

## Universal Design – Builders, are you up for the challenge?

Taken from the Center for Universal Design, “Universal design 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. The intent of the universal design concept is to simplify life for everyone by making products, communications, and the built environment more usable by more people at little or no extra cost. The universal design concept targets people of all ages, sizes, and abilities.”

There are thousands of Manitobans right now looking for more accessible housing for themselves or for their aging parents. Imagine how profitable your business could be if you were the first builder or contractor in Manitoba to embrace the Universal Design concept? The stats prove it. Wickman quotes statistics from The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation that by 2031, the number of Canadian seniors in the 75-plus age group will grow by 277%, to about four million, from 1.5 million in 1995. The number of seniors over the age of 85 will more than triple, to over one million. He says that the baby boomer population has been driving the Canadian housing market for the past 25 years, and will continue to do so as they retire and move into old age.

As people age and as medicine allows those with physical disabilities live longer, mobility and accessibility become greater issues. Stairs and terrain are more difficult to manage forcing individuals to either modify their existing homes or move. Consider if your parents were suddenly unable to walk and required a wheelchair. What would you do with their home? Would it not be best if their home was already accessible or easily adaptable, i.e. visitable so that they would not have to move?

Therapy First is an occupational therapy private practice based out of Winnipeg. We specialize in wheelchair seating, community rehabilitation and home safety and access issues. Along with our client work, we organize professional conferences.

Our latest venture is a conference for you entitled, “Human Factors in Design”. Our vision for this workshop is to unite all of those involved in building, adapting and assessing homes and communities and to consider building for the growing number of individuals with mobility impairments. Our target audience is therefore builders, architects, interior designers, occupational therapists, engineers, city planners, landscape architects, funders, government officials, consumers and others with interest in this subject. While the concept of Universal Design is not limited to those with mobility impairments, the scope and discussions of this workshop will be, with the hopes of expanding the discussion to include visual, hearing and other impairments in the future.

**The Human Factors in Design conference will take place on March 1 and 2, 2007 at the Victoria Inn, Winnipeg.** Our speakers will include Ron Wickman and Kathy Pringle. There will be a concurrent Trade Show which will provide a great opportunity for companies to display their products and services to a large number of interested conference participants as well as the public.

Ron Wickman, BA, BEDS, M. Arch, Architect, AAA, MRAIC is an architect from Edmonton with a specialty and passion for Universal Design. He has won numerous awards for his work in this area, has written many publications and lectures across Canada. He highlights that building accessible homes does not have to increase expenditures for builders. In his article “Accessible Design, Prepare for the Payoff” he states,

*“For the developer and builder who is willing to listen, I emphasize three key design features that allow for a dwelling to be more adaptable, accessible and affordable: providing for easy wheelchair access to enter a dwelling; providing for easy vertical*

*wheelchair access within a dwelling; and providing for a wheelchair accessible bathroom.”*

Kathy Pringle B.Sc. (O.T.), Dipl. Arch. Tech. is an occupational therapist from Ontario with a diploma in architectural technology. In her work she provides a range of services that promote function and safety for persons with disabilities through modifications to the built environment.

We are optimistic that we can join forces with Manitoba Builders and to make Manitoba homes useable and liveable for all Manitobans. Builders, are you up to the challenge?

Contact us at [www.TherapyFirst.ca](http://www.TherapyFirst.ca) or (204) 612-0399.

Corinna Klassen, OT Reg (MB)



Angie Maidment, OT Reg (MB)



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*A workshop for professionals  
involved with designing and  
building homes and communities  
and for persons with mobility  
impairments and their caregivers.*

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