

Consultant helps elderly, disabled in Sunrise with home improvements

She works with Sunrise to help those eligible remodel homes.

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Beth Kofsky, who is in the business of improving homes, gets a universal request from her clients.

"Every time I go to a person's house, they say, 'I don't want my house looking like a hospital.'"

Kofsky's version of home improvement helps the elderly and disabled. She is an environmental access consultant. One of her clients is the city of Sunrise.

Recently, she shared her tips with an audience at a program, "Make Your Home Barrier-Free," at the Sunrise Senior Center.

She did not mince words. "The biggest concern that I have with people of disability is a limitation of their access to... grooming, toilet," she told the audience. "We want to

make the bathroom accessible."

There is a purpose to Kofsky's bluntness. "I do ask a lot of personal questions because I need to know these things," she said.

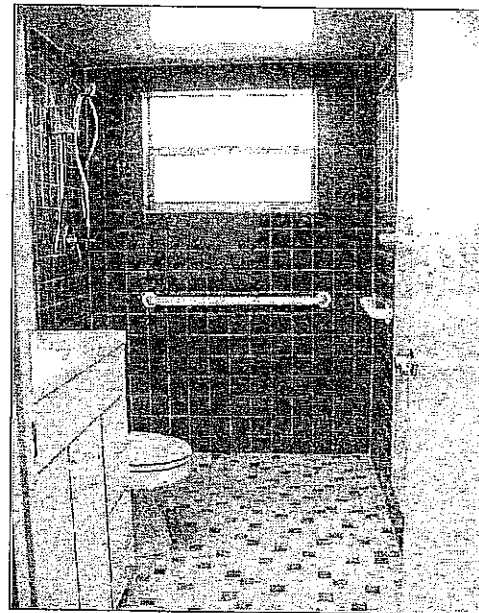
Sunrise provides financial assistance, through the State Housing Initiative Partnership and Community Development Block Grants, for home modifications for elderly or disabled residents. Those can include changes to driveways, doorways, halls, bathrooms and kitchens. The modifications also can include non-slip floors and improved lighting.

"This is a very stringent code," Kofsky said. "It exceeds most building codes."

Through the program, consultants inspect homes to determine what changes are needed. Residents must then fill out an application.

Through a computer presentation, Kofsky showed the audience examples of accessible entrances, with safe rail-

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STYLISH SAFETY: Far left, a bathroom before it is remodeled, and the same bathroom after.

Submitted photo

HOMES

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ings and ramp entries.

"This is a very light-weight aluminum ramp and they can move it, and anyone can lift it," Kofsky said, pointing out a picture of a portable ramp, which can weigh between three and five pounds.

Kofsky also displayed door handles with levers. "It's easier to maneuver, especially if you have an arthritic condition," Kofsky said.

Kofsky recalled providing the door handles for a woman with arthritis so severe that she could only move two fingers. "She thought it was the greatest thing in the world," Kofsky recalled. "That changed her whole life."

For bathrooms, modifications include toilets that conform to the Americans With Disabilities Act. The toilets can cost as much as \$500. "You can't just walk in and get one," Kofsky said.

"You have to order it." Support bars, which people can hold onto in the bathroom, also are expensive.

Floors in the showers are sloped. "That's to keep the water to stay within the shower area," Kofsky said.

To avoid water coming out of a shower, most people want a regular separator. Kofsky said that is not always possible, given the need of some people to be wheeled into a shower stall.

As for kitchens, touch-control appliances are available, and changes can be made to counters, cabinets and shelves. However, "I don't re-do a lot of kitchens in Sunrise. I just don't have the funding," Kofsky said.

Accessibility sometimes means compromise. "We widen the door, we can't always put a vanity in,"

Kofsky said.

There are no room additions. Also, "we don't do custom products. We have to use those funds responsibly and within the guidelines of the program."

Kofsky gave the audience the requirements. "You have to be income-eligible. Your home cannot exceed the assessed value of \$120,000 and a person in your home must be living with a disability." The program also requires that residents stay in their homes for five years. If they move, they must pay back the money that is owed to the city.

Audience members have received help. "I fell down and fractured my hip about a year-and-a-half ago," said Ada Sacco, who lives in Sunrise Lakes Phase I. "They put in a new commode, the high ones."

Gladys Lavergne, who lives in Sunrise Lakes Phase III, was getting information on modifications for her husband, who has neuropathy.

"If they approve, it's going to help my husband," she said.

Kofsky is the assistant director of the Stein Gerontological Institute, which is part of the Miami Jewish Home and Hospital for the Aged. She does consulting work across South Florida.

In Sunrise, "It's a great program. I think we've helped over 20 people this year, and the phone keeps ringing off the hook," Kofsky said.

For more information about the city of Sunrise Barrier-Free Housing Program, call Beth Kofsky toll-free at 1-800-322-7881, or e-mail her at bkofsky@mjhha.org.

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