

The beauty of universal design for aging in place

Posted at 9:34 AM on September 27, 2010 by Nancy Leasman ([1 Comments](#)) Filed under: [Aging](#), [Todd County](#)

"Ronald" commented on my [Sept. 8 post](#) about aging in place. He mentioned homes incorporating universal design, barrier free plans, aging in place home plans and other similar concepts. I talked with Richard Hardine of Infinity Development in Alexandria, Minnesota, about universal design.

Richard's mobility was affected by bulbar polio the year after he was born in 1950, so he understands accessibility issues. With residual effects of progressive muscular weakness, Richard recently found that using a wheelchair works better than struggling with canes or other ambulatory supports. The knowledge gained in building two previous homes adapted for accessibility as well as his association with architect Paul Ringdahl of [Ringdahl Architects](#) in Alexandria, has created a thoroughly thought out floor plan for his own home and a wealth of information to share with other future home owners who require similar considerations because of their own physical limitations. Richard, who has master's degree in marketing and management, acts as a construction manager in his own firm and works in association with Ringdahl Architects.

At the onset, it's important to understand terms associated with accessibility.

- Accessible design conforms to mandatory requirements which vary widely but generally result in fixed features which are permanent and noticeable. These include: wide doors, lower countertops, bathroom adaptations, altered switch and control locations, absence of steps and stairs and wider pathways.
- Adaptable design allows for the omission or concealment of some features of accessibility until needed. Wide doors, no steps, knee spaces, switch and control locations and other features are built in but other adaptations can be added as necessary. These dwellings can look the same as others and be matched to individual needs when occupied.
- Universal design creates dwellings that have been carefully thought out and are totally accessible throughout the range of human abilities across a lifetime.

The principles of universal design produce homes that are beautiful and

functional allowing access by anyone, regardless of physical capability.

Next time: more about the Hardine home and how it models accessibility.

Comments (1)

It is also important to take into account the person you are designing for, their current conditions and future limitations.

Posted by richard hardine | [September 27, 2010 3:48 PM](#)