



YVONNE CAREY/FOR THE HERALD

A CLEAR PATH: Beth Kofsky tells the elderly and disabled how they can make their homes easier to get around in.

Program makes life easier for disabled

The Barrier-Free Housing Program is helping Sunrise senior citizens and the disabled live more comfortably.

BY YVONNE CAREY
Special to The Herald

When disabilities prevent residents from preparing food, bathing or doing simple tasks in their own home, Beth Kofsky, an environmental access consultant hired by the city of Sunrise, steps in to help them modify their homes through the Barrier-Free Housing Program, which provides financial assistance, contracting and supervision of work to remove the barriers to independent living.

Kofsky's goal is to give "good outreach" through the 5-year-old, state-funded program. One of her main outreach focal points is the Sunrise Senior Center.

She gave her fourth lecture there on June 14, drumming up as many program applicants as possible.

Kofsky said the response to the program at the center has been great.

"The program is first-come-first-served," she said.

The money comes from a community development grant and the State Housing Initiative Partnership. In order to be eligible, applicants must be 62 years old or older and in need of assistance devices or disabled and any age. The

value of the modified home cannot exceed \$108,726.

Gladys Lavergne, 75, who attended the lecture and was already approved to receive assistance for home modifications, said it was to better care for her 92-year-old husband.

"Her husband has a hard time getting in and out of the tub," Kofsky said. "The first thing everyone wants is to have the tub torn out. Bathing becomes a problem almost immediately."

One resident was so crippled by rheumatoid arthritis that she couldn't switch her lights on or off nor could she make the trek from the sink to her eating area while carrying a plate. A small eating bar and touch-control switches, which she could prompt with her head or arm, were installed and made a big difference, Kofsky said.

After seeing her aunt struggle through vision loss, Kofsky decided to pursue a career in healthcare and she immediately knew it was her calling, she said.

Skilled laborers make the improvements, such as ramp-edge protections so walkers and wheelchairs don't slide off track, low-pile, nonskid carpeting, door-widening, counter and cabinet lowering, and sloped showers with grab bars.

For information on barrier-free housing, call 800-322-7881.