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The School of Life – Universal Design Living Laboratory

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Life
universal design
living laboratory

Life teaches us far tougher lessons than any eccentric professor ever could, and nobody appreciates this more than Rosemarie Rossetti, Ph.D. Though she spent many a studious hour earning academic honors, a life-altering accident reinforced the idea that classrooms exist beyond campus walls. As a result, she's building an educational facility of her own, and it also just happens to be her home. Along with her husband, Mark Leder, Rosemarie is creating the Universal Design Living Laboratory, a thoughtfully planned residence – incorporating barrier-free and healthy home principles with energy efficiency and sustainable practices – that will be open for touring not only to the A&D community, but to the general public as well. And to think that this revolutionary demonstration tool sure to impact numerous people's lives would have never happened had Rosemarie and Mark not chosen to go biking along a trail that day...

Ten years ago a 7,000-pound tree changed the course of Rosemarie's life. While enjoying some biking time with her husband, the mighty 80-foot tree suddenly fell, brutally striking her and paralyzing her from the waist down. After many agonizing months of rehabilitation, she looked forward to returning to the home in which she and her husband planned to retire. Upon arrival, however, they quickly and shockingly realized that, due to her mobility limitations stemming from the accident, 50% of what was once her dream home was inaccessible to her. Steps and stairs, high thresholds, tight spaces and narrow doorways were but just a few of the nightmares that she had to content with day in and day out. The most basic of daily tasks had become annoying difficult or out-right insurmountable.



Kitchen renderings

Her demanding circumstances started her thinking... Not only is the world's population aging and, therefore, losing mobility and sensory cues, but everyday people all over the world experience accidents and illnesses – whether temporary or permanent – preventing them from enjoying the one place on earth that should be their sanctuary: their home.

So why was it that more people didn't initially design and build their homes to be as universally accommodating as possible? Ignorance of the process, fear of the expense, perception of undesirable aesthetics or all of the above? Planning for everyone from the start would not only make a home more comfortable for its current residents, but it would also make the home more appealing and, consequently, raise its value by expanding the range of possible buyers in the future.

In today's increasingly eco-conscious climate, these concepts also made Rosemarie realize that if a built environment isn't accessible, then it cannot be considered sustainable. In other words, if it can't be passed along to future users without having to implement a great deal of change – resulting in a great deal of waste – then how can it truly be designated sustainable design?



Kitchen rendering

Master Bathroom rendering

No matter what, Rosemarie and Mark had to take action to create a more livable home environment for them both. Since they each also worked out of the home, it was doubly important that they took the care to do it right. Rosemarie was not satisfied with simply creating something that only benefited her and Mark. As an established professional speaker, consultant and trainer, she understood that her challenging circumstances could quite effectively act as a catalyst to educate others about practices that would save homeowners heartache in the short-term and money in the long-term. She saw the potential to influence the quality of others' lives. The idea for the Universal Design Living Laboratory was born.

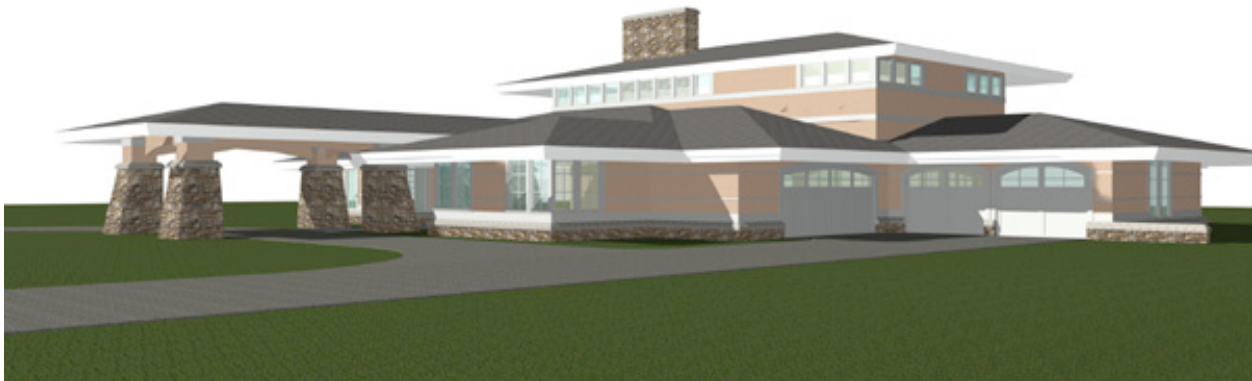
After assembling a top-notch team of design professionals and expert specialists and consulting with them for many an hour, construction on the 3,500-sf home is planned to get underway next month (June 2008) in the Jefferson Township of the Columbus, Ohio Metropolitan Area. Every decision and detail has been made with the UDLL mission statement in mind: To bring about awareness of the quality of indoor and outdoor lifestyle through universal design, green building, safety, and healthy home construction practices to the public, construction and design industries.



Wardrobe renderings

Among many other topics, Rosemarie lectures and writes about the seven principles of universal design, which cover ideologies from preventing segregation of a space's occupants to incorporating various options to impose the minimum amount of fatigue for users. To read a complete, detailed list of these thoughtful planning considerations, go to UDLL.com and look under *Articles*.

In order to bring this project to fruition, however, Rosemarie and Mark needed financial support. Luckily, they found it – and are still finding it – in the form of sponsors. Part of their goal includes “incorporating the finest craftsmanship and state-of-the-art products and services,” so they sought out brand name manufacturers to satisfy design solutions. As of May 7, 2008, they have almost 100 Approved Product and Service Contributors, and more are signing on every week. Current major contributors include: Marvin Windows and Doors, Kohler, Silestone by Cosentino, KraftMaid, Lennox Heating and Air Conditioning, and Classic Metal Roofing Systems.



Though a few images are included in this article, more can be found on the official UDLL website [UDLL.com], along with details on team members, photo and rendering credits, Rosemarie's articles, contact information, and much more. The website is in the process of undergoing a renovation, and they anticipate the updated, information-dense site will be up for viewing sometime next month (June 2008). At that point a complete list of contributors and photos of the construction site will be available.



Once the home-cum-classroom is completed, tickets will be available for groups and individuals to tour the home. Net proceeds from ticket sales will benefit spinal cord injury research at The Ohio State University. To keep up with progress, go to the UDLL website and subscribe to receive email updates. Whether you are a designer, builder, manufacturer or consumer, you'll be sure to learn a thing or two that will ultimately benefit your quality of life.

ARTICLE LINKS (in alphabetical order)

Classic Metal Roofing Systems: <http://www.classicmetalroofingsystems.com/>

Jefferson Township: <http://www.jeffersontownship.org/>

Kohler: <http://www.kohler.com/>

KraftMaid: <http://www.kraftmaid.com/>

Lennox Heating and Air Conditioning: <http://www.lennox.com/>

Marvin Windows and Doors: <http://www.marvin.com/>

Silestone by Cosentino: <http://www.cosentinousa.com/>

The Ohio State University: <http://www.osu.edu/>

UDLL: <http://www.udll.com/>