

Home, sweet home

Blind man settles into independent living with the help of Community Options

By CATHY VIKSJO
Staff Writer

ROBBINSVILLE — A padded Braille button on the microwave holds the key to independent living for Bernard Krakosky, a 41-year-old receptionist for the Division of Developmental Disabilities at 50 E. State St.

"I'm not that good at using the stove, so I use the microwave," said Krakosky, who has been legally blind since birth.

"This is the button that starts it. I can see it. I heat my water for coffee, and right here is where I put my cup for my coffee or tea, my frozen breakfast and my frozen dinners" he said.

Krakosky knows just how to operate all the electrical appliances and gadgets in his new condominium where he was interviewed earlier this week. After living in institutions for 30 years, he is really happy to call the two-bedroom condo his very own home sweet home.

He recently closed on the purchase of his Foxmoor condominium at

the law offices of Katz & Dougherty in Princeton. Krakosky had saved \$24,000 over the past four years to accomplish this goal.

THE FIRST-TIME homeowner was guided and supported in his quest for independent living by Community Options — a nonprofit organization headquartered in Bordentown which provides support to persons with disabilities and their families through the development of living, working and recreational options.

Since 1989, Community Options has provided community-based employment and housing support to individuals with developmental disabilities.

"Bernard is the first person to buy his own place in the Community Options program," said Executive Director Karl Pfister. "He paid for all of the closing costs — the process, legal fees and title search himself," Pfister noted.

"As far as that part of his life is concerned, he is in complete control of his living arrangements. Right now we work with 55 people in Mercer and Burlington counties. Bernard is the first to own his own home. The other 54 people whom we support live in a variety of housing arrangements, such as single-family homes, townhouses, condominiums and apartments. Our vision is to support those 54 in owning their

dog, but he does use a cane when he's going to be in unfamiliar environments. His skills are phenomenal."

COMMUNITY OPTIONS Program Manager Darren Garansi helped Krakosky select the appliances best suited for his needs.

"When I work with Bernard" on choosing the right appliance, explained Garansi, "we go through all of them and Bernard feels the controls until he finds one where it's the most tactile

"Even for us, our remote (control) is set-up in such a way that you can use it in the dark without looking at the buttons. It's kind of like a grid. We all know up and down, and left and right. In today's day and age, with all the ergonomics of electronics, we don't need to have Braille," Garansi said.

Born in Passaic, Krakosky learned Braille at the Maryland School for the Blind in Baltimore. He also attended the Matheny School in North Jersey and then the Jobastone Training and Research Center in Bordentown, where he was introduced to the staff at Community Options.

Sticking to a budget along with a simple passbook savings account made Krakosky's dream

come true.

"He tends to be a pretty frugal guy," said Pfister.

Added Garansi, "We educated Bernard in the beginning about saving and opening a simple passbook savings account. And we worked with him on budgets and learning how to spend money responsibly, with looking to the future."

But Krakosky already had a good background in the prudent management of his income.

"It was no problem to work with Bernard. He grew up learning the values of saving money and working hard — the basic all-American values that make up the American Dream. Bernard was taught really well as a child so he already . . . knew how to be responsible with his money," said Garansi.

Community Options supports 500 individuals in nine states.



Staff photo by Jane Therese

On moving day last week, Bernard Krakosky, left, gets help carrying a box of his belongings into his new condominium at Foxmoor in Robbinsville from his friend Darren Garansi.

homes as well," Pfister said.

Krakosky said he feels great about having his own place.

"I love it. I like being on my own and being independent," he said.

Figuring out where to put the furniture is all part of the fun.

"One bedroom I could make into a den and put my TV in there and my exercise equipment, my entertainment center and my stereo," he said.

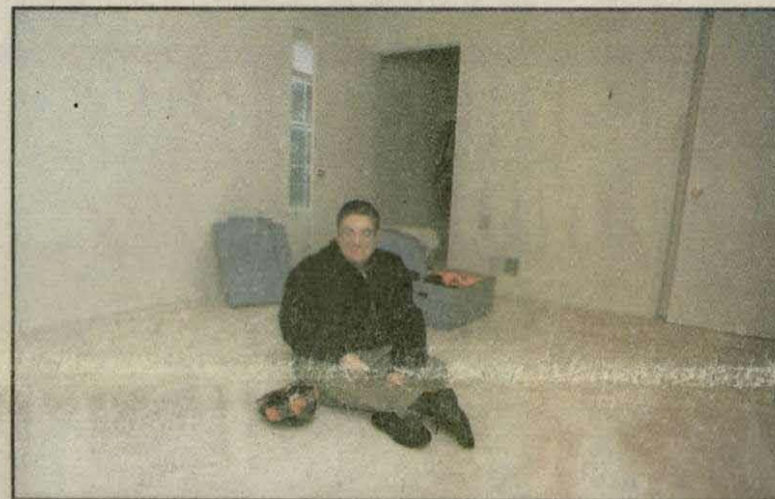
Krakosky, who has his own washer and dryer, is able to manipulate all the necessary dials, knobs and related gizmo's in order to turn his appliances on and off.

"He very much knows how to use the telephone," said Pfister. "He's very good at what's called orientation and mobility. Even though he has a visual impairment, he's very able to acclimate himself to environments. Right now, he chose not to use a Seeing Eye



Staff photo by Michael Mancuso

Bernard Krakosky sits in the office of his attorney Thomas Tresansky Jr., standing in rear, after he closed on his new home in Robbinsville in late October. Krakosky, who is blind, has spent most of his life in the Johnstone Residential Facility in Bordentown and will now live on his own for the first time.



Bernard Krakosky sits in the middle of his newly purchased condominium in Robbinsville. He says that figuring out where to put the furniture is all part of the fun.

Staff photo by Jane Therese