

# Matching homes to needs

## Brighton company helps keep house values up through changes

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STAFF WRITER

In 1965, Gene and Sandra Bailey's newly built Penfield house seemed just right: four bedrooms and two baths, enough to accommodate the couple and their three children.

Fast-forward to 2002, and Gene, 69, and Sandra, 66, had begun to find their home something of a puzzle.

Several bedrooms stood empty because all three children now live in the city.

The basement, with a working fireplace, was cluttered and unused.

Sandy's hip now complained when she went up and down the stairs.

And, most vexing, neither knew exactly who to call to help them sort out their options. An interior designer? A retirement planner? A home contractor?

That's where Mary Jo Conrad-Reingold and Bea Ades entered.

Their Brighton company, Dwellings, uses the pair's diverse educations to help people retain their home's value while revamping to accommodate retirement, disability, illness or a major life transition, such as a child with special needs or an aging, live-in parent.

Conrad-Reingold is an occupational therapist with a background in anthropology and rehabilitation in multiethnic communities.

Ades is a Brazilian-born inte-

rior designer who lived abroad for many years.

"Bea and I understand that people's needs are as varied as there are people in the community," Conrad-Reingold explains.

"We have an aging population, and people overwhelmingly want to stay in their homes as long as they can."

The AARP confirms that: In a 2003 survey of 2,001 people 45 and older, 83 percent said they wanted to stay as long as possible; 82 percent said they wanted to stay there even if in-home care became necessary.

Rein Brucker, vice president of Realty USA Rick Leasure Division, says the reason is rooted in emotion as well as economics.

"What's missing from statistics is emotion," he says. "You can't count how many people want to stay because there's the room where the holiday tree always was, and here's the place on the door where you measured your kids as they grew."

What homeowners regularly run into, however, is a multitude of agencies ready to advise them during life changes — for example, Eldersource for the aging or the Regional Center for Independent Living for the disabled — but no single source to consult on the emotional, psychological and décor needs that such changes can create.

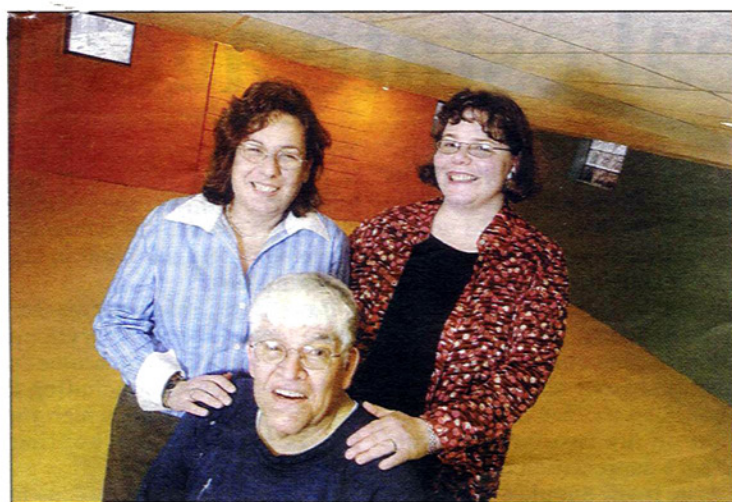
Dwellings has been up and

**HOMES, PAGE 5**



DANESE KENON staff photographer

Gene Bailey finishes painting the basement of his Penfield home Monday. Brighton-based Dwellings helped renovate the house.



Dwellings co-owners Bea Ades and Mary Jo Conrad-Reingold stand behind Bailey at his Penfield home Monday.

## Homes

FROM PAGE 1

running for six months, and currently has about a dozen clients.

Mary Boyd, 61, of Brighton says she and her husband, Donald, 62, are "still hale and hearty and able-bodied." But she knows that coming decades may change that.

For now, she's used Dwellings to add light and color to their 2,800-square-foot Colonial, which she says has improved its value and their moods.

The Baileys, though, used Dwellings to help them figure out the couple's practical needs as well as personal ones.

They turned the basement into a potential living space, added skylights and recessed lighting to see better, and are turning spare bedrooms into his and hers offices.

They've also recognized that their porch and outdoor paths will need work so the couple can enjoy them if they need to use a wheelchair or walker.

"What Bea and Mary Jo do is make you think about where you

want to be as a person, and what you want later in life," Sandra Bailey reflects.

"They ask about your family dynamic, who's (emotionally) supporting you, have you assessed your finances. It was very inclusive, and it made us learn we're more compatible than we knew!"

Conrad-Reingold and Ades charge consumers anywhere from \$80 to \$120 per hour for their work, but stress it's a sliding scale fee. "If someone's really strapped for cash, we can talk fast, believe me," Conrad-Reingold quips.

They won't recommend a contractor or home improvement company unless they know the track record well.

"We don't do kickbacks. We recommend who we know, and

## About the company

To contact Dwellings, call Mary Jo Conrad-Reingold at (585) 244-2310, or Bea Ades at (585) 442-1449. Or, go to [www.accessovertime.com](http://www.accessovertime.com).

if we can't find a name, we network like crazy to come up with a list," she explains, adding that the Dwellings-client relationship is long term.

"These are changes that need to be made over time, and often what needs to be done, as a family changes, isn't apparent right away," says Conrad-Reingold.

Brucker doesn't see services like Dwellings popping up around the nation. Senior communities, which offer "all the bells and whistles" from on-site medical care to full meal service, are growing now.

But, he acknowledges, the next decade may change that.

"Fifty years ago, you didn't see a lot of senior living communities. But you may see more and more of this (type of business) as (baby) boomers and generation X'ers get older." □

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