

It's Official! Virginia Has Its First EasyLiving Home!

Teri Barker-Morgan

For nearly a year, *Voices & Visions* has tracked the progress of bringing the **EasyLiving Home** program to the Commonwealth. Since our last update, two important goals have been achieved. Over the winter, representatives of the Board, Virginia Housing Development Authority, Home Builders Association of Virginia, and other key groups joined together as directors of the nonprofit Virginia Assistive Technology Solutions, Inc., and obtained a license to certify EasyLiving Homes in Virginia. Then, on March 13, 2008, that organization officially certified Virginia's first EasyLiving Home at 2332 Thomas Kenney Drive in Glen Allen. The event attracted prominent media attention and a large crowd of community and industry leaders who toured the house and learned more about the EasyLiving Home concept.

That concept and its potential are easy to understand. The certification opportunity encourages builders to include cost-effective features that enhance a home's accessibility and visitability. The readily identifiable certification mark lets realtors and homebuyers know that those value-added, lifestyle-enhancing features are present.

The EasyLiving Home program helps both the disability and aging communities break into the main-

stream housing market and influences how architects and builders design and construct new homes by promoting greater functionality and convenience for owners and guests across their entire lifetimes. Steve Thomas, president of Steven Thomas Homes, builder of Virginia's first EasyLiving Home, closely followed the program's progress as it was developed in Georgia then adapted to other states. Describing their 3,145 sq. ft., five-bedroom EasyLiving Home, he emphasized its "appeal to a wide group, including parents of young children in strollers as well as aging baby boomers who like the comfort of a stair-free entrance."



Partnerships forged to make EasyLiving Homes a reality in Virginia have been productive and represent one sustainable solution to building inclusive and welcoming communities. Additional Virginia EasyLiving Homes are planned and under construction, and the certifying organization is pleased to announce that Patrick Johnson of AARP has joined its board of directors. In coming months, he and his fellow directors and their organizations will work to expand statewide awareness of the EasyLiving Home concept and encourage many more builders to enroll in the program. ♡

VGA/VERC Disability Services Track

Katherine Lawson

Continuing a collaboration spanning more than four years, the Board provided funding and planning support for the annual joint conference of the **Virginia Guardianship Association** and **Virginia Elder Rights Coalition** held in Richmond on April 7 & 8, 2008. In his keynote presentation that opened the conference, Michael Gillette, Ph.D., of Bioethical Services of Virginia, discussed "Disaster Ethics" and what vulnerable populations need to prepare for in the case of a natural or manmade emergency. This issue is of particular interest and concern to the Board and its constituents at this time.

As in past years, many of the 233 conference attendees participated in the Board-sponsored Disability Services Track, and many friends of the Board were included on the track's agenda. Advocate Ed Turner spoke on his personal experiences overcoming prejudice and concerns about his professional abilities. A former Board staff member and recipient of its 2005 Jackie Crews Award for Excellence in Leadership, Ed is the Governor's Senior Advisor on Disability Issues in the Workforce and a trainer with Virginia Commonwealth University's Rehabilitation Research & Training Center. Karen Lawson of the Department of Medical Assistance Services presented on the Long Term Care Partnership, and Dana Yarborough of the Partnership for People with Disabilities introduced conference attendees to a panel of self-advocates from the New Voices initiative. Bill Fuller of the Virginia Housing Development Authority described new programs at his agency including an exciting effort to assist microboards that support individuals with disabilities in obtaining low interest loans to secure homes. Julie Stanley, Director of the Office of Community Integration, and VBPD staff member Katherine Lawson provided an update on Virginia's Systems Transformation, Money Follows the Person, and State Profile Tool initiatives. ♡