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Universal DESIGN

A home for all ages

By Larry Taff

Population studies in the United States show that by 2025 there will be 72.1 million citizens over the age of 60, compared to the 39.6 million we had in 2000. As a result of this population boom, initiatives all over the world are encouraging age-friendly cities. Universal design is a key component of that change. It is a worldwide building and design concept based on the idea that all environments should be easily used and accessed by people regardless of age, size or physical abilities — throughout their life span.

This has become such a hot topic that cities in the United States are creating “Lifelong Living Communities.” These forward-thinking municipalities are attempting to change the way we think about growing old in our communities. The cities adopt many universal design elements to create spaces, encourage business practices and services that benefit all who live there. Universal design in remodeling uses the same principle. It asks you to look at your home in a new way that will allow you to stay in your home happily and healthily, and will allow visitors to your home to be comfortable no matter their age or ability.

Most homeowners would prefer to live safely and comfortably in their home for as long as possible. Who wouldn’t? With the

costs for medical and limited care housing increasing, it makes smart financial sense to be proactive and prepare your home now ... for life. You plan for retirement; you can also plan for your family’s future comfort in your home. Most universal design strategies can be employed with very little fuss. While some folks may require a significant remodel to make their home live up to its universal design potential, most homeowners need only the very basic of modifications and perhaps a new way of looking at their space.

Based on our company’s history with accessibility and universal design principals, here are our top 10 universal design tips:

- Door width: 2’8” is OK, but 3’0” is better.
- Create no-step entries to home.
- Install single-lever door handles.
- Consider user-friendly plumbing fixtures.
- Improve lighting — pay attention to glare.
- Keep high-traffic areas free of rugs and furniture.
- Select flooring that is easy to travel and clean.
- Pay close attention to appliance styles and location of controls.

- Plan countertop and vanity height for future access modification.
- Add stylish assistance with decorative grab bars.

If your home requires major remodeling to meet your needs, consider this: The cost of limited care facilities can be \$5,000 or more per month. That can add up to over \$60,000 in one year at today’s cost. From a cost vs. value perspective, universal design updates can also add value to your home if done with a Universal Design Certified Professional.

The worldwide concept of a “city for all ages” is a wonderful, forward way of thinking about community. The first steps toward that attitude can be recognizing that change begins at home. By planning universal design improvements, you can make your home a place that allows you to live happily and healthily for as long as you need.



Larry Taff is owner of TZ of Madison, Inc., which specializes in residential remodeling and has been awarded the NARI Contractor of the Year Award in the category of Residential Universal Design for two years running. Learn more at www.tzofmadison.com.