

# Better Living

March 2015

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## MOVING TO PARADISE

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and the snow behind, now what?

**+** Finding the perfect house  
What to do after closing

**+** Are we warming up  
to smart houses?



## PROFILE

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TRACY LUX, *UNIVERSAL DESIGN COALITION*

# Adapt your house to age in place

BY CHRIS ANGERMANN, *Correspondent*

**T**racy Lux is nothing if not passionate about the issues of senior living, and she has plenty of experience in the field. Her background includes serving as National Director of Sales and Marketing for Hyatt's Classic Residence real estate division, the hotel chain's six retirement communities. She also was Vice President of Marketing for Sun City Center, Florida's largest retirement community.

Since she left the corporate world 22 years ago, she has been a consultant for senior housing, working with developers, builders and service providers of all levels of senior housing, from active adults communities (55+) to CCRCs (Continuing Care Retirement Communities) like Plymouth Harbor and Sunnyside Village.

A Sarasota resident since 1991 and semi-retired now, she is Vice Chairman of the Universal Design Coalition, a loosely affiliated grass-roots group consisting of architects, building contractors and people in the caregiving profession. She also sits on the Senior Advisory Council to the Sarasota County Commission and is a member of the Living in Community Network.



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### What is Universal Design?

It deals with aspects of homes that are usually referred to as “handicap accessible”. But that term applies only to commercial buildings. When we talk about residences, it’s called Universal Design. We try to incorporate features that allow people to age in place or assist them with their ability to stay in their homes and not have to be institutionalized. Ultimately, though, we want to create environments not just for the least of us in mobility, but for the best of us — people who might need special things in their homes because they’re taller or shorter, or who have challenges at a younger age because of a skiing accident, for example.

### How did you get involved in the subject?

I’ve always had a passion for Universal Design. As I got older, I wanted to make more of a mark and — I hate to sound corny about this — I wanted to take the knowledge I had accumulated all these years with mature people and housing and apply it to Sarasota. Previously, my job had been get to move people out of their houses and into retirement communities. Now, I’m trying to get them to stay in their homes.

### Is this a big need?

Yes. More than a third of the people in Sarasota County are over 65, and more than 90 percent are living in their homes. That’s a lot of people. Are they living well? That is the question.

### What do you mean by “living well”?

There are two big factors. One is visitability: Is the home accessible? Can anybody go to your house and enter through the front door, use the commode in the bathroom and get around using some kind of mobility device like a scooter or a wheelchair. The other is Universal Design: What is your life like in your home? Universal Design features allow you to

live there comfortably and safely — get into the shower without an impediment, move about comfortably whether you’re in a wheelchair or have a hip or knee replacement.

### What are some of the specific features?

Many are simple things — lever door handles, not knobs which are hard to turn; pulls on cabinets; raised electrical outlets so people can get to them more easily. In the kitchen, it’s having drawers and shelves that pull out, task lighting that improves the view of work spaces and, in some cases, glass fronts for cabinets to trigger memory of what’s inside them. Sometimes, we can get contractors to put in a raised dishwasher, so it’s not as hard to bend over. Raised washers and dryers are common nowadays already. Having appliances or microwaves at eye level, so lifting is not as hard, is important because one danger for an older person is having to bring down a hot dish from higher up. It’s best if you can slide it out and have a resting place for it, either a pull-out board or an easily accessible counter. Raised counters are easier on the back, too. In the bathroom, it’s a comfort height commode. If it’s too low, people can’t get up and down. Hand-held shower units and seats in the shower are good. A lot of people like them. Women can sit down when they shave their legs. When I remodeled a bathroom in my house for visitability, we took out a piece of the doorway and put in a sink with a space below so that someone with a walker could scoot under it.

### But not everyone can afford that kind of remodeling?

It can be pricey. But some of the things, such as the grab bars for the shower, door handles and shelves to modify the kitchen, are not that expensive. And they don’t have to look institutional. There are beautiful-looking products on the market today. There are lists of 40 to 50 different type of products to do remodeling.

### How does the Universal Housing Coalition fit into this?

At the moment, our efforts are largely educational. We hold forums to teach the public here in Sarasota County what is possible. Our two-year plan is to create a demonstration model home, say a 1950s Florida ranch house. Ideally, it would be centrally located, close to health care facilities and public transportation, maybe in South Gate or Gulf Gate. We’d remodel it with the help of volunteers and sponsor companies, so people can see what’s really possible, and have it as a living laboratory.

### What else is on the Coalition’s agenda?

We are working hard to get a resolution through the (Sarasota) County Commission to get builders a seal that provides a Universal Design certification for a home — very much like a green building. Universal Design today is what green building was 10 year ago. No one then knew what it was. The goal is to have people live as long as possible in their home, and if they need help, to outfit it in a way that they can get a caregiver to come and live with them. It costs a lot less money than a nursing home — \$8,000 a month — or assisted living — \$4,000 to \$5,000 a month.

### What do you see as your role in all this?

I want to leave a legacy. What would be better than taking all of this national experience I’ve had and devoting it to my community. I love Sarasota, and I want to be an agent of change here. I want to provide creative and inventive solutions for aging. We baby boomers have reinvented everything else, and we’re certainly going to reinvent this.

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Chris Angerman interviewed Tracy Lux regarding her work with the Universal Design Coalition.