

By Jeffrey Kerr

Accessible Friendly Real Estate

*I am very pleased to provide my new regular feature for **Outspoken!** magazine that will cover a variety of topics relating to homes that are friendly to people who use wheelchairs and other real estate that is accessible. I like to call this Wheel Friendly Real Estate!*



Accessible housing is a passion of mine. I have been a real estate agent for 14 years. In addition to traditional real estate, I founded AccessibleHomeFinder.com, an online resource for accessible homes and condos.

Unfortunately, there is a shortage of well-built accessible homes in many cities, including Toronto. This can create a problem for families who need a home that can accommodate their specific needs.

Garages, fenced in yards, hardwood floors and granite counter tops are not too hard to find, but when you add wheelchair accessibility to the list, the options that are available are suddenly reduced.

My unique approach to matching buyers who are looking for accessible homes with sellers who have homes that are – or could be – easily converted to meet my client's brief is at the heart of what I do.

The story of Matthew and Nathalie is a perfect example. Matthew has quadriplegia and he wanted to find a condo for them to share.

But as Nathalie says, that was only the beginning of their story.

"Before Matthew, I didn't know much about the actual needs of someone who uses a wheelchair, let alone purchasing and making a home accessible. I have two sons ages 15 and 17 who we had to consider, and I honestly didn't have any hope that we would find a place in which we could all be comfortable. But fortunately, Matthew knew Jeff from a community event he attended.

I learned that accessibility is often in the details. Jeff entertained every concern that Matthew had, from the thickness of carpet in the corridors to the dexterity required to operate key fobs needed to access the parking garage.

Jeff truly understood our vision and took our list of very specific 'must haves' and found us the home of our dreams."

Wheelchair friendly homes are rare, but as a result of my extensive training and experience working with people with disabilities, I can recognize the potential of how to make a house or condo accessible. A laundry room can be moved from the basement to the main floor. Installing an incline platform lift can be a simple solution to the challenge of stairs. In some homes, adding an elevator may be easier than you think. Counter tops can be lowered and bathtubs can be converted to roll-in showers.

But beware. Buyers looking for a wheelchair friendly home should realize accessibility is not just blindly saying a home can be easily modified. Some options may not be realistic in every home. Find a real estate broker specializing in accessible homes who has a network of accredited professionals who can provide an expert opinion on the practicality and costs of the potential changes that may be required.

Modifications to make a home comfortable for people of all ages, regardless of their level of disability can be achieved. At the end of the day, any home that is modified now will appeal to the growing number of an aging population who will be looking for a variety of accessibility features in the future.

For more information, on finding an accessible home or one that can be modified to suit your needs, contact:

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