

NEWS ON TAP

The NEWS ON TAP Newsletter is part of OHCD's Housing and Disability Technical Assistance Program (TAP) concerning issues related to housing for persons with disabilities in the City of Philadelphia.
January 2001

Building for the Future: Design and Marketing Ideas for the Homebuilding Industry

On September 19, 2000, the Philadelphia Office of Housing and Community Development (OHCD) sponsored a forum entitled "Building for the Future: Design and Marketing Ideas for the Homebuilding Industry". The forum was co-sponsored by the Housing and Disability Technical Assistance Program (TAP), the Building Industry Association of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Corporation for the Aging. Two national experts served as keynote speakers, explaining the concept of universal design and presenting hands-on techniques for builders and remodelers.

John Kromer, Director of OHCD, Diana Myers, TAP Consultant, and Susan Klein, Director of the Philadelphia Corporation for the Aging, welcomed the audience of homebuilders, architects, remodelers and contractors and then introduced Richard Duncan, the first keynote speaker.

Mr. Duncan, who works for The Center for Universal Design, North Carolina State University began by defining Universal Design. He then described the principals



*Example of a Universal Design Door Handle
Photo from the Center for Universal Design Website*

and features that make this concept so practical, not only for people with disabilities, but for all homeowners.

"Universal Design (UD) is the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design." Mr. Duncan noted that, "*Accessible Design* and *Barrier-Free Design* are the basis for Universal Design. The principles are the same, however a major difference of Universal Design is that it is much more aesthetic and can be functional for many different consumers." Mr. Duncan then outlined the seven principles of universal design that have been compiled by The Center For Universal Design at North

(Continued on page 2)

Inside this edition...

<i>Think Globally, Act Locally</i>	4
<i>Websites of Interest</i>	6
<i>Publications of Interest</i>	8

(Building for Future continued from page 1)

Carolina State University. These principles offer guidance to better integrate features that meet the needs of as many users as possible. They include:

- **Equitable Use:** The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.
- **Flexibility in Use:** The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.
- **Simple and Intuitive Use:** Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.
- **Perceptible Information:** The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.
- **Tolerance for Error:** The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of

accidental or unintended actions.

- **Low Physical Effort:** The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.
- **Size and Space for Approach and Use:** The design provides appropriate size and space for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of the user's body size, posture, or mobility.

Mr. Duncan pointed out, "The concept of Universal Design makes good sense and can also make good dollar sense, too. More and more builders and architects are becoming aware of the value of UD, because it offers many benefits to everyone. This includes families with disabled family members, families who might ever have a disabled family member, older family members, friends, colleagues, extended families, families who use strollers and movers. UD offers ease of use for devices such as doorknobs, flexibility in use, safety and aesthetics. If the UD is integrated while the home is being built, it costs much less than if features need to be added at a later date. It also adds value to the home."

Mr. Duncan stressed that

"UD is more difficult to do in a remodeling situation while it only adds 0 to 5% of the cost for new construction."

Susan Klein is a big supporter of Universal Design and knows how difficult it can be to make many of the existing homes accessible. Ms. Klein cautioned that builders should "Stop building the same mistakes."

Although there are currently no government regulations requiring UD, some cities are taking their own initiatives to promote universal design. For example, Irvine, CA has created a brochure describing UD features and requires that builders show the brochure to homebuyers so that they will know that universal design features are available options. Another City, Phoenix, Arizona, is considering regulations that will require all single-family homes to be built wheelchair accessible.

Another factor that increases the importance of including UD features in homes is that the majority of the population will consist of senior citizens in the near future. The National Association of Homebuilders has recognized that seniors

(Continued on page 3)

(Building for Future continued from page 2)

and people with disabilities are a growing segment of the housing market. Smart homebuilders are therefore developing barrier-free housing that falls in the “universal design” category.

Mr. Duncan added, “The demographic bulge may wipe out all of the issues that prevent UD from being a standard feature in all new homes.” As the elderly population increases, which it will, this group of homeowners will want entrances without steps, wider doors to accommodate wheelchairs, lever door handles that are easier to use (see photo on page 1), single-lever controls on kitchen and bathroom fixtures, and light switches and electrical outlets located at a height that is more convenient and accessible. These are just some of the UD features that will be common in the future.

Louis S. Tenenbaum, President of Access Remodeling, Universal Design Specialists, was the second keynote speaker. He agreed that older people are in the biggest population group and that the market for UD should increase. He stated, “AARP did a study that said older people don’t want to move; 84% of the people over 55 years of age want to stay in their own

home for as long as possible. There needs to be more appropriate housing to meet the changing needs of this population. UD allows all people to have services that they need where they want them.”

More people need to learn about UD and understand its value in order for more builders to offer it as a highly practical option. The Center for Universal Design is working with the National Association of Home Builders and doing training sessions to educate builders about UD. The Center is also working with the University of North Carolina School of Architecture and Design to introduce the concept and train people. In addition, the Center is trying to do a Habitat for Humanity

National Demonstration project.

Dainette Mintz, Director, Special Needs Housing for the Philadelphia Office of Housing and Community Development, delivered some closing remarks. She thanked everyone for attending and ended with a very positive note. “The City of Philadelphia adopted a policy this past July that UD features will be mandated in any new construction of low-income rental units and homes.” This further exemplifies how Philadelphia is focusing their attention on meeting the needs of low-income people with disabilities. But it is important to emphasize that incorporating UD features into homes will ultimately benefit everyone.

Dainette Mintz, Susan Klein and Diana Myers at the “Building for the Future” Forum

Think Globally, Act Locally

The National Council on Disability (NCD) is an independent federal agency making recommendations to the President and Congress on issues affecting 54 million Americans with disabilities. NCD is composed of 15 members appointed by the President and confirmed by the U.S. Senate. In its 1986 report *Toward Independence*, NCD was the first to propose that Congress should enact a civil rights law for people with disabilities. In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law.

NCD's overall purpose is: to promote policies, programs, practices, and procedures that guarantee equal opportunity for all individuals with disabilities, regardless of the nature or severity of the disability; and to empower individuals with disabilities to achieve economic self-sufficiency, independent living, and inclusion and integration into all aspects of society. NCD also promotes the enforcement of civil rights laws related to housing and works to strengthen fair housing laws and Title II of the ADA.

In August and September 2000, NCD conducted regional community briefings around the country to share findings and

recommendations on federal enforcement of disability civil rights laws affecting people with disabilities. In conjunction with the briefings, NCD coordinated a multi-year study scheduled for completion in 2001 on the implementation and enforcement of the ADA and other civil rights laws. On September 8th, 2000 a briefing was held in Philadelphia, at which time NCD's new Ten-Point Strategy for the Next Decade of Disability Civil Rights Enforcement was presented and the audience was asked for their input.

It should be noted that the final copy of the Ten-Point Plan may, or may not, include fair housing. The Ten-Point Plan is intended for local, state, regional groups and agencies to adapt, adopt or apply according to their local conditions.

A panel of NCD staff and members who led the briefing included: Debra Robinson, a consumer satisfaction team member at Vision for Equality, and also the first woman president of Speaking for Ourselves, (a national organization of people with cognitive disabilities advocating on behalf of members); Kathleen A. Blank, an

attorney/program specialist with NCD; and Bonnie O'Day, Ph.D., the senior research associate at CESSI, Inc., where she serves as the principal investigator for a project to evaluate Centers for Independent Living and to conduct policy research on a wide variety of topics.

The panel began their presentation by noting that ten years ago people with disabilities worked together to get an important piece of legislation passed - *The Americans with Disabilities Act*. This law provides certain protections to people with disabilities regardless of race, culture, disability type, age, severity, or income, etc. Unfortunately, since that time there has been some backlash against the ADA. Most often this backlash has taken the form of ignoring the law, publicly defying the law, and inaccurate, negative media portrayals of the law. The response to this backlash at the federal, state and local levels has not been vigorous enough. In 1996 when NCD held a summit of disability advocates to look at enforcement issues, they found that: 1) there is far too little money in the federal government to support complaint processing and;

(Continued on page 5)

(Think Globally continued from page 4)

2) there needs to be compliance monitoring in the area of employment. Panelists stated that in order to improve enforcement policy, there needs to be a grassroots effort at the community level.

The audience was then asked for their input and to think about ways to involve folks at the grassroots level to help enforce the law. Roger Margolies, Assistant Deputy Mayor for the Mayor's Commission on People with Disabilities in Philadelphia, explained that his office, which is an information and referral point for the City of Philadelphia, has been taking steps to make voting more accessible for people with disabilities. This is one way people can have a voice.

Someone suggested that people with disabilities need to be more visible and prominent in the public eye. Making better use of the media is one way to do this. However, it was recognized that people with disabilities face both communication and transportation barriers. Another concern was that some people with disabilities who receive funding from the state feel uncomfortable about speaking out about the enforcement problems because they are afraid of losing their funding. This is

counter to the need to insist on service policies that reinforce independence instead of increasing dependency. NCD's plan is for the people to "turn up the volume" and demand change starting at the local level.

Some people at the briefing felt that imposing a fine to enforce the laws is not effective. Others stated that the major impetus for compliance with ADA is that companies and people don't want to be sued and need to maintain a good image. The public expectation should be that everyone has equal access and breaking laws and discrimination should not be tolerated.

Following comments from the audience, the panel presented a summary of NCD's Strategy for the next ten years of disability civil rights enforcement. The ten-point strategy represents a collective effort by people from diverse backgrounds to reach beyond their own community perspectives to understand and lend a hand to one another on the road to full equality. The plan speaks to people across the boundaries of disability, race, culture, age, education and income. The main categories of the ten action steps are listed below.

Action Step 1:

Build Bridges: Equality is Everybody's Business.
Activate people from every disability, human and civil rights movement around their shared passion for equality to create a common agenda for full inclusion.

Action Step 2:

Find Out What to Do and How to Do It: Knowledge is Power.

Action Step 3:

Elect a Disability-Friendly President and Congress to Fix What Needs Fixing.

Action Step 4:

Raise the Money and the Bar on Federal Enforcement.

Action Step 5:

Publicly Monitor Agency Accountability. All people have a stake in civil rights enforcement

Action Step 6:

Win in Court and Win the Courts Over.

Action Step 7:

Uphold the Spirit and Intent of the Law in Every Settlement.

Action Step 8:

Stand Up to Negative Press and Win the Media Battle. Reeducate the public about the nature of discrimination and the meaning of equality.

(Continued on page 6)

(Think Globally continued from page 5)

Action Step 9:

Acknowledge Those Who Deliver on the Promise.

ACTION STEP 10:

Engage New Leaders with Disabilities.

The strategic plan can be viewed in its entirety on NCD's website as it was presented to the public for their comments. These comments are now being incorporated into a revised and enhanced plan that should be released early in 2001.

Closing The Gap: A Ten Point Strategy For The Next Ten Years Of Disability Civil Rights Enforcement as well as other information about the National Council on Disabilities can be accessed on NCD's website at www.ncd.gov. NCD's fair housing report should be published in the summer/fall of 2001.

According to the NCD, "The purpose of this plan is to promote the empowerment necessary to achieve full equality of opportunity for all

people living in this country. A sense of mission among those who have a stake in fully implementing civil rights laws will forge bonds and generate momentum among people across disability, cultural and advocacy groups to advance the status of any marginalized group in society. Ultimately, it will unleash the action needed at all levels to deliver on the promise of equality." This includes enforcing fair housing laws to ensure that people with disabilities have

Available Resources - Websites of Interest

Concrete Change

eleanors.home.mindspring.com

This website provides information on Concrete Change, an international effort to make all homes visitable. *VisitAbility* provides basic access design features that enable a person in a wheelchair to visit a home.

PhillyACCESS Unlocking Information

www.phillyaccessonline.com

PhillyACCESS is an informational service dedicated to the notion that knowledge is power. In its unique format, **PhillyACCESS** will strive to service the entire community including disabled individuals, parents and caretakers of disabled individuals, those that work within the community including teachers, therapists, advocates, and the rest of those involved in the lives of the disabled. **PhillyACCESS** will present a regularly updated source of information including news about the disabled community and a calendar of local events, the chance to sound-off or just to meet new people.

Disabilities Law Project

www.dlp-pa.org/

This website provides information on The Disabilities Law Project (DLP), a non-profit PA law firm that provides free legal assistance to people with disabilities, their families, and their organizations. DLP's main purpose is to advocate for the civil rights of people with disabilities, and their right to live as integral parts of their communities. DLP works to ensure that people with disabilities have equal, unhindered access to employment, transportation, public accommodations, and government services; to enforce their rights to vocational, rehabilitative, educational, health; and to protect them from abuse and neglect.

Center for Universal Design

www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/

This website provides information on The Center for Universal Design, a national research, information, and technical assistance center that evaluates, develops, and promotes universal design in housing, public and commercial facilities, and related products.

Available Resources - Websites of Interest

The Welcome to America Foundation

www.Welcome-America.com

Welcome to America is a non-profit corporation recognized as a tax-exempt foundation by the Internal Revenue Service. **Welcome to America's** mission is to provide least-cost mortgages to persons who might otherwise not be able to afford a mortgage. It serves immigrants, first-generation Americans, Native Americans, seniors, women-as-heads-of household, members of minority groups, the disabled, and other disadvantaged persons. For more information, please call **Welcome to America** toll-free at 877-221-0119, or write to: Welcome to America, Inc., PO Box 8995, Reston, VA 20190, or e-mail to: *immigrantsbroker@aol.com*

The Self-Determination Housing Project of Pennsylvania (SDHP)

www.sdhp.org

This website provides information on SDHP, a non-profit organization whose goal is to increase the stock of affordable, accessible and integrated housing and to expand access to public and private housing programs and self-determination in housing for people with disabilities.

Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council

www.paddc.org/index.html

This website provides information about the PA Developmental Disabilities Council, whose mission is to encourage and support the creation of an environment in which all citizens of Pennsylvania can thrive without regard to disability. The Council will: advance the empowerment of citizens with disabilities; ensure access to goods, services and community supports needed by citizens with disabilities, and will foster relationships that build inclusive communities.

Institute on Disabilities/UAP

www.temple.edu/inst_disabilities/

This website provides information on **The Institute on Disabilities/University Affiliated Program**, who works to change systems so that Pennsylvanians with developmental and other disabilities can live, work, learn and play in the communities of their choice. The **Institute on Disabilities/UAP**, which is affiliated with Temple University, is one of more than 60 University Affiliated Programs in the USA making a difference in the lives of people with developmental disabilities and their families.

Home Ownership for People with DisABILITLIES

www.disabilityhome.com

This website will help people with disabilities find qualified realtors, financing for their home and access modifications and programs to pay for it all. This service is available to relocation companies, corporate clients, individuals and non-profit organizations. The network of over 1000 realtors offer special programs for: access/modification, low interest loans, special federal and state programs for people with disabilities, special programs for families with disabled children and special programs for caregivers of elderly relatives. For more information call: 610-691-6100 or 1-800-293-3005.

NEWS ON TAP-OHCD's Housing and Disability Technical Assistance Program

www.newsontap.org

This OHCD website includes all of the latest information concerning issues related to housing for persons with disabilities in the City of Philadelphia. The website provides the *News On Tap* Newsletters, information on fair housing, information on accessibility and VisitAbility, a calendar of upcoming events, a list of available resources and more.



Available Resources-Publications of Interest

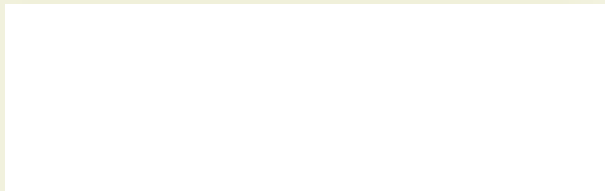
Consumer Handbook to Credit Protection Laws

This handbook explains how the consumer credit laws can help you shop for credit, apply for it, maintain your credit standing, and, if need be, complain about an unfair deal. This handbook also explains what you should look for when using credit, details that creditors look for before extending credit, and reviews legal solutions to discriminatory practices that have made it difficult for women and minorities to get credit. Copies of this handbook and other consumer pamphlets are available upon request from Publications Services, Mail Stop 127, Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, Washington, DC, 20551, 202-452-3000.

**When The Law Says It's Okay to Bend the Law -
Reasonable Accommodations**

This **NEWS ON TAP** publication on Reasonable Accommodations is part of OHCD's Housing and Disability Technical Assistance Program (TAP) concerning issues related to housing for persons with disabilities in the City of Philadelphia. To order a copy call 215-576-1150, ext. 4.

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