

Think ahead for your future needs when building

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Home and Garden

When you think about it, it should come as no surprise that the big growth area in housing these days is housing for the elderly.

Let's face it: The Boomers are getting on in years.

But the traditional concepts of elderly housing – subsidized apartment complexes, assisted living and/or nursing homes – are evolving, and for some, those concepts are becoming obsolete. More and more people are looking at ways of staying in their own homes, and some builders are coming up with some innovative ways of helping them do just that.

It's really just a matter of thinking ahead, but that is often something we don't do enough of.

You might not be thinking of yourself as an older American when you build your home, says Dana French of Meigs Inc. in Black Earth, but it doesn't hurt to think about what might happen when you are one. In fact, in terms of dollars and cents, it can prove quite profitable, he added.

A middle-aged couple building a new home needs to consider whether

they want to stay in that home for the long haul, to that point where they might require assistance, even live-in assistance. If that's what they want, building some simple amenities into the home up front can save a lot of money down the road.

"You build them accessible now," says French of Meigs' Longevity Living Homes. "The thing is to get people to think about this issue before it's a crisis. This 'Aging in Place' concept is really gathering steam. The up-front cost is minimal...to try and retrofit an existing home is huge. It goes from nominal to phenomenal."

Meigs, which markets John Wick Homes that are custom-built in Mazomanie and then constructed on-site, has a ten-point list of possibilities that new home purchasers can consider.

They include:

- no barrier/stairs from the garage
- wide hallways
- wide doors
- lever door handles
- roll-in showers
- higher toilets
- higher/lower cabinets and tops



It's a good idea to think ahead to your Golden Years when building a new home: wide doorways and halls, lever door handles and roll-in showers are just a few options to consider.

- conduit in walls for future use
- low/no maintenance exteriors
- security systems and lighting

In addition, said French, the builders suggest to those thinking way ahead that they rough in a third bathroom in the event they eventually have a live-in attendant. That may seem extravagant, but when you consider the cost of long-term care in a nursing home, it just becomes good planning.

"The idea is to be ready, and then incur lower costs as you need them. We really work at it to make our designs efficient," said French.

Meigs just built a home for a couple

in Waunakee, for instance, that employed this concept, although in reverse. The couple building the home built what amounts to a very spacious apartment in half of the home's basement. The wife's mother lives in the apartment, maintaining her independence yet able to quickly summon help if it is needed.

French added that while there is a trend in construction to go to wider spaces between studs (24" instead of 16") and use cross bracing with no sheathing, all to minimize costs, John Wick Homes as bucked that trend.

"We won't go along with these minimum construction techniques,"

said French. He also emphasized the firm's commitment to saving energy, noting, "We sometimes are literally more than 40 to 60 percent efficient than what's required to be Energy-Star certified."

That energy savings, he added, goes a long way toward covering the cost of building for the future, and the extra cost of building solid.

"Right now the 55 and older group makes up 21 percent of the new home buyers...older buyers purchase about 25 percent of all new homes," added French. "It's a growing market. The potential for us is tremendous."

Remember the Boomers? There's an awful lot of them....