



The Shenandoah's Windham model offers wide-open spaces with a circular flow between rooms. The home has a second story for visitors, but the owner's suite is on the first level.

We've all battled our homes in one form or another: Trying to get the front door open and lights turned on with arms full of groceries; getting up and down the front steps with a baby stroller; helping a family member with crutches get up the stairs; and most frustrating of all, moving new furniture through narrow doorways and around tight corners.

Just imagine what it must be like with a wheelchair or walker. Winchester Homes President Alan Shapiro realized the problem when his wheelchair-bound father-in-law came to visit. It took 20 minutes just to help him up Shapiro's two front steps. A few years ago, Shapiro joined a team to develop building standards for Montgomery County, MD's Design for Life Montgomery, a voluntary builder certification program for accessible homes.

"It just really struck me as something that was going to be an important thing," Shapiro says. "As the demographics keep moving in the direction they're moving in, more and more [housing] requests will revolve around accessibility."

As a result, Winchester is incorporating accessible-minded "universal design" into its active-adult Shenandoah development in Lake Frederick, VA. The developer is also opening a universal design show house in Clarksburg, MD, for homeowners of any age.



A signature feature of Shenandoah homes, as with the Clarksburg model, is a no-step entry.



Your Home, Your Way

The homes at Lake Frederick and Clarksburg are meant to show that universal design is not "handicapped design" with "in-your-face" elements such as ugly ramps or grab bars, says Randy Melvin, Winchester's director of research, standards, and design assurance. Rather, the concept means no-step entries, wide doorways and corridors, easy flow between rooms, a bedroom and full bath on the first floor, and kitchens with variable-height counters. Buyers can request as many or as few of those features as they want under the company's "Your Home. Your Way." program.

The program has existed for about 10 years, and Winchester executives saw elements of universal design as a perfect extension. For instance, if a young family doesn't

need grab bars in the bathroom when they purchase a house, they won't request them, but the walls have been built with extra supports should they need to be installed later on.

"You literally age in place, and you have the opportunity to fund and add in place" as the need arises, says Winchester Marketing Director Cynthia Herberg. But none of the universal design elements will ever look institutional, Shapiro points out. "We decided to showcase universal design and how to integrate it into a luxury lifestyle," he says. Because buyers can pick and choose, he adds, "we can deliver exactly the features that resonate with their lifestyle."