



# **Rosemarie Rossetti**

**Educator, Author,  
Universal Design Expert**

by Taylor Mulcahy, St. Cloud State University Student



Rosemarie Rossetti during a speaking engagement

**R**ossetti holds a double major in agricultural education and horticulture for her Bachelor of Science degree. She then studied agricultural education for her master's and doctorate degrees, finishing her final degree in 1982.

Rosemarie Rossetti grew up in Columbus, Ohio and earned her B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. at The Ohio State University.

Rossetti's older brother, Richard, had a developmental disability. She frequently attended events with Richard and was introduced to many of his friends who also had intellectual and physical disabilities. Later, Rossetti acquired her disability, a spinal cord injury, in June 1998. She states that it was "my life with Richard that prepared me to

be an advocate for people with disabilities."

Rossetti currently serves on the faculty part-time at The Ohio State University in the Department of Agricultural Education, since October 2018. Previously, she served full time from September 1986 to January 1997. It was then, in 1997, that Rossetti started her business, Rossetti Enterprises Inc. ([www.RosemarieSpeaks.com](http://www.RosemarieSpeaks.com)).

She speaks to and consults with companies to ensure that their spaces are accessible for their employees and the public. Utilizing Rossetti's valuable lived experiences, over 250 companies and various organizations have hired her for speaking and consulting. Rossetti explains that she "survived and thrived after [her] spinal cord injury on June 13th, 1998," and her

business transitioned towards motivational speaking.

Rossetti has many notable accomplishments including writing and publishing three books (The Healthy Indoor Plant, Universal Design Toolkit, and Take Back Your Life!) and received many honors (Ms. Wheelchair Ohio 2004, Torchbearer in the 2002 Winter Olympics, and National "Roll" Model in a fashion show in New York City - 2007). However, the most meaningful accomplishment may be her home that she built with her husband, Mark Leder.

She emphasizes that "My husband, Mark Leder, is a brilliant, loving, and supportive man. We were married on June 10, 1995. On June 13, 1998, he saved my life after I was crushed by a 7,000-pound tree while riding my bicycle. He is also my business partner,

guiding me through the many life and business challenges and transitions.”

Together with her husband, they led a design team and served as the general contractors to build their home: the Universal Design Living Laboratory [www.udll.com](http://www.udll.com), where they have lived since May 2012. This is the highest-rated universal design home in North America that is serving as a national demonstration home and garden. Universal Design is a framework for the design of living and workspaces and products that benefit the widest possible range of people in the widest range of situations, but without special or separate design. This framework is human-centered, serving to accommodate people of all sizes, ages, and abilities. Rossetti



*Rosemarie Rossetti and husband Mark Leder*



***Rosemarie Rossetti-Universal Design Living Laboratory-Front Elevation***

and her husband give tours of their home virtually and in person, as well as writing articles and books, and have given presentations using her home as a case study. She also consults with builders, architects, developers, designers, and consumers in regards to the implementation of universal design and accessible design features in their projects or products.

Rossetti explains the importance of inclusivity, “whenever decisions are made, people will be impacted by these decisions,” and that by having diverse groups of people involved in the decision-making process, the end result is more positive and productive.

Rossetti’s passion for accessibility for all was heavily influenced by her experiences with her brother Richard, and her spinal cord injury. She explains that the biggest misperception about people who have a disability is that disabled individuals do not have much to offer professionally or personally. Often, they are seen as underperforming—but if they are given support, some assistance such as assistive technology or accommodations, they can perform as well or better than their non-disabled peers. She states,

**“There are many myths about hiring people with disabilities that need to be dispelled... people with disabilities are dedicated, hard-working, and require a very minimal investment in most cases to modify their work environment to accommodate them.”**

However, one way we can change this misperception is through the media and accurate representation.

Casting people with disabilities as lead characters in film and television, as well as docuseries showcasing the accomplishments of many people with disabilities, will all serve to increase accurate and positive representation. Rossetti concludes, “I am passionate about the work that I do. My goal is to make a significant positive difference in the lives of others.”

