

Aging homeowners now stay put

By **JENNIFER HAMILTON**
The Associated Press

Alan and Julie Stewart converted their kitchen cabinets into drawers to hold pots and pans. They widened the doorways and eliminated all stairs in the house.

They age-proofed it, not for their grandchildren, but for themselves. The couple are in their 80s and getting around has become more difficult.

"It's fixed up for older, disabled people," Alan Stewart said. "It's a lot safer. It's a lot less tense for us not having to watch for steps."

This type of home modification is referred to as remodeling for "aging-in-place," something building industry representatives say is growing as baby boomers mature and seniors look for a more active lifestyle than what is provided in retirement homes.

"People want to maintain that independence," said Louis Tenenbaum, an independent living strategist based in Potomac, Md. "They don't want to move into a home where

someone else decides when they will have lunch."

Tenenbaum, who has advocated aging-in-place at national conferences, supports increased government funding, from such sources as Medicare and Social Security, to help pay for the remodeling.

"The age wave is coming and people are starting to find ways to deal with it," he said.

In addition to staying in their homes, aging baby boomers are searching for active adult communities with spas and Internet access. The fastest-growing segment of the retirement market wants to stay close to home, builders say.

To accommodate the need, homebuilders and remodelers are becoming more creative by designing homes and retrofits that are useful and aesthetic, architect Doug Walter said.

"There's no excuse for clunky-looking or institutional-looking bathrooms," he said.

In the Stewarts' home, the shower grab bars match the towel holders and the wider doorways are enclosed with double doors. They could have moved to a new home with built-in amenities, but they pre-

ferred to remain in the home where they've lived for more than 40 years. They even made plans to celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary here with 200 friends in late June.

"We just couldn't bear moving from this community," Alan Stewart said.

Walter predicts the remodeling market will surge as baby boomers age.

"The baby boom generation is doing OK in their 50s, but give us another 10 years and a lot more of these accessibility issues will be in the forefront," he said.

The National Home Builders' Association launched an aging-in-place certificate in May to train professionals about the skills needed to make home modifications that accommodate seniors.

The association estimates residential remodeling to be a \$180 billion industry.

In its latest survey of the remodeling industry, Harvard's Joint Center for Housing Studies projected that baby boomers will account for the creation of 12 million new households as a result of "empty nests" and new single-person households.



AP Photo/David Zalubowski

Alan, right, and Julie Stewart pose with their daughter Nancy, left, and granddaughter Megan in their remodeled kitchen in Bow Mar, Colorado this spring. No stairs, wide hallways and a number of other modifications have made their home easy for the elder Stewarts, who are in their 80s, to remain in the home they have lived in since 1956.

A house plan benefits from professional input

By **LORI HALL STEELE**
Special to the Record-Eagle

At least once a year, a client who's drawn up his own floor plans comes to architect Dave Whiteford for a do-over.

"A couple years ago, someone came to us who'd started building on a sloped site and realized the house wouldn't fit," Whiteford said. "It was nearly impossible for the driveway to be built. We redesigned a new house on top of the existing foundation."

Drawing up new home or renovation plans, or selecting ready-made house plans, is, for many people, a lifelong dream. But area architects see a number of recurring nightmares when people try to build from scratch or with purchased pre-drawn plans.

"Often people fall in love with a floor plan they see in a magazine, but don't realize it doesn't fit their particular piece of property," Whiteford said.

Good plans take into account terrain — slopes, soils that require deeper footings, wetlands, water table levels. They also consider such natural elements as wind directions, take advantage of views or natural light, suit lifestyle needs and don't waste space.

So, how do you know if that

dream home or long-sought renovation is going to work? Try hiring or at least paying a consulting fee to an architect, who can visit the site and make suggestions, before handing plans over to a builder.

Architects often charge 4 percent to 8 percent of the home's cost, and consulting fees are much less. Some plans simply need to be reversed or flipped to work on a particular site.

"If you save a client \$10,000 worth of mistakes, it's worth it," Whiteford said.

When hiring architects, be sure they specialize in your particular type of project, whether it's a new home or renovation. Ask whether the bulk of their work is in that area.

Designing your own home or planning a renovation can be challenging. Area architects see common errors in such large do-it-yourself project: Wasted hallway space, rooms that don't take advantage of views, potential structural problems, inadequate clearance for stairways, not taking into account wall thicknesses, and inefficiencies with kitchen and bathroom arrangements.

The trend among new homes in northern Michigan — which varies from home plans elsewhere — is view-oriented designs, as opposed to typical suburban-area plans found in many design books that are ori-

ented around the home itself, perhaps with the living room facing the front door.

Many new homes in this area are designed for empty nesters or retirees, something to keep in mind for resale value. In these empty-nester homes, major living area — master suites, kitchens, laundry rooms, dens, living rooms and dining rooms — are concentrated on the main level, with upstairs rooms reserved for guests and walk-out basement areas containing guest rooms and family rooms, said Traverse City architect Tom Piehl.

"If people are doing their own floor plans, they should think about what they really need and control square footage," Piehl said.

Think about the site itself — what particular size home will work there, not only for you, but for others if it's ever sold. Keep construction detail simple, too, to control costs. The best-laid plans can become a financial nightmare without some forethought.

"The chief problem, and this happens on every project, is that people don't look at what they want to do completely," said Traverse City architect Robert Dehne. "They're thinking about adding a room. They're not thinking, 'I need new lights, new outlets, that the furnace may need to be upgraded, that the

electrical panel needs to be upgraded."

These unseen infrastructure costs, along with what those in the industry call "allowances," can jack up renovation and new-home costs tremendously. Allowances are the budgeted amount for finish products — light fixtures, flooring, cabinetry — and often contractors estimate those costs based on the cheapest products available.

"Allowances are almost always way below what anyone would accept for a level of quality," Dehne said. "Somebody thinks they have a renovation that'll cost \$50,000 and it ends up costing \$75,000."

Lori Hall Steele is a local freelance writer.

Dealing with a dirty deck

For cleaning purposes, powdered laundry detergent and hot water is usually enough to clean a moderately dirty deck. However, if the deck has seen better days, a chemical wood brightener along with a pressure-washing might be what's needed.

Once it's clean, moisturize the wood with an oil-base stain or wood preservative. Whatever you do, don't buy anything with wax in it. When you wet a wood surface that has been sealed with wax, the water will bead beautifully.

Unfortunately, that beautiful coat of wax doesn't penetrate as far beneath the surface as oil does. Worst of all, wax evaporates far more rapidly than oil — about two to three times as fast. A good wood preservative also has chemicals that prevent damage from ultraviolet rays of the sun and from attack by mildew.

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Best way to paint exterior doors

It's time to get out your paint tools and deal with the exterior doors on your home. Here's a trick that will save you a headache this coming winter. When painting an exterior door, you must be certain to seal all six of its sides. Exterior doors have a tendency to warp and twist when the weather turns damp. That warping is a sign that the door hasn't been properly sealed on all six sides — outside, inside, hinge side, handle side, top and bottom. If you want to head off having to repair your doors next winter, be sure to seal all six sides when you paint them this summer.

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