

Handicap-access features critical for many homeowners

BY RICHARD NORMAN
MARKETPLACE STAFF WRITER

John and Vivian Gregor of Niantic decided to have John's mother, Eleanor, come from the Cleveland area to be with them. John's sister, Mary Ann, would relocate in Connecticut as well. To accommodate them, John and Vivian remodeled the house and put in wheelchair accessibility.

It was a big job. There was the designer, and there were the remodeling crew, sanitation crew, landscapers and pavers. There were the Gregors' children. There were dogs and cats. People coming and going every which way, a cast of dozens. The little boys helped the pavers and laid block with the landscapers, hung out with them and ate lunch with them. Talk about a family project.

Eleanor Gregor, 86, has a number of health issues, including diabetes, Alzheimer's and arthritis, and can get around now only with the help of a wheelchair. But John and Mary Ann didn't want to put her in a nursing home. So they called in Jan Blonder of Design Essence in Old Saybrook to help them create a plan for expansion of the Gregors' ranch-style home.

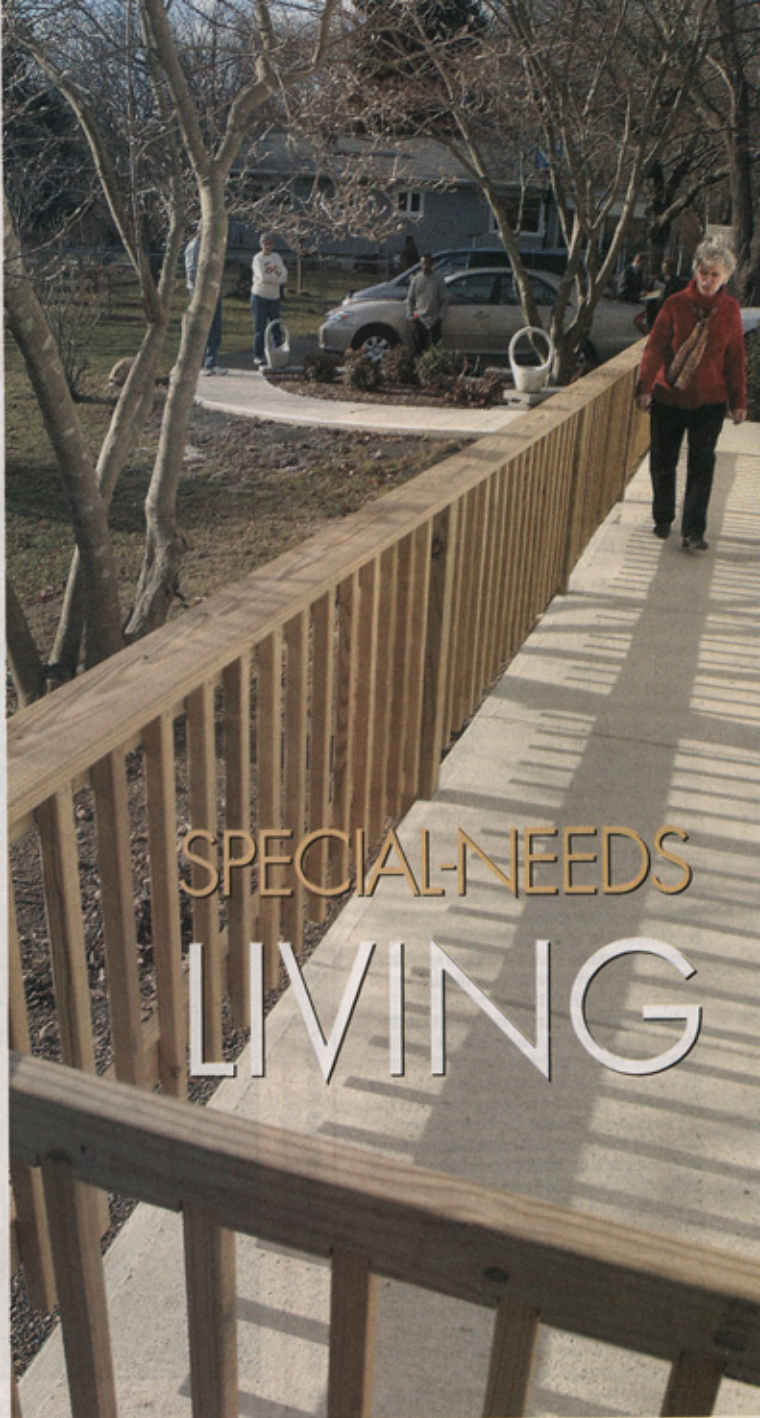
"It doesn't look institutional," says Blonder, looking at the finished apartment. "It's warm and homey. It's visually comforting — user-friendly."

Yankee Remodelers came in to do the work. The garage was gutted. The walls were retained as interior walls, and length was added to the house. The in-law apartment now consists of a living room, two bedrooms and a bathroom. The bathroom is centered, so that both bedrooms have access to the bathroom and the living room. A pocket door with windows in it connects the apartment to the main part of the house occupied by John and Vivian's family.

The front of the house is newly landscaped, and a wheelchair ramp runs alongside the house and around to the back, where it accesses the apartment. The bathroom contains handicap features as well, such as a fold-down seat and safety bars. The bathroom is very large — "big as a barn," Eleanor calls it.

The ramp, which is wood in the back and concrete on the side of the house, has only a light incline.

"Our 10-year-old can push my mother up



SPECIAL-NEEDS LIVING



HOMEOWNER VIVIAN GREGOR, RIGHT, TALKS TO DARRELL McCLELLAN OF JUSTICE LANDSCAPING IN GROTON ABOUT THE WORK HE AND HIS CREW DID AT HER'S AND HER HUSBAND'S NANTIC HOME. BY COORDINATING LANDSCAPING AND CONSTRUCTION TECHNIQUES, THE GREGORS WERE ABLE TO PROVIDE HANDICAPPED ACCESS TO AN ADDITION TO THEIR HOME FOR JOHN GREGOR'S MOTHER. THE ADDITION FEATURES AN EASYACCESS SHOWER WITH NO LIP OR EDGE, LEFT, WIDE DOORS AND PLENTY OF ROOM TO MANEUVER A WHEELCHAIR. **PHOTOS JEFF EVANS**

and down the ramp," says John.

The apartment is about 900 square feet and cost \$140,000, excluding the landscaping.

Blonder's goal was to integrate the apartment with the main part of the house, not only functionally but psychologically as well.

"I wanted it to be not just a special-needs place," she says, "but functional into the future, when someone else will be living here."

Another factor that Blonder considers important: there is no wasted space in the apartment. Every inch is used.

Justice Landscaping in Groton did extensive work in the front of the house. Darrell McClellan, one of the landscapers, tells how he planned the work.

"We saw that the whole front of the house was straight lines," he recalls. "So we wanted to put in some curving lines, starting with the curving walkway."

There is a curving walkway from the right side of the driveway, around the flower beds, to the ramp on the right side of the house. McClellan also put in a new walk from the driveway to the front door of the house, using the same brick and block he used for the walls enclosing the stepped flower beds. The flower beds are on a couple of levels, curving gracefully back and forth. Another wall encloses a tree that was already there.

While they were at it, John and Vivian brought in Anton Paving of Old Lyme to put down a new driveway.

Another distinctive handicap-access project was undertaken by Covenant Kitchens & Baths of Westbrook. Owner Gerard Ciccarello was asked to redesign the kitchen of a house built in the 1960s. The redesign would have to meet the special needs of the husband, who uses a wheelchair, and also the wife, who is a gourmet cook. The end product was a kitchen that won

an award from the National Kitchen and Bath Association.

The husband needed a cutting surface that was low enough that he could prepare food on it, along with a microwave and toaster oven accessible to someone in a wheelchair. He also wanted a small refrigerator that would fit under the counter, a bar on roll-out shelves, and space for reading materials and a television.

The wife wanted an up-to-date kitchen with new appliances, space to work and an area to

sit and read.

The basic footprint of the room remained the same. The island was reconfigured to contain the handicap-access features — "universal features," in the nomenclature of the home-design industry. All the items the husband wanted were installed, including a butcher block on full extension glides, pullout trash bin, toaster oven and coffee maker behind a pull-down drawer at wheelchair height and drawers for storing food.

FIND COMFORT IN THE FUTURE

I Redesign Portfolios so that people:

- Do Not Run Out of Money
- Do Not Lose Any Money
- Increase Their Monthly Income if Necessary
- Significantly Reduce Their Taxes (Liabilities)

I am a Specialist in:

- Defensive Asset Allocation
- Retirement Income Planning



DR

DAVID J. REINDEL

Safe Portfolio Design, LLC

Mystic • Warwick • Westerly

Call for your seminar invitation • Toll Free 800.639.5113