

Accessibility is priceless when it comes to helping Mom

By Mike Unger
Examiner Correspondent

For a quarter-century, Tom McLachlen's mother, Nancy, has managed to navigate her wheelchair throughout the Rockville home she's lived in since 1963. Needless to say, the rancher wasn't built with wheelchair accessibility in mind.

But that was then.

This is now: A sparkling new, 6,000-square-foot house right next door that Tom will share with his mom, designed and constructed with her comfort as the top priority. The home is entirely wheelchair friendly, from the extra-wide doorways, lower cabinets, additional lower sink and convection oven in the upstairs kitchen, to the elevator that runs between the main floor and lower level.

Yet walking through the house, which Tom and his mother hope to move into "any day," you hardly notice its wheelchair-friendly setup.

"The home had to work for his mother, but it also had to have all the luxuries you see in modern homes," said architect Bruce Rich.

Mission accomplished. McLachlen bought the property about two years ago, and immediately set out to renovate it while he and his mother lived in her home. Designers kept half of the exterior walls, yet managed to enlarge the structure dramatically by expanding toward the back of the half-acre lot.

"We took off the roof and increased the pitch to make the house nicer looking from the street," Rich said. "We didn't want it to look like the biggest house in the neighborhood, and it doesn't, even though it's the second or third."

The neo-traditional home features all the bells and whistles of modern construction, including a geothermal heating and cooling system, and water and air purification systems. Each room has its own thermostat and is heated and cooled through the geothermal system that features four, 400-foot-deep wells. A chemical extracts the Earth's natural heat in the winter and chill in the summer, which is then circulated in pipes woven throughout the house to keep it a comfortable temperature.

The system itself cost about \$250,000. McLachlen spared no expense during the building process.

"The basement had an old foundation and leaked," said builder Jeff Robins of Jeffco. "Instead of doing a spot repair, [Tom] told us to dig up the entire foundation, dig up the soil, install an upscale waterproofing system which drains into a drainage field."

Originally three bedrooms and two bathrooms, the home's original 2,800 square feet have been transformed into a living room with a fireplace, first-floor master bedroom and gleaming kitchen, complete with granite countertops, two sinks and multiple ovens. There's a microwave nestled below the counter, so it's easily reachable from a wheelchair. The additional five bedrooms and 5.5 bathrooms are in space that either never existed before or was unutilized in the basement.

White oak floors add a modern, sleek look throughout. Several rooms on the main level have bay windows that provide an airy feel and abundance of sunlight — as does the bank of French doors that lead from the great room to the slate backyard porch.

With a wheel-in closet, a kitchen featuring counters 24 inches high as opposed to the standard 36 inches, and a bathroom with a higher toilet, Nancy's master suite is a far cry from her previous bedroom.

"She was pretty amazed when she saw it," Tom said.

The lower level feels as if it's a home unto itself. It features its own kitchen, backyard access, and an indoor endless swimming pool for when Nancy exercises.

"In the water she can stand up and get in a good workout," Tom said.

Transforming this decades-old rancher into a modern architectural marvel cost McLachlen more than \$2.5 million.

That's quite a chunk of change, but when it comes to Mom's comfort and happiness, money is no object.

BEFORE
Since 1963, Tom McLachlen's mother, Nancy, lived in a Rockville rancher that wasn't built for wheelchair accessibility. They were looking for an option that was wheelchair friendly as well as luxurious and modern.



Luxurious touch
Granite countertops are featured throughout the kitchen.

Brilliant idea
A microwave nestled below the counter for easy access.

Twice as nice
Multiple ovens and two sinks were also installed.



Modern look
The home features white oak floors throughout creating a sleek look.

AFTER
After a \$2.5 million renovation, this 6,000-square-foot home that Tom and Nancy will share is entirely wheelchair friendly — from extra-wide doorways to an elevator, modern and luxurious. Mission accomplished!



Smooth ride
An elevator was installed for access between the main and lower levels.

Workout space
An indoor swimming pool in the lower level of the house for exercise.

