

A SHIFT IN HOUSING:

extended family living

By Dennis Allen

A significant shift in housing and lifestyle has been occurring in America over the past 35 years—namely, the growth in multigenerational housing. In fact, 1 in 6 Americans now live in such households. This means a record 57 million Americans, or 18.1% of the population, lived in multigenerational family housing in 2012. That's double the number who lived in such households in 1980, according to the Pew Research Center based on US Census Bureau data.

After three decades of steady but measured growth, the arrangement of having multiple generations under one roof spiked during the recent recession (2007-2009) and has kept growing in the post-recession period, albeit at a slower pace.

Multigenerational housing is defined as three or four generations of the same family living under the same roof or parents with the adult children 25 years of age or older living together. Historically, the nation's oldest Americans have been the age group most likely to live in multigenerational households. In recent years, however, young adults (ages 25-34) have surpassed older adults in this regard. Almost 1 in 4 (23.6%) are living with their parents, up from just over 1 in 10 (11%) in 1980.



As mentioned, the recent economic downturn drove different generations to come together in greater numbers, whether prompted by a lost job, a house foreclosed, expensive or unsatisfactory elder housing, or a sinking pension. While the reasons these families came together are mostly behind them, they are now staying together by choice. The benefits can be great -- financial, practical or emotional. It can be an advantageous investment for all parties. Household expenses can be shared and there is often free child care. It's hard to find someone



you trust more than your parents that you feel comfortable leaving your children with.

Our construction company has built a number of these multigenerational dwellings through the years.

The national conversation bears out what we have found to be our clients' preferences: a self-contained, apartment-like living area with bedroom, full bath, kitchenette and a separate entrance.

California's recent legislation requiring local communities to ease requirements for granny units (technically called ADUs or Accessory Dwelling Units) is accelerating





this trend. Many local building departments are experiencing a deluge of permit applications for ADUs.

A unit, whether attached or detached, allows independence and privacy while still letting family members be near. Another bonus is that this versatile arrangement has good resale value. Other possible uses might be as a home office, a rental unit or guest quarters.

These homes are now scattered in every community across the country and may soon become the dominant housing form in many neighborhoods that once were bastions of the classic nuclear family home.

Dennis Allen is the founder of Allen Construction and has a passion for building energy efficient and sustainable homes. His commentaries on sustainable solutions to environmental and social problems have been published locally, regionally and nationally. For more information, visit BuildAllen.com..

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