

Guest Column

The Wisdom Bank and Where it Resides

By Ronnie Godfrey, CGB, president, R Godfrey Homes

Recently I was approached by some ladies in my church about building housing that would meet their specific needs. All of these lovely ladies were in their 70's, 80's and 90's. From their request it has become obvious to me that we, the builders, developers and the community at large in which they live are missing the boat on answering their housing needs.

These are the elders of the tribe of man. As in any tribe we should venerate our elders and care for them. The cumulated wisdom is of immeasurable value. **They are our wisdom bank.** We should sit at their feet and reverently listen to what they know.

I ran a brief survey with some members of this bank, about what they thought they might want in the way of housing. It shouldn't be hard to meet these needs as most of them were quite simple to construct. I'm still interviewing our elders as I would like to get more input before any design work is done. I want to be sure that I get it right for their benefit. Because of this, I covet input from any one that might like to seek better housing, either for their selves or for a loved one.

Additionally, I may partner with some folks that already have land or find a parcel that I could buy and develop. I may need to partner with a religious or civic group to do this project. If you have anything to add to this topic, or might be in a position to partner in this endeavor or have suitable land available, please call or email me and thanks for doing it soon. My contact information is at the bottom of this article.

Finally, I'm working on earning the Certified Aging in Place designation from the National Association of Home Builders. This designation program teaches the technical, business management, and customer service skills essential for developing in the aging-in-place market. The technical skills teach the way a building should be built to both meet current needs and future needs of the residents. Topics include width of doors and halls, hand rails, safety features, etc.. These skills will help us to preserve the residents' dignity and self-worth, and enrich their lives.

There is another terminology for this kind of housing. It is Universal Design. Per AARP: “Here are some of the more common universal design features:

- No-step entry. No one needs to use stairs to get into a universal home or into the home's main rooms.
- One-story living. Places to eat, use the bathroom and sleep are all located on one level, which is barrier-free.
- Wide doorways. Doorways that are 32-36 inches wide let wheelchairs pass through. They also make it easy to move big things in and out of the house.
- Wide hallways. Hallways should be 36-42 inches wide. That way, everyone and everything moves more easily from room to room.
- Extra floor space. Everyone feel less cramped. And people in wheelchairs have more space to turn.

Features for Comfort

Some universal design features just make good sense. Once you bring them into your home, you'll wonder how you ever lived without them. For example:

- Floors and bathtubs with non-slip surfaces help everyone stay on their feet. They're not just for people who are frail. The same goes for handrails on steps and grab bars in bathrooms.
- Thresholds that are flush with the floor make it easy for a wheelchair to get through a doorway. They also keep others from tripping.
- Good lighting helps people with poor vision. And it helps everyone else see better, too.
- Lever door handles and rocker light switches are great for people with poor hand strength. But others like them too. Try using these devices when your arms are full of packages. You'll never go back to knobs or standard switches.

Features for Later

Universal design gives you great home feature you can enjoy now. It also helps you plan for the future. Take closets for example. When you build a closet, add some adjustable brackets. Later on, you can use those brackets to move clothing rods and shelves to a better height. This tiny investment helps a closet grow along with a child. It also means you can use the closet

even if you start using a wheelchair. This kind of planning can help you make sure every part of your home will adapt to your changing needs”.

There is more. The development should be done in such a way as to encourage a sense of community. It should be a place where residents would look out for, comfort and befriend and share with each other. Be there in times of need, in times of sorrow and times of joy. It should be a place to keep our **Wisdom Bank**.

I Timothy 5:17 The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

For comments about this article contact Ronnie Godfrey at Ronnie@RGodfreyHomes.com or call 817 988 0149.