

HOME



IMPROVEMENT

Nationwide Home Access Program

After recognizing a need for a resource to help people modify their homes, Handi-Ramp, manufacturer of ramps and lifts since 1958, developed the Home Access Program in 2006.

"The program was designed to help individuals and families increase their options when selecting a home," said Thom Disch, President and CEO of Handi-Ramp, the program's sponsor.

Assisting people to find someone in their area who can help locate and/or modify a home for accessibility is the premise of the program. A nationwide searchable database of realtors, consultants, contractors, architects, handymen, and design specialists makes this site invaluable for discovering someone in your area who can help.

"We were constantly getting calls from people with a family member who had a disability, asking us to help them figure out how to best accommodate their specific need. We realized that the need was probably much larger than we were seeing and thought the best way to reach people was through the home buying and home improvement network," said Disch. Since we've been (in the accessibility market) for 50 years we thought we could lend our expertise to the marketplace."

This network of realtors and consultants expands the reach of the program nationwide and brings services to a local level, which makes the whole process more personal and individually tailored to each specific need.

Being a member of the Program expands your horizons by allowing you to network and share resources, according to Jim Erickson, Nordic Home Services, Wood Dale, IL. The site is a great way to pool resources. "Expanding your individual knowledge base, the Home Access Program allows us to offer clients better products while seeing someone's life being impacted."

What makes the Home Access Program special is that it is a free service for both program members and consumers.

"This no-risk, free service educates both members and end users about the various options that they may have. It also expands the number of homes that a family with a member with a disability can choose from," said Disch. "By putting our logo and link on a member's website, it lets consumers know that that business provides a more extensive list of services."

All that Handi-Ramp asks members to do is post the Home Access Program logo on their website so that consumers can identify participants, and it also notifies them that a program of this nature exists in the market.

"Putting a link to the Home Access Program on my website adds credibility to what I'm doing," said Stephen Beard, a realtor for Keller Williams Realty in San Francisco, CA. It exhibits professionalism and an affiliation in a nationwide agenda.

For realtors, there is a special



section on the site for posting accessible home listings, generating additional exposure, and creating awareness of listed properties.

As the program continues, new items will be added to expand its reach. Some of the current resources on the site include: daily Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) news, a monthly newsletter, accessible home listings, a member blog, and more. Recently added items include: a nationwide database of Centers for Independent Living, Community Ramp Programs, and a commercial searchable database of realtors and consultants.

"This year we've extended our reach.

The Home Access Program

Total Members

- 96 realtors
- 83 consultants

Started in 2006

Managed and sponsored by Handi-Ramp, manufacturer and distributor of ramps and lifts

Program Features

- Daily (ADA) Accessibility News
- Monthly Newsletter
- Realtor and Consultant Database
- Accessible Home Listings
- Community Ramp Program Database
- Centers for Independent Living Database
- Links to government websites, disability info, housing resources, and philanthropic organizations
- Accessibility Product Information
- Resource Books
- Member Blog/News

Our initial goal was to have a realtor and consultant in all fifty states. Next, we plan to expand into every metropolitan area to provide comprehensive service across the country," said Disch.

One of the most popular and greatest features on the site is the daily ADA news. Every weekday, current news stories are posted to the Web site that relate to accessibility, wheelchair use, disabilities, etc. Available for browsing in html, RSS, and XML feeds, this element of the site provides a one-stop-shop for all accessibility related news. News stories are also archived on the site for ease of use at a later date.

Since its inception, the Home Access Program has been growing each month with new features, members, and resources. To date there are 179 members,

including realtors and consultants located in 50 states and Canada.

"I thought the (Home Access) Program was an awesome way for me to let people around the country know about my service. It helps increase awareness around the country about disabilities," said Beard. "I like the ability to look up other realtors in other states for clients who need accessibility realtors."

Each month the Home Access Program puts out a newsletter called, The Chronicle. The newsletter features the top three news stories for the month, accessibility products, a realtor/consultant, program news, and fun facts.

Consumers and members are welcome to send in information they would like to see in the newsletter and on the site. A blog is set up for posting shared informa-

tion on resources, life, and anything else that relates to accessibility and home access.

Striving to make information more readily available to the public, the Home Access Program is working to improve the lives of all those who use the site and are involved in the initiative. Funding is a huge area that the Home Access Program is working to develop. Many insurance programs will cover the cost of a wheelchair but not the cost of a ramp. The Funding and Community Ramp Program sections address this issue by providing contacts for local resources that may be able to provide assistance. •

For more information on the Home Access Program, visit www.homeaccessprogram.org or call Anne Tripicchio, marketing manager, at 847.996.6848.

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