

## In the News – Corporate Report Profile

### **Jane A. Hampton, Accessibility Design: 'It's not just whether a sofa looks great.'**

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Several members of Jane Hampton's family worked in healthcare, and she can remember holiday meal conversations about the diagnosis and prognosis of family acquaintances.

She regards that familiarity with physical frailties as an important part of her work as founder of St. Louis Park-based Accessibility Design. An interior designer by training, she started three years ago as a consultant to architects on the living space of the aged and disabled. Almost immediately her firm began to directly serve seniors and the disabled, and the list of services continues to grow.

She recently returned from an extended visit to northern Europe full of product ideas and enthusiasm for teaching other designers how to serve this growing part of the population. "It's been uncomfortable for most interior designers to be involved in this market," she says. "People are in pain, or going through a difficult transition."

Hampton began thinking of this niche several years ago while working for a designer in Sarasota, Florida. She tried hard to consider functional needs of the new house for a couple in their 60's, and, in addition to a pleasing appearance, she found that some small touches made it easier for them to get about and cook meals. In their kitchen, for example, the counter tops contained a small notch for a cane, and came in contrasting colors to compensate for failing vision.

The couple was pleased; and referred her new clients. "She told me that they were eating at home a lot more," Hampton says. "She said, 'I can lift my pots and pans, and reach all my items.'"

Back in Minnesota, Hampton worked as a designer for larger firms and made plans to address the disabled persons market full-time. She came up with four principles -- aesthetics, easy maintenance, safety, and accessibility. "It's not just whether a sofa looks great," she says. "You have to be able to get out of the sofa that looks great. It has to be easy to clean."

All clients go through an assessment, and she contracts with occupational therapists to do some of this work. Some jobs are billed hourly, some are billed as a percentage of the job, and some are billed as time and materials.

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As her firm has evolved, it's acted as a designer, contractor, product vendor, and distributor, and even funding source consultant for those possibly eligible for public assistance. The clients have ranged from wealthier older people who wish to age in their homes, to hard-luck cases referred by social service agencies. "That's what's so fun about this work," she says, of the latter group. "You try to make a whole home accessible for \$3,000 or \$500 or whatever they have to spend."

This fall she plans to show off a new home in southern Minnesota built from the bare lot up, for an owner who has lived in an institution since being injured several years ago. Until he learned of her work, she says, he felt he had no other options. "He's said he's willing to open up his home to whoever wants to see it," she says. "He wants to see more homes like this out there."

She claims not to be motivated just by financial goals, or she would never have left her lucrative work in Florida. She doubts that Accessibility Design will ever grow to have a large staff. While she divulges no specifics, she says her start-up phase is over, and that the business is going well financially.

As has been the case since she started it, she's thinking about new services. For instance, she recently began classes to obtain a real estate agent's license. "Maybe that's phase ten of the firm," she says. "But I also want to have that knowledge."