

THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL

Providence, RI

Morning Circulation - 167,609
Daily

SEPTEMBER 1, 2004



Bacon's

Computerized homes may help elderly stay put

SCRIPPS HOWARD NEWS SERVICE

For older adults, living alone in their own home gives them a feeling of independence, comfort, and control over events in their lives. This satisfaction can only be approximated by other living arrangements.

HOME

Unfortunately, many seniors have physical and mental conditions that

make living alone in their own homes difficult, if not impossible. This may be the case even when they are functioning well enough to perform many of the activities of daily living.

Now, several universities are developing computerized systems to help elders "age in place." For example, Dr. Wendy A. Rogers and her associates at Georgia Institute of Technology are developing a computerized technology for home use that will enhance the elderly's chances of remaining in their own homes. Development is in a fairly early stage, and its availability is probably several years away.

The developers at Georgia Tech are working on two different computerized systems. The first consists of a Digital Family Portrait that is an in-home monitoring system informing family members living elsewhere about their relative's activities, health status, and possible problems. The system creates a visualization from sensor information of the

older person's day.

A number of older adults have visited the developer's houselike laboratory and viewed the prototype of the system. In general, they are positive about the system, and they have no objection to viewing a record of their movements through the house as long as it is by a relative and not by a stranger.

The second system records recent actions of the older resident, which can then serve as a substitute for memory when it fails (as it often does). For example, suppose an older adult is cooking a fairly complex meal that has a number of ingredients when a telephone call interrupts the cooking. After the phone conversation, the older adult fails to remember if a certain ingredient had been added. Playing the recording would give the needed information. Similar systems could be developed to support other activities, such as remembering to take medications.

Will it be expensive to computerize an elder's home? The developers at Georgia Tech estimate that it will not. The price of technical equipment is decreasing rapidly, installation will require virtually no structural changes to the house, and maintenance costs will be low. Computerized homes offer a promising future for elders wanting to remain in their homes.