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GLOBAL UNIVERSAL DESIGN COMMISSION, INC. (GUDC) Creating Voluntary Universal Design Standards

Description:

The Global Universal Design Commission, Inc. (GUDC) is a not-for-profit corporation established with broad bipartisan support from across the country and with the involvement of the design, development, disability, and aging communities. The Commission's purpose is to develop, promote, and accelerate the understanding and use of Universal Design in the design and development of buildings, products, and environments worldwide.

Recognizing the need to take Universal Design (UD) to the next level, Josh Heintz and his law partner, William Gilberti, of Gilberti Stinziano Heintz & Smith, P.C., agreed to fund the initial formation of the GUDC. Heintz and Gilberti collaborated with Peter Blanck, Chairman of the Burton Blatt Institute, in organizing and leading several meetings to conceptualize the GUDC and bring together experts and stakeholders to collaborate with the new Commission. The GUDC's first effort is to create voluntary consensus standards to guide designers, developers, lenders, governments, and end users to understand and apply UD Standards and certify their efforts.

GUDC is currently in the process of developing UD Standards for both new and existing commercial buildings. Modeled after the very successful Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards produced by the U. S. Green Building Council, the UD Standards are intended to complement existing accessibility standards by identifying and encouraging the incorporation of features that increase usability, safety, and health for a diverse end-user population. The standards will expand access to buildings for all people, regardless of physical stature and varying abilities.

The development and approval process for creating UD Standards will include public comment and review. The approved UD standards will be available on the GUDC website to guide corporations and government entities in the creation of barrier-free facilities, providing diverse users with better access to and convenience in commerce, public services, entertainment, and employment settings. Once the standards for commercial buildings are completed, additional standards will be drafted for other components of the built environment, including housing, products, schools, etc.

A numerical rating system will be developed based on the goals of Universal Design. Depending on the type and number of Universal Design strategies

included, a project will receive a point total and be given a level of accreditation based on that total.

Benefits:

Because Universal Design seeks to make environments, products and systems safer, healthier, and more usable, adopting UD Standards has many benefits for a diverse population:

- UD increases functional independence and opportunities for social participation for the growing number of older people and people with disabilities:
 - 650 million people are living with disabilities worldwide;
 - Over 18 per cent of the U.S. population have some limitation in ability;
 - More than 40 per cent of the U.S. population over 65 years old have diminished abilities;
 - The aging of the Baby Boom generation and the obesity epidemic will increase the prevalence of disability; and
 - The population aged 65 and over will grow from about 20 million in 1994 to almost 40 million by the year 2010 and to an estimated 71 million in 2030.
- UD expands markets beyond disability and aging to include people of extreme stature, left-handed individuals, international travelers, people with chemical sensitivity and severe allergies, parents with children, and caregivers.
- UD provides a business advantage to organizations:
 - Increases a consumer base and customer loyalty;
 - Reduces operating and renovation costs;
 - Increases productivity;
 - Expands the labor pool by making the work environment useable by greater numbers of people.

Impediments or barriers to development or implementation:

- The development of the UD Standards will follow an “ANSI-Approved Process,” which is both democratic and public, for developing the standards. Because this method includes maintaining balance in committee membership, public review and comment, and documenting responses to all negative ballots and comments, it requires a great deal of time and effort.
- Another potential barrier to the UD Standards is the eventual rate of implementation. As a voluntary standard, there is no guarantee that builders, businesses, or government agencies will adopt the UD Standards developed by GUDC. Nevertheless, GUDC has begun to gain international support for its Standards Development efforts. Potential early adopters of the GUDC standards include: the London 2012 Organising Committee; the government of Ecuador; and the Paralympics Committee, which is planning the design of facilities for the 2014 Winter Games in Russia.

Resource—example:

- A potential early adopter of the UD Standards for commercial buildings in New York State includes Kirkwood Senior Housing Development in Binghamton, New York (owned by 3D Development Group, LLC), which is in the planning stages of a Phase II development to expand its facilities. Lauer-Manguso & Associates Architects and the Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access are collaborating on this project and incorporating the draft UD Standards in their plans. Construction is scheduled to begin in spring 2009.

Resource—written and web:

- Global Universal Design Commission, Inc. (GUDC)—a not-for-profit corporation whose mission is to increase understanding and use of universal design (UD) and to accelerate adoption of UD concepts for the range of human performance and preferences in order to provide ease of use without disadvantage to any group or individuals. P.O. Box 6801, Syracuse, New York, 13217; (315) 442-0139; info@globaluniversaldesign.org; <http://www.globaluniversaldesign.com>.
- Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access (IDeA)—located at the University at Buffalo, the Center practices human-centered design through research, development, service, dissemination, and educational activities, with a primary goal of producing knowledge and tools that will increase social participation by groups (such as individuals with disabilities and older adults) who have been marginalized by traditional design practices. 378 Hayes Hall, School of Architecture and Planning, University at Buffalo, 3435 Main Street, Buffalo, New York, 14214; (716) 829-3485, Ext. 329; TTY: (716) 829-3758; idea@ap.buffalo.edu; <http://www.ap.buffalo.edu/idea/>.
- Burton Blatt Institute (BBI)—located at Syracuse University, the Institute's international focus is on research, education, training, technical assistance, and outreach to achieve its mission, which is to advance the civic, economic, and social participation of persons with disabilities by creating a collaborative environment and transforming policy, systems, and people through inclusive education, workforce, and communities. World Headquarters, Suite 300, Crouse-Hinds Hall, Syracuse University, 900 S. Crouse Avenue, Syracuse, New York, 13244; (315) 443-2863; Peter Blanck: pblanck@syr.edu; <http://bbi.syr.edu>.

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