

## **BUILDING FOR EXTENDED FAMILIES**

The NY Times recently interviewed Wid Chapman, an architect and co-author of a newly-released book, Unassisted Living: Ageless Homes for Later Life. The authors predict baby-boomers will:

- Have no set retirement age because technology allows people to combine work and leisure in any setting;
- Live as an unconventional family unit where children, adults, and parents reside under the same roof;
- See multi-generational living as a compelling reason to stay in one area and not head to the Sun Belt or to an over-55 community;
- Want multi-use rooms en suite in their home's design so that families will have flexibility to use many of their rooms as a bedrooms, office, den, or whatever the need.

City planners and municipal zoning boards need to take note and be proactive to allow flexible housing designs which encourage, not discourage, multi-generational housing. According to the Census Bureau as of 2010, 4.4 million U.S. households held three generations or more under one roof, a 15 percent increase from 3.8 million households two years before. And a recent Pew study reports even greater numbers, with 50 million Americans in multi-generational households, a 10 percent increase from 2007. Both these statistics illustrate that multi-generational housing is becoming more and more common in communities all over America.

With young adults saddled by high levels of college debt and a difficult job market, boomers may be housing their adult children for the foreseeable future. And, an additional 20 percent are providing some financial and care-giving assistance to an aging parent. By combining families, thousands of dollars a month can be saved in duplicate costs with an added benefit of companionship and sharing household tasks. "It's such an advantage to have multiple wage earners in the same household when the economy is still struggling," said Nicolas Retsina, a lecturer at the Harvard Business School and Harvard's Joint Center on Housing. Retsina feels the multi-generational housing trend is one he expects will continue.

Home builders, Lennar, Toll Brothers and PulteGroup, agree and have started incorporated flexible multi-generational living arrangements - such as guest suites with kitchenettes - into their designs, when such accommodations were once offered only as a custom option. Having flexible spaces addresses the need of an adult child or aging parent and/or their caregiver, allows for an increasing multi-ethnic population with a tradition of three generations under one roof, and even for singles who may need or want to double or triple up with siblings or friends save on living expenses.

Another interesting option for housing which is expected to become more available nationwide is a "Co-housing Community" -- where homeowners of all ages purchase or rent homes or condos which are clustered together, with maintenance covered by association fees and designed with porches that face one another to reinforce a sense of community. The neighborhood or village is pedestrian-friendly with a community house

where everyone can get together several times a week to eat or socialize in an informal setting. Neighbors of all ages are encouraged to help one another – retirees acting as surrogate grandparents tutoring or watching younger children, mid-adults helping older adults with lifting heavy items and helping with driving if needed, and children living in safety around people who care about them.

To meet the demands of the changing needs of tomorrow's housing consumer, architects, home builders, zoning boards, and developers of senior and multi-generational living communities are wise to adapt their designs to allow for flexible spaces which accommodate the needs of many generations.