



# Ramping Up!

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## TRIBUTE: LARRY LEMECKA (1948 - 2005)

As a young man, Larry Lemecka wanted to be a police officer and help others in his community. However, in 1965, Larry had an injury that changed the course of his life, and was to change that of others in Calgary for decades to come.

Following a car accident which left him a quadriplegic, Larry spent several years living in various places that were unsuitable for him. He spent five years in a nursing home, two years living with his brother Steve, or sharing accommodation with friends who also had mobility problems.

Larry had a vision of what life could be and he banded together with other young men facing the same reality he was. In 1974, these pioneers collaborated with architects, physiotherapists, Canadian Paraplegic Association, and three levels of Government to design and build a residence that would offer them and others like them a home where they could receive personal care and live with dignity and independence. In 1976, Larry's dream was realized and under the auspices of the Accessible Housing Society, the Fourth Dimension Group Home opened its doors.

The Fourth Dimension (4D) was not a group home, but a home for 12 individuals with various types of disabilities. In an interview Larry did, he said, "Reactions and experiences prior to 4D varied as some people had been living with a disability for some

time while others were coming from the hospital after a recent injury. There was a real "family" atmosphere, though there was a lot of partying, like dorm living!"

In 1980, with Alberta Municipal Affairs, Larry pioneered another innovative project that filled a void for people with mobility problems in Calgary – an Accessible Housing Registry. At the time, there was nowhere for people with physical disabilities, such as those leaving care facilities after a serious injury and needing information about accessible housing, to access information about what was available. For the past 25 years, Larry ran the Housing Registry for the Accessible Housing Society, and in 2004 there were approximately 500 requests made to the Registry for information on accessible housing.

In 1982, Larry moved into Chinook House, where he had been instrumental in having six suites with wheel-in showers and on-site care incorporated into the non-profit apartment building operated by what is now the Calgary Housing Company. Larry and several other residents who were quadriplegic were leaving the 4<sup>th</sup> Dimension group home to strike out on their own and live in an apartment. This was ground breaking at the time and remains the preferred model for most people with disabilities today.



Larry, who attained his Master's in Social Work after his injury, counseled thousands of individuals and families, and was also a very strong and forthright advocate for people with disabilities. Larry often faced phone calls detailing incredible need with no ready housing solutions. In spite of this, he did whatever he could to mitigate the issues. In some instances he enlisted other Accessible Housing Society services such as the Residential Assessment and Design program to help.

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(Tribute: Larry Lemecka , continued from pg. 1)

Larry attended countless meetings as a valued spokesperson in the community, working tirelessly with agencies and government to create more housing, and better links and communications between housing agencies.

Larry's accomplishments are almost too numerous to mention. His work and vision was the cornerstone of what the Accessible Housing Society is today. It is not an exaggeration to state that Larry changed the face of housing and services for persons with disabilities in Calgary. He was involved in many housing projects over the years in the city, including McLaurin Village, Edwards Place, Inglewood Housing Project, the Beaverdam Road Co-op, and White Cliff Estates to name but a few.

Larry was also a valued resource for the Kerby Center Housing Registry

and their Private Light Care Home Registry for Seniors. He worked on a committee for the creation of the Calgary Homeless Foundation Registry, and sat on the sub-committee that saw people with physical and cognitive disabilities included in the Calgary Community Housing Plan for the first time.

He was a frequent resource to the Calgary Health Region, the Calgary Housing Company and the community at large.

Larry was very proud to receive awards for his service to the community, which included:

- Rotary Club of Calgary East Integrity Award
- Pioneer Award from Access Awareness Association
- The Honourable Mention for the 2004 City of Calgary Grant MacEwan Lifetime Achievement Award

After work, Larry retired to Glenmore dam in the summers, where

he was an active member of the Disabled Sailing Association and often took other non-sailors for a spin. He was also an ardent Cannons baseball fan. Larry was a tireless supporter of the Calgary Stampede and a general outdoorsman who took any opportunity to acquire his trademark summer tan. Every June, whether rain or snow, he would go fishing west of Crossfield at the Alberta Fish and Game Association annual Handicapped Fishing Derby.

Larry's final challenge came with his recent long hospitalization, which he faced with his customary quiet fortitude and courage. He was supported through this period by visits from close friends, and the companionship and love of his family.

As we say good-bye to Larry, we are thankful for the legacy he fostered in the community, the pleasure of his company, and the memory of a life well lived. He will be missed.

## RESIDENT PROFILE: JAMES HELMER

It's not unusual to see resident James Helmer outside on the patios that surround the Fourth Dimension group home snapping digital photographs of Chinook skies, beautiful sunsets or the trees in Confederation Park covered in hoar frost.

This brave resident thought nothing of getting on his scooter to photograph the park duck pond in -20°C. "The sun is shining," said James matter-of-factly. That attitude is probably a carry-over from years of weathering arctic conditions as he studied and explored the archaeology of the Canadian north.

James was a professor of archaeology at the University of Calgary where he taught Method and Theory and Arctic Pre-history in the Department of Archaeology for 18 years.

James' archaeological expertise is in Archaeological Method and

Theory and in the study of Paleo-Eskimo people of the Eastern Arctic (including Greenland ) dating from about 4,500 to 2800 years ago (Pre-Dorset) to ca. 2700 to 1000/500 years ago (Dorset). This archaeological "Culture" is believed to have originated in North East Asia about 5,000 years ago and is not thought to be directly related to the present day Inuit of Alaska, Canada and Greenland.

In 1990, Professor Helmer won a Distinguished Teacher Award in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the U of C where he still retains an office.

James took a "Long Term Disability Leave" from the U of C and moved into the 4D group home in 2001 when his Multiple Sclerosis made it too difficult to live safely on his own.



Although he was born in Ottawa and moved several times, James has called Calgary home for over 31 years. He has been married for 28 years to wife Elizabeth who is currently teaching at the University of Victoria.

If Dr. Helmer could change one aspect of the Government of Alberta it would be the current post-secondary and environmental policies which this government supports.

## AHS NEW YEAR'S WISH LIST

At the Accessible Housing Society, we appreciate any gift, be it a cash donation, someone's time, or equipment and supplies. Below are a few items that we need at the Society. Your donation of any of them will help us keep expenses down, enabling us to maintain and, ideally, increase the high level of service that we provide to our clients.

### Accessible Housing Society Office

- Avery Labels
- Newspaper subscriptions
- Postage Stamps

### Fourth Dimension Group Home

- Fabric softener, Laundry soap
- Latex and non-latex rubber gloves

### Residential Assessment & Design Program

- CD read/write drive to transfer files from desktop to laptop
- Disto Classic3 laser distance meter.

## AHS AND THE UNITED WAY – A BEAUTIFUL FRIENDSHIP

“For a city to be truly great, it must be great for everyone”

For the past four years, the Accessible Housing Society (AHS) has been fortunate to be aligned – both in vision and in financial support – with the United Way of Calgary and Area. Their tagline above echoes AHS's hopes for the Calgarians we work with. We know that for people with mobility problems, housing that meets their accessibility needs is key for them to have a great life in our city.

AHS was thrilled to recently sign a three-year funding agreement with the United Way in support of our Residential Assessment and Design (RAD) Program. Thanks to their financial support, the RAD Team of Alanna (Occupational Therapist), Alan (Architect), Sue (Occupational Therapist), and Lesley (Outreach Assistant) will be able to continue providing the essential service of barrier-free design expertise to the over 550 clients they work with each year.

The RAD Program changes people's lives, change that can mean the difference between:

- being imprisoned in one's home **and** being able to move about freely;
- caregivers being at risk for severe back injury **and** being able to care for their client or loved one safely;
- spending one's days relying on family members and health care workers to accomplish basic activities **and** being independent;

- being cooped up in one's home **and** being able to pursue a productive life in the community.

AHS commends the United Way on having the foresight to support this program which has such long-term impact on the quality of life of people with mobility problems.

AHS has benefited from this partnership in other ways. Each year, during the United Way's fall campaign, AHS representatives have the opportunity to speak to numerous companies on our services and our connection to the United Way – a great way to promote what we do in the community to groups we might not normally get to meet. We are also lucky to be part of the Days of Caring program. Teams of enthusiastic, hard workers from all sorts of Calgary businesses have come out to the group home, our golf tournament, and other venues to jump in and get their hands dirty – literally! – doing group volunteer projects. The employee teams always bring lots of energy and good spirits to whatever they do.

Thanks again to the United Way for their support of the Accessible Housing Society. We are thrilled to be able to continue such a beautiful friendship!



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# ACCESSIBLE KITCHENS, PART 2



by Alan Nakatsui, MAAA, PEng.

(Excerpt from "Renovations Magazine" Spring 2004)

correct height, and adjacent to a wheel-under counter should be considered. The racks inside the oven should be approximately level with the counter. An adjacent pull-out shelf could allow sliding of hot items from the oven racks to the shelf.

**Dishwasher:** The dishwasher can be raised on a plinth if bending over is difficult. It can also be easier to use from a wheelchair.

**Rolling Cart:** A rolling cart can be used as an alternative to placing items on your lap if using a wheelchair or if carrying items is difficult. This is especially useful for hot items.

**Refrigerators:** Whether the freezer is on top or on the bottom or it is side-by-side is often an individual preference. Some considerations are a person's reach, availability of space for the door swing, and left or right handedness. If there is a roll-under counter adjacent, this can make access better for someone in a wheelchair who has adequate reach and strength.



**Countertop stove:** Smooth top stoves allow pots and pans to be slid on and off for safety and convenience for someone with lack of adequate grip or arm strength. Controls should be side or front mounted to avoid having to reach over hot elements or pots.

**Wall Oven:** Use of an oven from a wheelchair can be a very hazardous operation. It is always riskier than for an able bodied person who can react quickly in case of an accidental spill, and who is not exposed to scalding liquids spilling into their laps. To minimize these risks, a wall oven with a side swing door, mounted at the

**Switches:** It is possible to place the switches for the range hood fan and light in the front fascia panel if the reach is too great for someone in a wheelchair.

**Upper Cabinets:** Obviously, it is best to lower the cabinets for someone in a wheelchair. However, there are some minimum distances required from cooktops by the building code. Also, you should leave sufficient room for tall appliances that are normally left on top of the counter. There are motorized adjustable height models if cost is not an issue.

Planning a kitchen is always a challenge. Renovations to an existing kitchen are even more difficult, and if you have to design for a mobility problem, there are numerous additional issues to consider. If you need some help with the layout, the Accessible Housing Society has the expertise in house to do a professional evaluation of your situation and provide customized solutions, including drawings. We have Occupational Therapists on staff who can make a thorough assessment of your physical abilities and needs, and an Architect to assess the existing home environment, and as a team, plan a new kitchen that works for you. You can reach Accessible Housing Society by phone at (403) 282-1872 or by email at info@ahscalgary.ca.

**HAPPY NEW YEAR!!**



Great volunteers Sheri, Valerie, and Tanya are hard at work in the AHS offices.

## CHANGES TO RENOVATION FUNDING PROGRAMS

### RESIDENTIAL ACCESS MODIFICATION PROGRAM

The Residential Access Modification Program (RAMP) was formerly named Home Adaptation Program. This is a provincial grant through Alberta Seniors and Community Supports. The gross household income threshold has increased from \$32,000 to \$33,900. Deductions of \$4000 for a spouse and \$300 for each dependent child remain the same. Eligible clients can receive up to \$5000 for home renovations that provide wheelchair accessibility.

### RESIDENTIAL REHABILITATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) is one of the funding programs through Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). RRAP provides funding to landlords and homeowners for improving accessibility and for major home repairs. In August 2005, we were notified that the budget for both Disabled RRAP (accessibility modifications) and Homeowner RRAP (major home repairs) in the Calgary area had been expended for this fiscal

year, which runs from April 1, 2005, to March 31, 2006, and there may not be additional funds until after April 1, 2006.

In October 2005, when this article was written, RRAP received some additional funding and had several applications in progress. Approximately 70 new applicants were on a waiting list and RRAP was not adding more names to the list at that time.

Other funding alternatives are available but do not provide nearly the amount that RRAP does (up to \$16,000 for homeowners) and are limited to specific client groups. The Residential Access Modification Program through Alberta Seniors and Community Supports only provides up to \$5000.00 and applicants need to be using a wheelchair in order to be eligible for this program. Home Adaptations for Seniors' Independence (HASI) is another program through CMHC that provides up to \$3500 for minor home modifications that will increase safety and independence. Applicants need to be over 65 years old to qualify.

## NEW STAFF AT AHS

Lesley Gibson recently came on board at AHS in the newly created position of Outreach Assistant. Lesley spends half her time working with Roy in the Housing Registry and the other half working out in the community with the RAD Team. Her background in rehabilitation and disability studies will serve her (and AHS!) well.



Pat Bateman, RN, joined AHS to job share the role of Client Care Director. Pat works part-time with Florence Fraser, managing staff and resident care at the Fourth Dimension Group Home, Chinook House, and McLaurin Village. Pat brings a wealth of experience in nursing, most recently with Home Care.

## ACCESSIBLE HOUSING SOCIETY SERVICES

**Housing Registry** - To help you find wheelchair accessible rental housing in the city, please call Lesley or Roy at 282-3373.

**Residential Assessment and Design Program** - To have your new or current housing situation evaluated for plans or renovations to achieve greater mobility, please call Alanna, Alan or Sue at 282-1872.

**Personal Care Services** - To access the personal care provided at three locations in Calgary, please call 282-1872.

**Library Services** - To research a mobility solution, please feel free to browse our resource library.

**Barrier-Free Design Workshops** - Call AHS at 282-1872 to arrange a workshop for your group.

## FUNDING

Did you know that there are programs out there that may assist you financially if you need to renovate your home to improve accessibility? Each of the following programs has specific eligibility requirements. To determine your eligibility, call the individual program or call AHS at 282-1872.

- ◆ Residential Access Modification Program (RAMP): through Alberta Seniors, 310-0000, then enter (780) 427-5760
- ◆ Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP): through CMHC, (403) 515-3000
- ◆ Home Adaptations for Senior's Independence (HASI): through CMHC, (403) 515-3000
- ◆ Easter Seal Ability Council: equipment only, (403) 235-5662



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1,500 copies of this issue will be delivered to and read by as many as 4,500 Albertans from the disabled community, health services sector and housing renovations industry. Do you have a product or service they should know about?

Contact Robyn at 282-1872.

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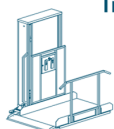
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