



Organizing a Universal Design National Demonstration Home

The National Association of Home Builders defines Universal Design as “the design of products and environments to be usable for all people to the greatest extent possible without the need for adaptation or specialized design.” Universal Design is related to aging-in-place. Some of the many features of Universal Design include no threshold entrances, one story living, wider hallways and doorways as well as levers instead of doorknobs. These slight changes in residential planning can make a home much easier for those who have limitations in function.

After a life altering accident, Rosemarie needed a wheelchair for mobility. Living in her two-story home proved to be a nightmare. Cabinets were too high, sinks were not accessible, doing laundry was impossible. Daily life for Rosemarie and her husband Mark became unbearable. The concept of Universal Design appealed to them as they struggled to make adaptations to allow Rosemarie to function in their current home. They decided it was time to build a home that they could both live in comfortably and for a very long time. In 2004 I was fortunate to be working at the architecture firm that was hired to build the Universal Design home for Rosemarie and Mark.

Over the next several years the project slowly came to life. Being part of the design team was both fascinating and quite challenging. I learned first hand how these Universal Design specifications would make this house functional and beautiful! We proceeded to sculpt a home that would accommodate Rosemarie who is 4'-2" in her wheelchair, and her husband, Mark who is 6' 4". In the kitchen there are several different counter heights. The sink is open underneath and allows Rosemarie to roll up in her chair and wash dishes. There are no rugs in the home and zero thresholds between rooms and at the exterior doors allowing Rosemarie to travel everywhere with ease. The home is spacious and inviting without any hint of the slight design changes that make this home special.

Ten years later, while I am presently working with Rosemarie and Mark as a Professional Organizer, the goal has remained the same. I am continuing to help my clients facilitate the use of their space and make life easier. Rosemarie has a limited capacity to carry items on her lap so it is more important than ever to store items where

they are used! We moved the entire CD collection to an old armoire in the garage because the only time she listens to them is while driving. Now she can select from her collection and immediately be on her way. In the master closet, Rosemarie's clothes are on the lower half of the wall and Mark's hang above hers. All the shelves for Rosemarie's shoes are within easy reach for her and her husband takes the high road. Nothing sits on the floor. Our work in progress involves setting up Rosemarie's memorabilia and files as well as Mark's tool collection and technology room.

It has been a unique opportunity and privilege to be able to work with my clients during the design and construction of their amazing new home. I now have the pleasure of helping them with the upcoming grand opening of their national demonstration home , The Universal Design Living Laboratory located in Columbus, Ohio. In late Fall 2014 this demonstration home will be open to the public for tours and classes to showcase the benefits of Universal Design and the ability to age in place.

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