

## Home Safe Home: A new Ontario incentive addresses the lack of accessible homes on the market

By: Cynthia Ross Cravit

Sandra Thompson has relied on the use of a wheelchair for mobility since contracting spinal meningitis at the age of four. "Growing up I was very fortunate to have an extremely talented father who built our family a new accessible home to ensure I had the same quality of life as my brother and sister," she says.

But when it came time to purchase a home of her own, Thompson quickly became frustrated with the lack of accessible homes on the market as well as the high cost of retrofitting a home to reduce or eliminate physical barriers.

But she wasn't willing to give up her independence so easily. After months of fruitless house shopping, "I approached Howard Sher of Quality Homes with an idea to design an accessible model home," says Thompson.

Quality Engineered Homes Ltd., established in 1987, specializes in factory-built custom homes and cottages. The company constructs high quality custom homes at competitive prices while offering homebuyers the ability to customize designs and choose from a wide range of available upgrades.

So it seemed a logical extension to customize home designs to meet the needs of people facing aging or mobility issues. "Quality Engineered Homes recognizes that disability is a part of the human experience and that accessible housing is an increasing need as the population ages," says Howard Sher, the company's executive vice president.

"Howard sought my assistance in understanding the needs of the market and designing an accessible model home to be displayed at Quality Homes' Sales Centre in Kenilworth, Ontario," says Thompson. "He felt 'who better to design an accessible home than someone who has dealt with mobility issues their whole life?'"

With the aging of the Canadian population, there is an increasing need for accessible housing. In Ontario alone, 44 per cent of Ontario's disabled population is age 65 and over. And people aged 65 and over will become more numerous than children aged 15 and under around the year 2015. By 2031, the number of people in Canada aged 65 and over will range between 8.9 million and 9.4 million.

This will be an unprecedented situation in Ontario and Canada. According to a Statistics Canada survey in 2001, 12.4 per cent of the population (slightly more than 3.6 million Canadians) had at least one disability. But among people 65 and older, the disability rate increased to 40.5 per cent. And now, as the oldest of the baby boomers turn 60, the Heart and Stroke Foundation's 2006 Report Card on Health shows 45- to 59-year-old boomers are not as healthy as today's 65- to 74-year-old seniors.

There can be little doubt we are facing a surge of disability and with it, a rising demand for new housing options based on the accessibility needs of aging boomers – a generation that for the past twenty five years has driven housing markets in Canada.

It has long been recognized that "aging in place" is critical to the promotion of independent living for older persons. And not surprisingly, most older persons want the option of living in their own home within a familiar community where they know their neighbors, local merchants and medical professionals. This calls for a housing choice that meets the needs of people through their life cycle.

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, "aging in place" is a critical element in the health of older persons.

Addressing this need, Quality Engineered Homes has recently introduced The Liberty Series of barrier-free homes. Quality Engineered Homes' staff will provide the disabled and aging populations with expertise in designing and building an accessible home specific to individual needs ensuring increased independence.

The Liberty Series will include such features as easy access showers, walk-in tubs, raised tubs and toilets, lever and wing type taps, lower kitchen cabinets, built in ovens, automatic door openers, stair glides, ramps, elevators, textured walls, home communication devices, grab bars, lower light switches, wider doors and much more. (These components will be on display at all of Quality's design and décor centers as well as in a featured model on the company's Kenilworth sales court.)

### Liberty Series Facts

- Quality Engineered Homes' staff has received extensive training related to the needs of individuals with a variety of disabilities.
- This staff will provide the disabled and aging populations with expertise in designing and building the perfect accessible home specific to individual needs ensuring increased independence.
- The Liberty Series will include such features as easy access showers, walk-in tubs, raised tubs and toilets, lever and wing type taps, lower kitchen cabinets, built in ovens, automatic door openers, stair glides, ramps, elevators, textured walls, home communication devices, grab bars, lower light switches, wider doors and much more.
- Quality Engineered Homes will provide a consultant to work with the homebuyer to determine other mobility and assistive devices that may be required but not included in the building of the home. The nominal consulting/co-ordination fee is based on the estimated number of hours needed for the consultant to determine and arrange for the desired devices.