Aging in Place

Staying Home, Staying Connected: A Collaborative Approach to Aging in Place

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Freestone

FOR MANY PEOPLE, the idea of "aging in place" sounds simple—stay in the home you love, surrounded by what's familiar. But in practice, it takes far more than intention. It requires thoughtful planning, the right expertise, and a network of support working together behind the scenes.

In Lake Oswego, three women—each approaching the work from a different angle—are helping make that possible. Through home design, skilled craftsmanship, and long-term planning, they're helping homeowners rethink what it means to grow older at home.

At Mountainwood Homes, the design-build team addresses these concerns from the start, ensuring the layout and design selections thoughtfully support how homeowners want to live both now and in the future. At Freestone Senior Connect, guidance begins with helping older adults and their families navigate the often-overwhelming decisions that come with aging, connecting them to trusted resources and creating plans that support long-term independence. Meanwhile, Ace Handyman Services focuses on the practical side of daily living, helping homeowners make thoughtful modifications and repairs that improve safety, accessibility, and ease within the home—from installing grab bars and mounted shower seats to replacing round doorknobs with lever-style handles, widening doorways, and repairing handrails.

At its core, aging in place isn't about reacting to a moment of need. It's about anticipating it.

"When most people say they want to 'age in place,' what they're really saying is, 'I want to stay in my home, on my terms, for as long as I can,'" says Darby Sargent, Director of Design at Mountainwood Homes. "Day-to-day, it's not dramatic—it's the small things. Being able to move through your home without thinking twice… When it's done right, it just feels like a home that works really well."

That idea—removing friction before it becomes a problem—runs through each of these organizations.

For Erin Wagner of Freestone Senior Connect, aging in place starts with a shift in mindset. "It's about moving from a home that 'works for now' to one that is functionally prepared for the future," she explains. "If you are altering your lifestyle to fit the house, the house needs to be altered to fit you."

It's a distinction many families don't consider until something forces the conversation.

"The biggest misconception is that aging in place is automatically cheaper or easier," Wagner says. Without the right modifications, a home can become a hazard—limiting mobility and increasing the risk of falls. Waiting for a crisis often makes the process more stressful and more expensive.

That's where trusted execution becomes critical.

Melissa Boatwright of Ace Handyman Services sees that gap firsthand. "People aren't always struggling with the idea," she says. "They're struggling with how to actually do it—and who to trust to do it well."

Her team often steps in to address the small, daily barriers that can make a home harder to navigate over time. Many of those barriers aren't obvious at first.

"Sometimes the early signs aren't about the person—they're about the home itself aging," Boatwright explains. A loose handrail, a doorknob that's harder to turn, a door that takes more strength to open—small changes that gradually affect how someone moves through their space.

Across all three perspectives, one theme comes up again and again: the earliest signals are subtle.

People begin avoiding certain parts of the house. They hesitate before stepping into the shower. They reach for furniture for support without fully realizing it. None of it feels urgent—until it is.

That's why planning ahead matters.

"The best time to think about it is before you need it," Sargent says.

For families looking to get ahead of the curve, the advice is surprisingly consistent. Start with the layout. Can daily life happen on one level if it needs to? Look closely at the bathroom, where many falls and injuries occur. And think about flexibility—what changes could be made now that would make future updates easier?

"As we talk with Lake Oswego homeowners, many tell us they would rather invest in improving the home they already love than start over somewhere new," says Alicia DeCosta, Director of Marketing at Mountainwood Homes. "They've been in their homes for years, and remodeling allows the home to evolve with them. They love their neighborhood, their routines, and the life they've built there. Plus, with current mortgage rates and limited housing inventory, many homeowners realize they can create the home they want by renovating the one they already have."

Wagner points to what she calls the "gold standard" of access: a no-step entry and a full living suite on the main floor. Boatwright emphasizes bringing in a trained professional to assess the home with fresh eyes. Together, those steps create a roadmap—one that can be approached gradually, rather than all at once.

And while large-scale updates like elevators or ADUs can be part of the conversation, much of the impact comes from simpler changes.

"Grab bars are the number one thing I would recommend," Boatwright says. They're often overlooked, installed too late, or dismissed for aesthetic reasons. But that's changing. Today's options blend seamlessly into a home, offering both safety and design continuity.

Lighting is another common thread. Brighter, more even light in hallways and bathrooms can prevent the kinds of falls that lead to bigger changes. Lever-style door handles, non-slip surfaces, and clear pathways all contribute to a home that feels easier to move through—without calling attention to why.

Taken together, these changes aren't about limitations. They're about extending independence and autonomy.

Wagner recalls a family who chose to make updates before they were strictly necessary—a ramp, a curbless shower, thoughtful adjustments that fit naturally into the home. When an unexpected surgery came later, everything was already in place.

"They never had to face the stress of a temporary facility stay," she says. "Home modification is an insurance policy for your independence."

Sargent has seen the same pattern. Families who plan ahead are able to focus on what matters when something changes. Those who wait often find themselves making fast decisions under pressure.

But even the most thoughtfully designed home is only part of the equation.

Aging in place also depends on what exists beyond the front door—access to care, opportunities for movement, and, just as importantly, connection.

"It requires a robust system that supports the whole person," Boatwright says. That includes home health care, nutrition, and ways to stay engaged with the community. "Isolation is one of the greatest risks of aging, and a community that takes aging in place seriously addresses that head on."

Lake Oswego, she notes, is uniquely positioned to do just that, with strong volunteer networks, accessible recreation spaces, and a culture that values connection.

Sargent echoes that perspective. A home can be beautifully designed, she says, but if someone feels isolated, it isn't fully supporting them. "Being able to get out for a walk, run errands, or see familiar faces matters more than people realize."

In the end, aging in place isn't a single decision. It's a series of thoughtful choices—about how a home functions, who you trust to help shape it, and how a community shows up around it.

What ties all of this together is trust. Each of these women brings a different layer of expertise—design, execution, long-term planning—but their work overlaps in meaningful ways. They're helping families think ahead, ask better questions, and make decisions that support not just safety, but quality of life. For those beginning to consider what the next decade—or even the next year—might look like at home, reaching out to professionals like these can turn a vague idea into a clear, manageable plan. And in many cases, that planning is what makes it possible to stay right where you are with confidence.

Or, as Wagner puts it, it's about looking ahead with clarity: "Audit your environment through the lens of your future self. If you make your home a partner in your health rather than an obstacle, you get to stay the captain of your own ship much longer."

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