

Peter Marks is an 83 year old Alaska Native living in his own home. His goal is to continue living independently as long as possible.

The home was originally built by his father and sits within a pod of Marks' family homes off of North Douglas Highway. Like all structures in Juneau, time and weather have taken a toll.

THRHA (Elder Home Weatherization program) had been providing some repairs, focusing on the roof leaks, bathroom issues, and stairs from the secondary exit.

After exhausting their resources, Peter was referred to SAIL by the THRHA representative. She was particularly concerned as he had recently fallen on the muddy path leading to his house, become trapped within the dense overgrowth of salmon-berry bushes and was not discovered for several hours. Could we help, she wondered?

A visit to his home revealed a friendly elder with a beatific smile and impish chuckle. He was proud of his home and clearly took thoughtful efforts organizing his belongings and meaningful collections of art and mementos. He remains quite independent in his ADL's and receives some support, when needed, from his niece and neighboring sister.

His primary challenges are related to his hearing loss and inconsistent balance. (Of note, "primary challenges" are my words. He never describes his life in terms of challenges. For Peter, all is good, as is, and suggestions for improvements are greeted with a novel enthusiasm.)

From an independent living stand point, safety was an issue due to lack of CO monitors & smoke detectors and lack of safe accessible egress out the home. As Peter has a significant hearing loss, we discussed options for alternative doorbells, monitors, and phones including flashing, vibrating, and amplified types.

Following a HomeMAP, he applied for a RurALCAP home modification grant. A number of possible intervention options were suggested. Peter's priorities were the entry ramp and a pocket talker.



Original Path to Peter's Home:
Deck rotting, path slick & overgrown



Original Entry Access:
Deck rotting & unstable.



Suggested Intervention:
Bridged ramp concept

Zoom view:
Access Steps to
secondary side
entry.



Peter Marks, December 2016

“The first time I walked on it, it was like walking on air.”

On a follow-up visit to help Peter set up his CapTel phone, I had the opportunity to talk with him about his home modifications.

Me: “Our board of directors like to hear about what we are doing and how our work improves your independence. Would you be willing to share a quote about your new ramp?”

(Me- poised with pen ready to document, word for word, Peter’s soliloquy.)



Peter: (beatific smile) “The first time I walked on it, it was like walking on air”.

(Me- waiting, with head down to capture every detail as Peter continues to wax poetic.)

.....awkward silence.....

Me: “Ummm, could you say how it has improved your independence?”

(If we were in court, this is the part where someone would say- ‘Objection, leading question’.)

Peter: (still smiling- like, what else is there to say?! It doesn’t get much better than walking on air!)

OK, I concede to what is:

1. His smile speaks volumes.
2. The fact that he does not view his life in terms of challenges is quite beautiful & inspiring.

When I think about the visit as a whole, I do note some additional hidden jewels buried in our chit chat.

First, when I’d asked how he was managing to get around in our recent snow deluge, he shared that his grandsons had been coming to his home to shovel the new ramp. *(Peter sits up tall and flashes a HUGE smile).* Though not directly stated as an improvement to his life, in this context, the ramp has been a conduit for greater contact with his grandsons.

Second, while talking about the thick salmon-berry bushes lining the ramp, we’d joked about how he could now reach the berries way up high from the safety and security of the ramp while the bears were free to forage the berries below the ramp.

(Peter chuckles impishly- Though I’ve got to say, that really does sounds like a plus to me!)

* Note: This story is marked by a successful & thoughtful collaboration between the consumer, SAIL, THRHA, RurAL CAP, & ATLA.

COMPLETED RAMP

The completed ramp and side access stairs are illustrated on the right.

On this site visit, it was noted that the ramp was missing edge guards. This oversight has been corrected.

Work was completed in November 2016



Peter on His New Entry Ramp/Bridge:
"The first time I walked on it,
it was like walking on air."