



Accessible Home

By Rosemarie Rossetti, PhD

Finding an Accessible Apartment or Condo

Hunting for an apartment or condominium is a daunting task. Not only is it time-consuming, it can also be extremely frustrating, even more so for a person like me who uses a wheelchair for mobility.

A few months ago, I was researching what was available for rent in the Columbus, Ohio, area since I had recently sold my home. My new home, the Universal Design Living Laboratory (www.UDLL.com) is not yet completed. My husband and I are the general contractors for this universal design and green national demonstration home and garden. We needed a temporary place close by to live for about eight months. We knew for accessibility purposes we were looking for a single-level apartment, preferably on the ground floor. We also needed two offices, one for me and one for Mark, in addition a bedroom.

Let me share my recent experiences selecting a three-bedroom garden style apartment, and maybe, if you're also in the market, you'll learn from my experience. In this column I'll discuss the searching process: what I was looking for and what I did to find it. As no apartment is perfect, in my next column, I'll discuss the sorts of modifications we decided to make and how we executed them.

Internet searching made it easier for me to see what was available for rent in the surrounding area. I went to www.rent.com; www.apartmentguide.com; www.forrent.com; www.apartments.com; www.apartmentfinder.com; and www.craigslist.org.



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I also called the local independent living center, as well as a few realtors to help me with my search. My husband, Mark, and I drove around the area looking

for apartment and condominium complexes within a 15-minute drive from the new home.

As I did my research over four weeks, it was obvious that there were not many apartments that would be available when we needed one that would also meet all of the accessibility

and location criteria we had set. After about 100 phone calls and e-mails, I finally located two apartments that met all of our criteria. Before we even got to look at one of the apartments, we were told it was already taken! So that left just one apartment to choose from. We could only hope it would live up to its promise.

Because the three-bedroom was still occupied, Mark and I were given a tour of a two-bedroom model apartment to give us an idea of what the complex's apartments were like. It was easy for me to roll in the front door. The bathrooms, kitchen, living room, dining room, bedrooms and laundry room seemed large enough to accommodate both of us.

We obtained the floor plan with the room dimensions for the three-bedroom version. The apartment we were targeting did not meet

the ADA guidelines for wheelchair accessibility; however, since it was a ranch-style apartment, we thought it would work for the short-term. The agent representing the apartment complex agreed to make minor modifications to accommodate me.

When we drove by the apartment that we were planning to rent, Mark got out of the van and walked around the building with the agent. We asked the agent where the van accessible parking space was located. The agent was very apologetic as she realized there was no curb cut close to the sidewalk that led to the apartment door. She assured us that a van accessible parking place and curb cut would be provided. (As of early February, the curb remains uncut.)

When Mark and I went back home, he took the floor plan for the three-bedroom apartment and drew

in our furniture to scale. He showed me the furniture plan to verify that there was adequate space in all of the rooms for me to navigate.

Having been satisfied that this apartment met the basic criteria, Mark and I signed the lease and paid the deposit. We moved in a few weeks later, and assessed what modifications had to be done.

Next month, I'll share some of the changes we did to make our temporary home livable for someone who uses a wheelchair.

Rosemarie Rossetti, Ph.D., is building a national model universal design home in metropolitan Columbus, Ohio. Contact her at rrossetti@unitedspinal.org. To learn more about the Universal Design Living Laboratory go to:



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