Wood Builders Collaborative, LLC, a home remodeler. He performs accessibility audits as well. He can be reached at 410-750-0890 or by email at BobWood@BuiltByWood.com.