Universal Design and elements of UD is all around us. Universal Design strives to be a broad solution to life’s challenges taking into consideration functionality, ease of use and appearance. Given the seemingly endless lists of statistics that clearly present the need to understand, identify and to address the needs of our customers, Universal Design is not complex but rather logical; it is not expensive but quite cost effective; it is not obscure but rather quite obvious. For unlike a “building”, a home and its characteristics become an integral part of the family of occupants. Our success as a Builder, Remodeler or Designer will be measured by how well we meet the needs of our customers by defining the characteristics of our product.

Clue # 10 - As a contractor, builder, developer or remodeler, our first clue to using UD to meet the needs of our customers is to pause and observe the broad and most basic features of our product and how these features contribute to universal functionality. Ask yourself……………

- If the pairing of the plan with the topography of the land was conducive to minimizing grades and minimizing or eliminating sharp inclines?

- If the exterior features create an environment conducive for exterior enjoyment? Were porches and decks placed in logical locations that take into consideration ease of use and entry?

- Did the site placement create the opportunity to construct a no-step entry or ramped entry at one of the entrances? A wonderfully assembled floor plan and features on the interior could be unacceptable to some purchasers because entry opportunities were overlooked on the exterior.

- Did the landscaper appropriately position flower beds and sodded areas so as to provide ease of maintenance and enjoyment to those customers who enjoy outdoor projects?

- Was an area of privacy created that is coupled with an ease of entry and exit?

- Was consideration given to easier access to the mailbox area, sprinkler system controls and main utility controls?

- Was it possible to position the home so that basement driveways or basement sidewalks could be added to facilitate a multi-generational family occupancy of the home.
Clue # 11 - Design, review the design, modify, and review again using logic and common sense. The cost of many Universal Design features at this stage will cost very few dollars if any when planned in the design stage. Most of these features are easily recognized and appreciated by purchasers for reasons of comfort and functionally regardless of their UD label.

- Wide hallways and hallways with no 90 degree turns are easier to maneuver if you have a permanent or temporary mobility disability. Other customers will appreciate the fact that walls of wider hallways and hallways with non-right angle turns will be bumped and scared less. The customer and their Movers will appreciate the reduced risk of furniture and wall damage that is facilitated by wider hallways with no sharp turns.

- Wider doorways of at least 2’-10” or greater are a must for persons with mobility issues. For other customers, they will appreciate the ease of moving furniture through wider doorways and the decrease in nicks, dings and marks that wider doorways facilitate. Everyone will notice the openness and greater visual impact of the rooms and their sizes from the wider, more open doorways.

- Bathrooms with wide walkways and no step showers are a must for persons with mobility issues. Other customers will quickly recognize the spacious feeling that wider walkways in baths create and they will enjoy getting ready for their activities without bathroom “traffic jambs”!

- Laundry rooms that have wider work areas are a must for persons with mobility issues and are a Dream Come True for all persons who handle the laundry functions of a household.

- Small walk-in closets or offsets in hallways which align will facilitate installation of elevators at a later date. Solid blocking on stairways will facilitate chair lift installations at a later date.

Clue # 12 - The décor and choice of details in finishing decisions will accentuate the care and thoughtfulness taken during the design process creating for the customer a sense of oneness with the home and its characteristics.

- Does the kitchen have a logical layout, with appropriate work areas? Have provisions been made for sitting while cooking if required? Those holiday and Sunday dinners are more enjoyable to prepare when one has a means to rest while cooking regardless of any physical challenges.

- Have appliances been positioned to reduce congestion and to increase margins of safety. Ovens and microwaves should be positioned so persons of most heights are not handling hot food items above eyelevel.
• Were pull-out shelves and multiple height countertops considered when the cabinets were designed?

• Have plumbing fixtures be chosen and positioned for ease of use. Were handicap mobility areas factored into placement of fixtures? Where blocks placed to accommodate the installation of safety grab bars upon a customer’s request?

• Were the lighting fixtures and their placement planned and chosen to insure adequate lighting and reduce shadows? Was task lighting considered? All customers will quickly notice and appreciate additional and specialized lighting.

• Was the floor tile chosen for wet areas that has a texture which will lower the risk of slippage when wet?

• Were rocker switches considered as electrical devices rather than the typical toggle switch? All customers appreciate the sleek and elegant appearance of rocker switches. Persons with their hands full of items or persons with an arthritic condition will appreciate not being required to grasp the switch for movement.

• Were lever locks considered for doors rather than the typical knob shaped door lock? All customers appreciate the sleek and elegant appearance of lever locks. Persons with a hand full of groceries, books or laundry or persons with wet or arthritic hands or persons in wheelchairs or on crutches all will appreciate lever door locks.

Yes, common sense, that is the common thread that Universal design features have in common. Interestingly, these are features that most of us would want in our home if we were building a new home or remodeling our existing home.

It Universal Design a no-brainer! You bet! A contractor dictionary defines a no-brainer as an item desired by the customer, easily noticed by the customer, easily installs and has a low cost.

Notes: