



As time marches on, seniors discover aging in place

2nd Sep, 2009 | Source : By Susanne Matthiesen

As people enter the retirement years, one of their major lifestyle decisions is deciding where to live. In our series of retirement articles, this is the first of three installments on living spaces for older adults. In this article, we will explore the current practices of the aging in place model. In subsequent installments, we will examine the concepts of universal design and home and community services.

The [National Association of Home Builders \(NAHB\)](#) defines aging in place as living in one's home safely, independently, and comfortably, regardless of age, income, or ability level. Options available to older adults include modifying an existing home or moving into senior-friendly housing.

To recognize excellence in accessible home design, [AARP](#) and NAHB established the [Livable Communities Awards](#). The annual awards are given to the best developer, builder, and remodel that focus on a home's:

- Accessibility features.
- Elements that improve daily comfort.
- Features that incorporate ease of use.
- Features that incorporate safety.
- Usability by all ages and all abilities.

The [National Aging in Place Council \(NAIPC\)](#) has assembled a team of financial planners, reverse mortgage experts, home modification specialists, and gerontologists to focus on providing better services for seniors. These experts serve local senior populations in more than 20 NAIPC chapters and senior support networks in cities across the country.

"Needs may arise with couples when one member is ill and the other is the caregiver," says Marty Bell, NAIPC director of communications and marketing. "Both persons need different kinds of support to sustain their independence at home.

Fortunately, many social workers and geriatric counselors are



available to make assessments and help with referrals to services for people who wish to age in place." A resource directory for such help is on the NAIPC website.

Modifying your home might be the answer

Calling your house your lifetime home is a goal of many adults. An [American Society of Interior Designers](#) survey found that 82 percent of U.S. homeowners want to remain in their homes as they age, even if they require assistance and care.

The economy and housing market can also affect a decision to stay at home rather than to move. Older persons who wish to stay in their homes might consider the benefit of retrofitting their residences to accommodate their needs.

In conjunction with AARP, NAHB awards the [Certified Aging-In-Place Specialist \(CAPS\)](#) designation to builders who complete a course in adaptive modifications of homes. The association also publishes online [aging in place checklists](#) for individuals considering retrofitting.

[Susan Bachner](#) is a home modifications consultant specializing in safety, accessibility, and quality of life issues. In addition to holding the CAPS designation, she is a [U.S. Rehab](#) Certified Environmental Access Consultant (CEAC) and has earned the Specialty Certification in Environmental Modification (SCEM) from the [American Occupational Therapy Association](#). She says, "I look at how a person will function while engaging in the daily activities that make life meaningful. What is the interaction between what the person wants or needs to do, and how that activity is affected by the environment?"

Typical home modifications include reconfiguring bathrooms, installing grab bars, providing step-free entryways, and widening doorways and hallways. However, simple home modifications, such as decluttering floor space and increasing lighting, can go a long way toward improving the quality of life.

Susan counsels seniors, "Work with your team of professionals, such as occupational and physical therapists, contractor, architect, and designer to create a comfortable environment that is going to work for you as you age."

For homeowners concerned about how modifications might affect a home's value, Steve Long, a [Seniors Real Estate Specialist® \(SRES®\)](#), advises, "Retrofitting bathrooms and kitchens to make them more accessible can be a sound investment, depending upon the demographics and the degree or cost of the retrofit. If the area's residents are predominantly retirees and seniors, the retrofit could retain or enhance the home's resale value. I recommend that anyone considering a retrofit consult with their local SRES realtor first."

If moving to another home, a Seniors Real Estate Specialist can smooth the transition

SRES is a national designation earned by more than 15,000 realtors across the United States and Canada.

Carrying their SRES designations to a higher level, realtors Steve Long and [Vicki Palmer](#) are launching [SeniorCare Realty Services, LLC](#), tailored to older persons who want to move into senior housing. "We help them prepare their existing homes for sale, examine their options for new living arrangements, and then help them transition into quality senior housing in an honest, effortless, and caring manner," Steve says. "We can also refer to licensed elder care attorneys, accountants, tax consultants, and estate planners when needed."

Aging in place options abound in senior housing

Moving into senior housing can also provide the advantages of aging in place. Besides using an SRES-designated realtor to help with the transition, several online resources are available to help individuals research their options and make informed decisions. From his RE/MAX office in Tucson, Arizona, SRES-designated realtor [Vito Teti](#) says, "Seniors readily embrace information technologies, such as the Internet, to help them research housing options. Highly professional and timely communications are imperative in building relationships and trust."

At the [SnapForSeniors](#) website, visitors can explore housing choices by selecting a location and type of service: independent living, residential care, adult family home, assisted living, home healthcare, skilled nursing, nursing home, Alzheimer's care, or continuing care.

Unique among senior housing options are continuing care retirement communities that allow residents to age in place while moving between levels of services -- from independent living to nursing-home care -- all conveniently located on a single campus.

"Our residents tell us over and over again how important being able to enjoy peace of mind is at this time in their lives while enjoying maintenance-free living, activities galore, and superb healthcare," says Stephen Montgomery, president and chief executive officer of [Williamsburg Landing](#), an accredited continuing care retirement community in the heart of Tidewater, Virginia. Approximately 500 Williamsburg Landing residents have access to a full continuum of services, including independent residential living, ambulatory care, home health, emergency medical assistance, assisted living, special care, memory support, skilled nursing care, and long-term care, in their homes, townhomes, and apartments.

In the next article in this series, we'll look at the elements of universal design, which enables people to age in place.

Susanne Matthiesen, M.B.A., is managing director of the Aging Services customer service unit of CARF International, www.carf.org/aging, an accreditor of services and

residential options for seniors, including home and community services, assisted living residences, nursing homes, and continuing care retirement communities.

Article from NewsweekShowcase.com

URL : [http://www.newsweekshowcase.com/Retirement/venues/aging in place](http://www.newsweekshowcase.com/Retirement/venues/aging%20in%20place)

Published : 2009/09/02

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