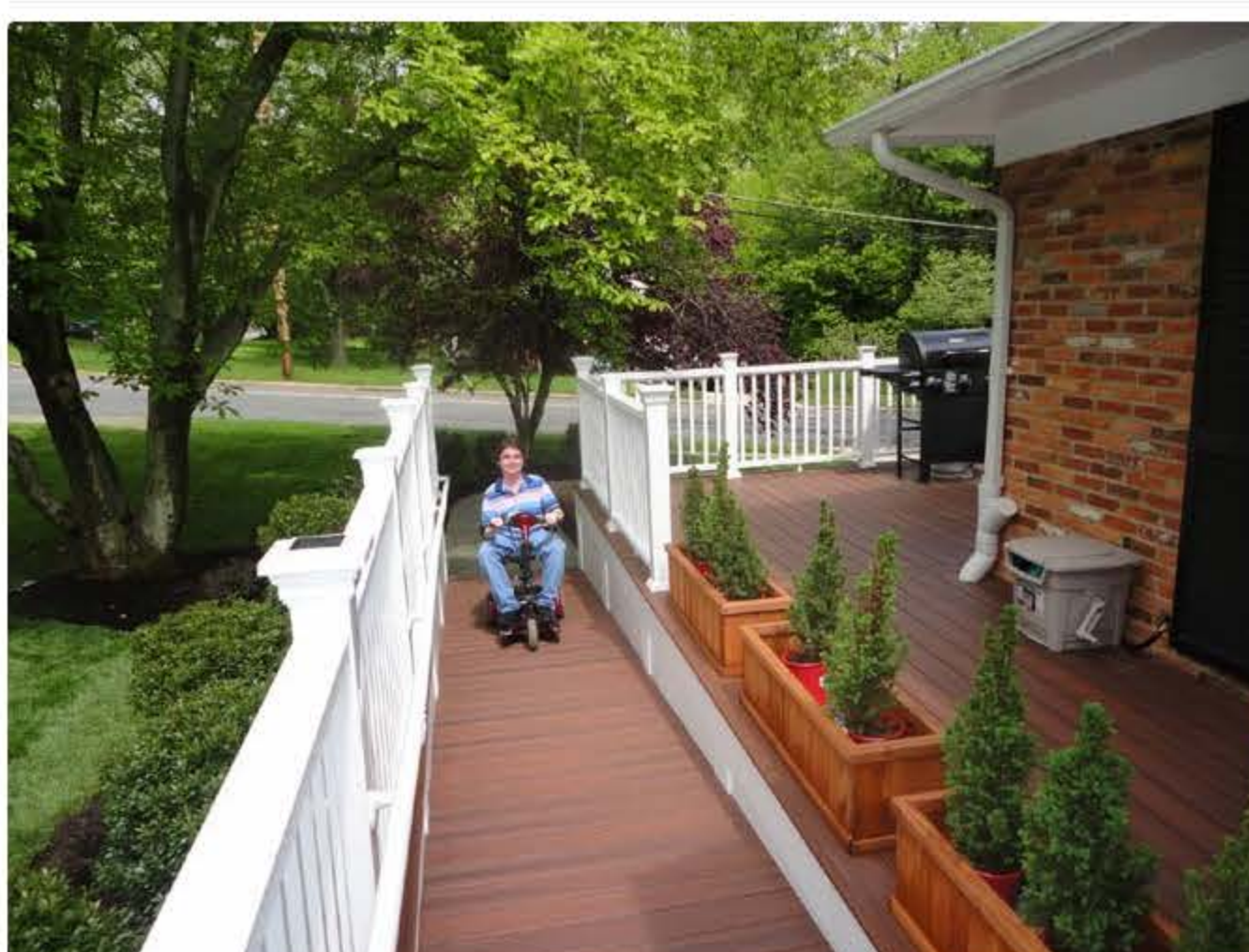


Creating Attractive Access

Front elevation universal design solution is both functional and architecturally appropriate.

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Chris Cassidy, who is completing graduate studies, can now travel from the front door to a waiting ride at the foot of the drive without assistance. Photo contributed

By John Byrd/The Connection

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In many respects, well-executed universal design speaks to the hope that a better world is not only possible, but within our grasp. Certainly the intention is to include people with challenged mobility. And it follows that a good universal design solution can be an enhancement not just for one person, but for everyone.

"The thinking in our culture has really evolved on this issue," said accessibility design specialist Russ Glickman of Potomac, Md. "It is much more common today to find a special needs mobility solution so perfectly rationalized that the improvement extends beyond how the house works to how it looks."

Of course, as a practical matter, finding a skilled change-agent who gets the vision can be difficult. Just ask Grace Cassidy.

The Cassidy family has occupied a two-level brick ranch near Lake Accotink for 15 years. Son Chris, who is now a graduate student at American University, was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy when he was not quite 3 years old, and shortly thereafter the family moved to the pretty ranch on a corner lot with a sloping hill. A second child was born. Life went on, hampered only by occasional struggles in moving Chris' scooter as he got older. Gradually, Chris' natural drive to independence became a factor. To help him get from the front of the house to sidewalk, for instance, the family deployed a fold-out ramp, which they re-folded and removed at the end of the day.

As Chris became more accustomed to going places, the Cassidys stepped up their search for ways to appropriately retrofit the house itself.

"Finding someone who understood our range of requirements turned out to be a real problem," Cassidy said. "The contractors we discussed our needs with either didn't know what they were doing, or just turned us down outright. That's when I recognized that the kind of solution wanted was still considered pretty specialized."

Enter Russ Glickman, president of Glickman Design Build. What is particularly "specialized" about services provided by the veteran remodeler is that he's learned much of his craft by care-giving for his own son, Michael, who was born with cerebral palsy, and is also a college student living at home with his parents.

"I have been designing and remodeling homes for over 30 years," Glickman said. "About 15 years ago I really immersed myself in mastering about a dozen special-needs building technologies. It's an evolving discipline that includes some very particular applications."

Glickman's search eventually led to certifications in Aging in Place (CAPS), Environmental Access (CEAC) and Green Building (GACP). For Cassidy, though, the important difference was that Glickman came forward with ideas.

"Russ showed us how we could re-design the home's front elevation so that it would not only help Chris, but also create an outdoor family place and enhance our curb appeal. That intrigued all of us," Grace Cassidy said. "I began to see that there wasn't any reason why a universal design solution has to look like it was created for handicapped needs."

That said, the most evident difficulties were inherent to the site itself. The plan called for a pathway in which Chris Cassidy could easily get from the front door to a waiting school bus at the foot of the driveway one level below. Since the existing downward path consisted of a series of staircases and walk-ways built along a rapidly-deteriorating brick retaining wall, the feasibility issues seemed daunting.

"Of course, there was an obvious site preparation component," Glickman said. "We had to cultivate the grade so that the scooter can negotiate it without difficulty. This entailed a certain amount of earth-moving and re-compaction, which we secured with a two-part retaining wall system that now figures into the new landscaping plan."

The newly paved side walkway extends some 90 feet from the front door to the driveway, never rising faster than one inch per foot.

The space-constricted former front porch has been replaced by an L-shaped veranda that wraps the home's northwest corner as it segues to the new outdoor grilling deck.

Surrounded by matures trees and recently completed landscaping, the new outdoor space is elegant and private.

To assure traction and durability, Glickman specified Fiberon decking. For atmosphere, the railing caps are fitted with Azek night lighting — which creates a pretty effect on a warm night when the family gathers for a cook-out.

"But the greatest pleasure for me is how well this works for Chris," Grace said. "When I see him heading off for school, or coming up the hill on his own, it's the complete fulfillment of everything we'd hoped for."



Photo contributed
The new L-shaped front veranda wraps the home's northwest corner where it segues to a family grilling deck. Railing caps are fitted with night lights — perfect for evening entertaining.



Photo contributed
Scooter-access between the house and the front walk had previously depended on portable ramps — which were unfolded in the morning and removed at night.



Photo contributed
The access solution by Glickman Design Build blends into the home's existing architecture. The new front-facing veranda — which includes a grilling deck — has been a pleasant warm-weather asset for the entire family.



Photo contributed
Part of Russ Glickman's solution entailed replacing a failed retaining wall with a double component system that incorporates landscaping.



Photo contributed
Russ Glickman re-graded the existing slope so that it never rises faster than one inch per foot. The ramp and deck flooring are constructed of Fiberon planks, which are durable and skid-free.

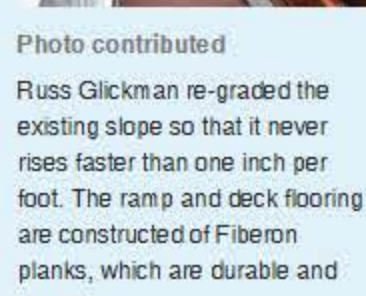


Photo contributed
The Cassidy family has occupied the ranch on a corner lot for 15 years; owing to site challenges, most of the contractors they originally approached with their access requirements declined the assignment.

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