

[« Return to Main Page](#) | [Print](#)

Professional Remodeler

PATH Report: Certified Aging-in-Place Specialists (CAPS) have a Lock on the Market

Asa Foss, PATH Partners -- 4/1/2007



Pantry cabinet with knee space and easy-to-reach, full-extension shelves.
Photos courtesy of PATH Partners

extra education and planning, you can market yourself as an expert and secure a larger slice of the baby boomer pie.

Chances are you've been making most of your money from baby boomers the past decade or two. If you want to continue to tap America's largest population segment, you may need to find new ways to meet the needs of this aging clientele.

Sidebars:
[For Your Information](#)
[Resources](#)

As baby boomers retire, they're choosing to retire in their own homes, unlike their parents did.

"We've noticed first-hand that over the past few years there has been an increase in the number of people who want to live independently rather than in an assisted-living facility," says Katie Lammers of Lammers Construction Services in Iowa City, Iowa.

Which is why aging-in-place design has attracted so much attention. Help clients stay in their homes longer by making the home more accessible using aging-in-place techniques.

The good news is that you've probably been using some of these techniques all along. With a little

Get Certified

Get started at NAHB, which offers a Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist (CAPS) designation. Randy Stow, CAPS, CGR, a remodeler for 13 years and owner of Stow's Home Repair and Remodeling in Houston, now concentrates exclusively on renovations to improve accessibility.

"I got the certification back in 2002 because you need something to differentiate yourself from everyone else. This is it for me," says Stow.



CAPS — a collaboration between the AARP, the NAHB Research Center, and NAHB's 50+ Housing Council and remodelers councils — trains and certifies remodelers in aging-in-place design. And business is booming. When it was launched in 2002, CAPS certified 52 professionals; in 2005, it certified 284. By July 2006, the total number of CAPS certifications hit 1,000.

Remodelers who don't plan to make aging in place their main focus, certification can still help.



Universal bathroom cabinets can have "entertainment center" door hardware that opens to provide knee space (top). The adjustable-height lavatory (bottom) has knee space and easy-to-reach, lever-handled faucets.

first day covers the social aspects of working with seniors and people with disabilities. The second day addresses the technical aspects of accessible design, such as where and how to locate grab bars, light switches, doors, kitchen cabinets and counters. The third day covers business management training.

At a cost of \$320 for NAHB members, you can gain a marketing edge that your competitors may have never considered.

Expand Your Referral Base

Aging in place has helped Stow build a strong referral base, which has been his most effective form of marketing. He spends a lot of time educating professionals who work with the elderly and disabled about universal design and accessibility products.

Stow meets with occupational and physical therapists at home health care companies to tell them about products they can suggest to their clients. Stow also visits assisted living facilities and gives mini-seminars to groups such as the National Multiple Sclerosis Society and, Lou Gehrig's society, and similar support groups. Easy Living Home Texas, a program sponsored by the Institute for Rehabilitation Research, has been another major source of referrals.



The prefabricated curbless shower has an adjustable-height bar for the hand-held shower and a lever-handled faucet.

"I've spent the money doing magazine and newspaper ads, flyers, things like that, but to no response," Stow says. "I've come to the conclusion that going door to door with any kind of aging-in-place advertising is ineffective. The general public is not ready to accept that they need our services. But if their doctor or occupational therapist says that they need to have a retrofit done, I'll have them in an instant."

Many CAPS remodelers also get referrals from their local builder and remodeler associations.

"When people call the local builder's association looking for an aging-in-place remodeler, the association will give them the three or four names with the CAPS designation in the area," says Shattuck.

"The greatest benefit for me to getting CAPS certified is that I have greatly increased my versatility as a remodeler," says Steve Shattuck, CAPS, CGR, CR, of Shattuck & Associates in Puyallup, Wash. "For example, I ask all my clients how long they are planning on living in the home. If they say for the rest of their lives, I encourage them to select some accessibility features, such as wider doors and hallways. And so they say, 'Of course, it makes sense.' Nobody else told them that stuff before."

"It's all about planning and thinking about what they want to do in the future."

Certification entails a three-day course. The

He also relies on doctors and other professionals for referrals, he says, estimating that about ten percent of his projects predominately feature aging-in-place concepts. He gets so much business



A no-step entrance with a side light and lever door handle adds accessibility.

he turns work away every day.

Proposing an aging-in-place design to elderly or disabled clients is obvious, but don't miss the chance to propose it to younger and more mobile clients as well. Planning for the future can save them significant money and hassle of another renovation down the road.

So go out there and use your knowledge of aging-in-place to grow your business. There's no time to waste.

"There are a lot of us in the baby boomer era who are going to need aging-in-place services," says Shattuck. "It's going to become even more significant, so it's a smart move for people to be prepared for this."

Author Information

Asa Foss writes about better building practices on behalf of the Partnership for Advancing Technology in Housing (PATH). PATH is administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Learn more at www.pathnet.org.

For Your Information

Questions to ask your clients, regardless of their age:

- How long do you plan on staying in your home?
- How long would you stay if mobility were easier?
- Is it possible that your parents might move in one day?
- Do you have any relatives who visit often? Is mobility an issue?
- When you sell this house, would you like to appeal to as wide a market as possible?

Resources

- NAHB Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist: www.nahb.org/education. Click on "Designations."
- Universal Design Bathtubs, Showers and Kitchen Cabinets: www.toolbase.org/techinventory.
- Center for Universal Design, North Carolina State University: www.design.ncsu.edu/cud.

[« Return to Main Page](#) | [Print](#)

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