

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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“Universal Design” – Livable Homes For All Generations

Are you adapting to your home as you age, or is it adapting to you? Did you know your home was probably designed for a healthy person of average height and good vision? You may fit that description now, but with time and circumstances, you can find yourself living in a home that no longer fits your needs – whether due to limited mobility or total disability. This trend will affect a huge portion of the population – approximately 20 million people – as Baby Boomers move into retirement age.

Universal Design is a set of standardized building and furnishing principles based on the belief that homes can be designed (or modified) to meet the needs of all generations and provide for enjoyable, independent living, regardless of age, size or level of ability.

The concept is catching on in the building and planning of homes around the country. Features such as wider doors, raised electrical outlets, stepless entry and lever-style door handles not only accommodate the needs of many different people, they increase its worth and enhance its beauty and livability over time. One obstacle that is already being overcome is the perception that specialized fixtures can have an “institutional” appearance. More stylish and personal choices in fixtures and design are available now than in the past, and the principles of Universal Design are gaining recognition among architects and university architecture programs.

Proponents of livable homes are leading a movement to integrate Universal Design into the planning stage, before a home is built, where it will become more accepted and familiar to both builders and designers.

Laurence Weinstein, a retired architect and planner in San Diego, has been championing Universal Design for years. He is currently the National Livable Homes Consultant for AARP (The American Association of Retired Persons) and coordinates the Livable Homes Pavilion at the annual AARP National Event. In 1999, Weinstein formed Shared Solutions America, a non-profit organization to promote the principles of Universal Design to builders and consumers.

Most recently, Weinstein has established a website, www.livablehomes.org, working with Web Feet Integrated Marketing in San Luis Obispo, CA. The goal of the website, Weinstein says, is to provide a clear, accessible source of answers to the thousands of questions he has received about how to build or change homes to accommodate disability. Photos in the site’s “livable home tour” showcase attractive homes built to Universal Design.

“Our mission is to help people better understand how to build new homes and make changes to existing homes,” Weinstein states, “incorporating special features that will help all family members perform daily living tasks more efficiently and enjoyably ... and assure independent and safe living through all stages of life.”

“Instead of saying *disability*,” Weinstein adds, “I prefer the term *maximizing ability* to perform everyday living tasks – for people of all ages. These days it can cost \$60,000-\$70,000 to put someone in a nursing home, but most people don’t need to go there.”

The principles and standards of Universal Design (also known as “Lifespan Design” or “Design for the Ages”) are described in detail on the Livable Homes website. Just a few examples include:

- At least one no-step entrance to the home.
- Full-length sidelights at entry.
- A 5’x5’ level turning circle on both sides of the entry.
- Minimum 36”-wide door openings throughout the home.
- Windowsills at maximum 30” height.
- Outlets, thermostats, phone jacks and switches at conveniently accessible heights.
- Improved lighting and skylights.
- Kitchen cooktop at 30”-34” height.
- Counters, stoves and sinks that allow a wheelchair to roll under.
- Beveled corners and edges on walls and counters.

Advantage Homes, a nationwide seller of manufactured homes, has introduced the “Generations Home Series” – homes built using Universal Design – in San Luis Obispo County. Pictures and listings of open houses in the series can be found at www.generationshome.com. Central Coast Advantage Homes in Arroyo Grande can be reached at (805) 474-1629

The Livable Homes website is at www.livablehomes.org. For more information about Laurence Weinstein and Universal Design, email to info@livablehomes.org or call 619.445.6778.

Photo captions (photos courtesy of Advantage Homes):

Livable Home 1: “This Arizona home was built incorporating Universal Design, to be enjoyed by all generations at all levels of ability and mobility.”

Livable Home 2: “The Universal Design shower allows for easy entry and has adjustable showerhead and convenient shelves.

Livable Home 3: “Raising the washer and dryer provides more convenient access using Universal Design principles.

Livable Home 4: “Kitchen sink plumbing is rerouted to make the sink is wheelchair accessible, as shown in this photo of an Advantage Homes residence, built using Universal Design principles.”

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Web Feet Integrated Marketing provides advertising, publicity, and image development for businesses throughout California. Web Feet has been providing a customized integrated strategy for four years. Graphic and advertising design, logo design, interior design, exterior signage, targeted marketing plans and public relations services are some aspects of Web Feet's customer-focused marketing approach.

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