

Adapted apartments bring hope to seniors

BY SHARON McCULLY

Helen Powers got a new lease on life at age 70 when she was handed the keys to her own apartment, tailored to her needs.

"My life started at 70," Powers said, from the immaculately maintained apartment she has called home since June 26, 2004. "For the first time in my life, I can cook on my own, do whatever I want, when I want and everything in here is mine – all mine."

Powers said her doctors have told her the transition to independent living in an adapted apartment has resulted in a marked improvement in her physical and mental health.

It's the kind of result the Association for the promotion of rights of handicapped people in the MRC Memphremagog (Han-Droits) was hoping for when it launched a campaign to construct affordable adapted housing units four years ago.

In what has to be one of the shortest turnaround times from conception to realization, the association succeeded in raising a record-breaking \$4 million in less than five years from local donors, corporate sponsors and government grants. Within two years, seniors and handicapped people with a range of special needs occupied 15 apartments in one building and 16 in another. Not only were they built and occupied in record time, the construction came in four per cent under budget.

Units are universally adapted to meet 55 special needs and each apart-



Helen Powers not only got a new lease on life for herself, she is improving the quality of life of her neighbours with her sunny disposition and great cooking.

ment is tailored to the specific requirements of the resident.

SPECIAL FEATURES

Each apartment features wider doorframes, sliding cupboards, electrical outlets and light switches at seat level within easy reach of those in wheelchairs, or seniors who have difficulty reaching and bending. Cupboards and kitchen appliances are easily accessible from a seating posi-



Until recently, George and Evelyn Brier lived in their own home. But after each suffered a stroke, they needed housing adapted to their needs.

tion and cooking controls on the stove are on the side, instead of the back for easier access. Windows are lower to allow those in wheelchairs, or who spend a lot of time sitting, to see outside. Each bathroom has a concealed layer of plywood so that railings and aids can be installed, and there is ample room throughout each unit for wheelchairs to turn.

Powers' apartment has several unique features that respond to her

hearing impairment. When the telephone, doorbell or smoke alarm rings, a flashing light alerts her. In the event she is sleeping and neither hears the alarm nor sees the light, her bed is programmed to vibrate.

Association president Melvyn Bryant and project manager Paul Champagne have taken a hands-on approach to the construction and