

The Weekly Record

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Conceptual design and drawings

Helping people personalize their homes

By **GEORGE COLLINS**
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For many years, Carole Ponzio owned an interior design business on Long Island, N.Y. She moved to Charlotte County in 1981 with her family and opened a local unit of a national franchise interior design company in 1984.

Now the Port Charlotte resident is the owner of Design Solutions!

which she established in 2001 to offer conceptual design and drawings for remodeling or new construction, space



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planning and custom cabinetry.

While with the franchise organization, she managed 10 other franchise owners, taught franchisees design and business management on a national basis and ran her own successful business here. During the time she was with



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Brit and Ken Lund are shown in the library of their home on the Myakka River in Port Charlotte with Carole Ponzio, owner of Design Solutions!, which specializes in conceptual design and drawings for remodeling and construction projects. Carole did the decorating for the Lund home and designed everything in the library — the bookcases, shelving, window seat, desk and window treatments.

the company, she won a variety of awards, including two first-place design awards in national competition. The *Charlotte Sun* also published a long-running series of articles on interior design that she authored.

Before starting Design Solutions!, she worked with a

local high-end kitchen design company for seven years.

"My main goal in starting my own business was to be able to offer homeowners a chance to have great kitchen design with an option as to the cost and quality of the cabinetry. I believe that even moderately priced kitchens

deserve great design," Carole said.

Tell me what you do.

Carole: My services include just design work for homeowners who are experienced do-it-yourselfers, contractor referral service, cabinet and product selection or full scale project manage-

ment. I use a computer assisted drafting (CAD) program for designing floor plans and producing elevations and perspectives, so clients can better see what the final results will be.

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Remodeling contractors, as well as new home builders, also may use my service to offer their clients the opportunity to upgrade and personalize their projects to reflect the homeowner's desire for upscale and modernized use of space.

What other services do you offer?

Carole: Years ago, I had visited a friend's home and was impressed with the openness of the floor plan. She told me that the house had been designed for her disabled husband, whom I hadn't met. After she gave me the tour of her home I realized then that I wanted to learn more about incorporating accessibility features into my designs.

In 2005, I earned the National Association of Home

Builders CAPS designation for Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist. The CAPS designation allows recipients to design for the disabled, elderly and multi-generational families living in one home. Based on the NAHB's current list of CAPS, I am the only designer out of four people in Charlotte County to have earned this designation (two are remodeling contractors and one is an accessibility consultant).

What does this involve?

Carole: There are many new products available to assist in making life easier for people of all ages and physical abilities, such as foot pedals to turn water on and off, sinks that can be raised or lowered with the flip of a switch and cabinet design that allows for wheelchair accessibility.

In multi-generational fam-

ilies (as well as disabled situations) design features can include incorporating different height countertops to make work areas comfortable so all family members can be involved in meal preparation.

What training have you received?

Carole: A Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist is trained in the unique needs of the older adult population, aging-in-place home modifications, common remodeling projects and solutions to common barriers.

We have been taught the strategies and techniques for designing and building esthetically enriching, barrier-free living environments. The CAPS program goes beyond design to address the codes and standards, common remodeling expenditures and projects, product ideas and resources needed

to provide comprehensive and practical aging-in-place solutions.

When you hire a CAPS, you are buying a service rather than a product. Each CAPS professional draws from a different knowledge base and will approach a project in a different way. No matter where you start in the process, you will eventually need to hire a professional remodeler to actually make the modifications to your home.

I have developed relationships with a mortgage company and a bank for remodeling loans, especially for a homeowner who is faced with an unplanned remodeling project because of an accident that caused a disability for themselves or a family member. I can help them put together a complete package of design, project financing

and contractor.

As a member of the Charlotte-DeSoto Building Industry Association (formerly CBCA), I have served on its Board of Directors for the past five years, completing two terms on the Executive Committee and have chaired many of their committees. I also am a member of the Board of Directors of the Arts & Humanities Council of Charlotte County and am a past president of the American Business Woman's Association Peace River Charter Chapter.

Consultations are by appointment only. Charges for services depend on the scope of each individual job. For more information, call 941-629-4100 (office) or 941-276-2195 (cell) or e-mail at design-solutions@earthlink.net.