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#### News

## Disabled benefit from Chelsea apartment's 'universal design'

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A state-of-the-art Chelsea apartment specially designed to serve residents with both visual impairments and developmental disabilities was unveiled on W. 23rd St. on Wed., Feb. 3.

The four-bedroom residence, located inside the Selis Manor blind-services center between Sixth and Seventh Aves., was recently renovated to provide easier access and maneuverability for the seven tenants living there. Funding for the apartment, which has been leased and operated by the Catholic Guardian Society and Home Bureau since 1992, was made possible through a \$150,000 grant from the Lavelle Fund for the Blind.

The apartment features a wheelchair-accessible kitchen and bathrooms, easy-open closets and doors, and new lighting and flooring. The project was conceived of using the principles of an Upstate college's "universal design" architecture program that seeks to create environments accessible to the disabled and non-disabled alike.



Tim Carey (at center, in background), assistant executive director of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Services for the Catholic Guardian Society and Home Bureau, details the work that went into renovating the W. 23rd St. apartment. (Photo by Patrick Hedlund)

A team from SUNY Buffalo, led by "universal design" pioneer and architectural school chairperson Prof. Edward Steinfeld, made recommendations for the renovations as well evaluating and verifying the outcome of the project.

"The mentality is, with the proper support, there's really nothing they can't do," said Tim Carey, the Society's assistant executive director of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Services, of the apartment redesign.

Among the apartment's residents are two sisters—both visually impaired and developmentally disabled—who were recently reunited through the efforts of the Society after being separated for decades following their discharge from the former Willowbrook State School on Staten Island.

The renovations took place during the day, while the residents were away at day programs, and required the cooperation of many parties to successfully finish the job.

"I am amazed at the dedication these people have to help the unfortunate," said Vincent Aliperti of GVA, LLC, the project's contractor, who worked closely with the university to design the apartment.

"It's hard work," he added, "but it's worth it."

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