



New Web Site Provides Aging-in-Place Resources

By Denise D. Vermeulen

WHILE Universal Design and aging-in-place are nothing new to kitchen and bath designers, they have yet to become part of the average consumer's vocabulary.

We all know that millions of baby boomers are aging; no one denies the need for kitchen and bath designs that embrace ideas that will help people remain independent for as long as possible.

But education is key. Designers need to learn about the growing options available to help their clients live at home safely and comfortably, and they need to learn to help clients embrace those ideas.

Enter Togetherworks, Inc., an entrepreneurial endeavor that develops projects that "improve systems or create social value." The marketing strategy company was founded by husband and wife team, Meres and Lysa McCarroll. Their expertise includes introducing specialty products to a mass market. They have developed projects such as "Get BoneSmart," a consumer



TeleHome Companion's interactive Web site, www.telehomecompanion.com, was designed to provide valuable resources about home solutions for aging-in-place.

awareness campaign about orthopedic care, and "Healthcare Interiors Digest," a resource for healthcare management specialists. Their latest idea should have kitchen and bath designers paying attention.

Togetherworks is currently applying its marketing savvy to a service entitled "TeleHome Companion." The company is striving to increase consumer acceptance of the use of assistive technologies and telecare systems in the home. Their research indicates that "people want to remain in their own homes for as long as possible," says Lysa McCarroll. She adds, "But there is great resistance to using technology to achieve the goal and a reluctance to have their homes look or feel like an institution."

Togetherworks concluded that if "technology was presented in conjunction with Universal Design and other less intrusive...features, people would have more interest and motivation to try things that could help them achieve their goal of aging in place," explains McCarroll.

TeleHome Companion is dedicated to helping people better age-

in-place by showing the benefits of using universally designed housing and products, telecare technologies and other assistive products. In order to accomplish this, the firm has developed an extensive and interactive Web site, located at www.telehomecompanion.com, as well as a newsletter to help readers stay current with age-in-place trends.

In addition, the firm has teamed up with Caregiver's Home, which provides monthly print and electronic newsletters and other services to family and professional caregivers. "[Caregiver's Home] allows us to work with more than 28 million people nationwide who are actively involved in care giving and the decisions that are made on how best to do it - including the use of Universal Design principles applied to the kitchen and bath," says McCarroll.

McCarroll claims that TeleHome Companion takes a unique approach to helping those who want to age-in-place. First is the "whole system approach." The service looks at aging-in-place from many perspectives, and incorporates a great deal of information into one Web site. Secondly, TeleHome Companion

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focuses on encouraging people to live life to the fullest. Finally, it emphasizes building a community of like-minded people.

TeleHome Companion begins with ensuring the safety, convenience and accessibility of the home. "We think Universal Design is the key to achieving this," says McCarroll. Another component is "connecting systems," which, according to McCarroll, is "about integrating assistive technologies and telecare services into the home to increase the time a person can live in their own home."

A major part of the TeleHome Companion mission is to educate consumers about the products and services available. The more information available, the more likely seniors will accept and even seek out products and designs that will help them live at home. But, unlike many promotional campaigns, creating demand for these goods and services will have tangible benefits for a large part of the population.

The campaign encourages consumers to take the time to

educate themselves, and designers to spread the word among their clients. Armed with the facts, consumers will find it easier to have an informed discussion with designers when planning a kitchen or bath remodeling project.

A USEFUL TOOL

"For designers to make the case for Universal Design, it requires a certain amount of education," explains McCarroll. She adds that, with the use of sales-neutral, entertaining and informative materials such as pictures, videos and print materials, "TeleHome Companion will showcase projects of how professionals handle design challenges related to aging-in-place without creating an institutional look." McCarroll points out that designers can use their "case studies and PowerPoint presentation" to show their clients some of the features and benefits of incorporating Universal Design principles into their homes.

McCarroll sees TeleHome Companion as both a resource and

an opportunity for kitchen and bath design professionals. "TeleHome Companion supports the role of professionals by showcasing their work and presenting informative articles." The site will offer an ongoing series of articles about the value of universally designed kitchens and baths. The articles will be published by both TeleHome Companion and Caregiver's Home Companion. The articles will be featured in monthly print and online magazines and weekly newsletters.

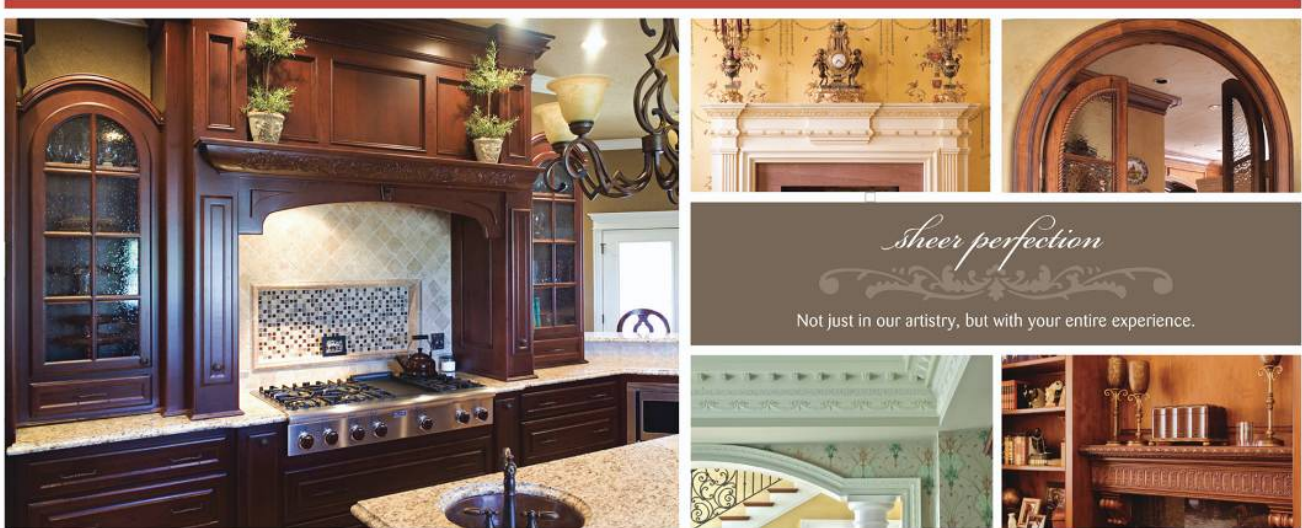
It also offers benefits to manufacturers who sell kitchen and bath products that support the goals of aging-in-place and Universal Design. "For example, if someone had a universally designed product, we would feature it in the series, put up a showcase on TeleHome Companion and set up a blog to solicit community feedback and identify potential sales leads," says McCarroll.

The TeleHome Companion Web site was designed to be easy to navigate, since older consumers are often less adept at Web surfing than the 20- and 30-somethings,

and it also offers numerous links to other resources. One page, "Smart Homes," offers information about getting the most out of familiar technology while also introducing newer technology. The page entitled "Showcases" features in-depth product profiles showcasing universally designed projects, new assistive products and specialty furnishings. Other pages feature the latest in Universal Design, as well as an opportunity to blog and connect with the cyber community.

Beyond the practical tips, the Web site's originators hope to motivate and inspire people, removing the obstacles that can make aging-in-place so difficult.

The Web site's creators believe that designers should seize the opportunity to help seniors and others with physical challenges to break down barriers and embrace the designs, ideas and products that could enhance their lives. McCarroll believes that by educating these consumers about available resources, designers will be doing a service to both their clients and their firms.



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