

Aging Happens: Take steps now to remain in your home

By Ellen Waldman

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In a previous column, I described how people want to remain in their own homes for the duration of their lives. A webinar presented by an occupational therapist, titled "Implementing Accessibility and Safety for Long Term Care in the Home," addressed this very idea. Here are some facts to consider:

- More than 80 percent of seniors want to stay in their home for as long as possible, even if they need to receive health care or assistance.
- Accessible housing is essential to health and well-being as people age.
- Only one in six homes have made the changes necessary to support that desire.
- Among those 80 and older, three-quarters live in their own homes.
- Sixty percent have lived in the same residence for 20 or more years.

What is the percentage of people who can do the same activities at age 75 that they were capable of doing at age 65? Less than 5 percent! Are you sure your home will work?

What does it take to make your home friendly for aging? The Home Builders Association has developed a level of skill called a "certified aging in place specialist" or CAPS. In 2001, the development of the CAPS certification was created "to support appropriate design of long term care environments of choice." Basically, to ensure your home fits you as you age.

Here in Ashland, we actually have a CAPS professional at hand. Darrell Boldt (daboldtconstruction.com, 541-482-4865) has been doing business here since 1972 as a general contractor. As a CAPS, he offers home remodeling services to modify the environment to allow for aging in place. His motto is "houses for living, homes for life." This sounds like just what everyone is asking for.

In Central Point, there's already a small group of homes built as age-friendly, and it has become widely interesting to many people. The five most important "universal design" features, according to Harvard University, are: no-step entries, extra-wide hallways, accessible living spaces on the ground floor and accessible light switches and door levers. These homes have incorporated all of those features and several more.

A symposium will be held from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. May 16 at the Higher Education Center, 101 S. Bartlett St., Medford. It's called "Better Living by Design: Modifications that make our Homes More Adaptable for All Ages." Sponsored by AARP Oregon, Rogue Valley Council of Governments and Age-Friendly Innovators, it will be of interest to homeowners or home buyers, developers, builders, remodelers, architects and anyone else interested in this topic.

For \$20, including lunch (always draws a crowd), attendees will learn about home modifications, the Lifelong Housing Certification program and other information. It concludes with a tour of homes built to these standards in Twin Creeks Development. The three speakers will be Alan DeLatorre from Portland State University Institute on Aging; Susan Duncan RN, accessibility and home modifications specialist;

and Leigh Anne Jasheway, University of Oregon, humorist. (We all need to laugh sometimes when it comes to the topic of aging.)

To register or for more information, call Age Friendly Innovators, 541-261-2037 or send an email to sharon@agefriendlyinnovators.org. This is a lot of advance notice, but since spring is here, it's a time when people start thinking about their homes.

Some years ago, I had a client who lived on a large piece of vineyard property in Ashland. The problem was, she was still trying to do what she did decades before. She had to climb a spiral staircase to get to her bedroom — and that's just the beginning of the ways this home was no longer a fit for her. Since she refused to move, the family did their best to make some modest modifications. Eventually, the inevitable happened, and she fell and did not recover enough to return home.

No one thinks this will happen to them, but it can and it sometimes does. It's so much better to prevent this mess by having the right environment to support your long life. As in many topics I present, it's not too soon to think about this. Put this symposium on your calendar. You will leave with a much better understanding of what's available as you age and be better able enjoy your life, at home.