

Model home toured

League removes barriers of handicapped

By Jonathan Taylor

A new program known as the Barrier Removal Information Center will save the League of Human Dignity about \$30,000, Mike Schafer, the league's executive director, said Tuesday at a barrier-free environment awareness luncheon.

Mark Schultz, housing and design specialist, said the new program was formed March 1 when the barrier-removal and barrier-free information centers were combined. Schultz took a group of Lincoln community business people on a tour of the league's barrier-free model home. Funded from Community Development block grants, the model home features a living room, bedroom, bathroom and kitchen.

Schultz said the model home has a hydraulic tub-lift and a roll-in in the bathroom, lever-type door handles in all rooms and a kitchen with an adjustable-height roll-under sink and stove, pull-out storage shelves and a front-loading washer and dryer. More than 1,000 people have studied and used the home in the last two years, Schultz said. He said that by having the donated equipment on display, customers can test the products before they buy, rent or receive them by way of grants.

The model home is an example for contractors and builders to follow when they put "adaptable designs" into their homes. Schultz said "adaptable designs" allow builders and contractors to build

ground-level homes that customers with or without handicaps can use.

Schultz said that while the builders he has talked to cooperated with design changes, some argue that the changes cost too much. Though only the best cost-reducing methods are suggested, he said building a home with a barrier-free entrance, wider doorways and a five-foot turning radius in every room adds about \$300 to \$400 to the price. This does not include possible grab rails or other specific equipment that may be installed later, Schultz said.

With the low turnover rate of barrier-free homes, Schultz said, the need is definite.

Schultz said he hopes this need will be met when construction begins this month on a \$700,000 scattered-site barrier-free apartment project made possible through a loan from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The league has waited one and a half years for the approval of the HUD loan to build the 12 one-bedroom and six two-bedroom units at four locations in Lincoln. The spots include the Belmont area, 62nd and Seward streets, 65th and Starr streets and three blocks North of O on 34th street.

About 34 people have expressed interest in the 18 units, Schultz said. People who cannot get space in the new complexes and need modified housing can receive relocation help from the Barrier Removal Information Center.

The center keeps a list of modified homes and determines its customers' access problems and the best solutions. The center also consults with architects, students and other building professionals.

People who need to remove or modify barriers can get grants of up to \$2,500 from the center, Schultz said.

If people qualify for financial aid, the center schedules a conference to assess the barrier problem, Schultz said. He then draws up the plans for changes. Such barrier changes have included ramps, wheelchair lifts, doorway widening and complete bathroom remodeling, Schultz said.

Aside from a free equipment loan program, Schultz said the center makes sure public buildings follow state law and city codes for accessibility by conducting on-site inspections and keeping a building-plan checklist.

Law requires that buildings constructed after 1976 be accessible to the handicapped, Schultz said. But, owners of older buildings take responsibility to decide whether barrier changes should be made.

"We need to get the word out of the services we have available," Schultz said. But because the league does not publish many public service announcements, he said, most of the center's publicity is by word-of-mouth or the league's bi-monthly luncheons.

Lack of funding restricts access

By Jonathan Taylor

Accessibility to buildings on campus "is not perfect, but it's quite good," said Martin Munn, director of handicapped services.

Munn said that not every floor of each building is accessible to the fewer than 25 students who need barrier-free entrances. But, he said, programs and classes have been moved to accommodate those students' needs.

Electric doors currently are being installed in the library entrance, Munn said. However, the extremely high cost of barrier modification limits the amount of remodeling that can be done on other areas of the campus, he said.

Union Director Daryl Swanson said few people have complained about the accessibility to the Nebraska Union.

"I am surprised to hear we're one of the better buildings," Swanson said.

Swanson said that when the ramp on the westside of the union was built, it was expected to be only temporary. He said the electronic door lets in a blast of hot or cold air, depending on weather conditions.

Swanson said two alternatives have been proposed. The first calls for a long, low incline ramp to be installed on the north side of the union, so handicapped students could enter where the large screen television currently is. The other alternative would be to tear down the existing ramp and replace it with an enclosed, heated vestibule, a lift device for handicapped, and steps for the general public. However, no structural changes have been implemented because of a lack of money, Swanson said.



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Sophomore Darlene Wirth uses the handicapped access ramp on the west side of the Nebraska Union.

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