

Home improvement

Suite new home

New home built on longtime family property includes a space specially designed for grandmother

By LOUISE RONALD

The Graphic Printing Company

Frances Weesner just turned 86 years old and has lived on the same county road southeast of Portland her whole life.

"I really have roots here," she said.

Weesner grew up on the road, of course. When she married, she and her husband moved next door, to a farmhouse she called home for some 60 years. They raised three children and farmed the land. The children grew up. Weesner's husband passed away. The house had more rooms than she needed and was in need of some major repairs.

In August, Weesner moved next door again, this time into a brand new house.

Her new home occupies one corner of the home of Aaron and Katie Daniels and their children Emerson, 3, and Porter, 10 months.

Katie Daniels is Weesner's granddaughter.

Katie grew up on land that borders the Weesners' farm but on a different road, right around the corner. Aaron grew up nearby as well.

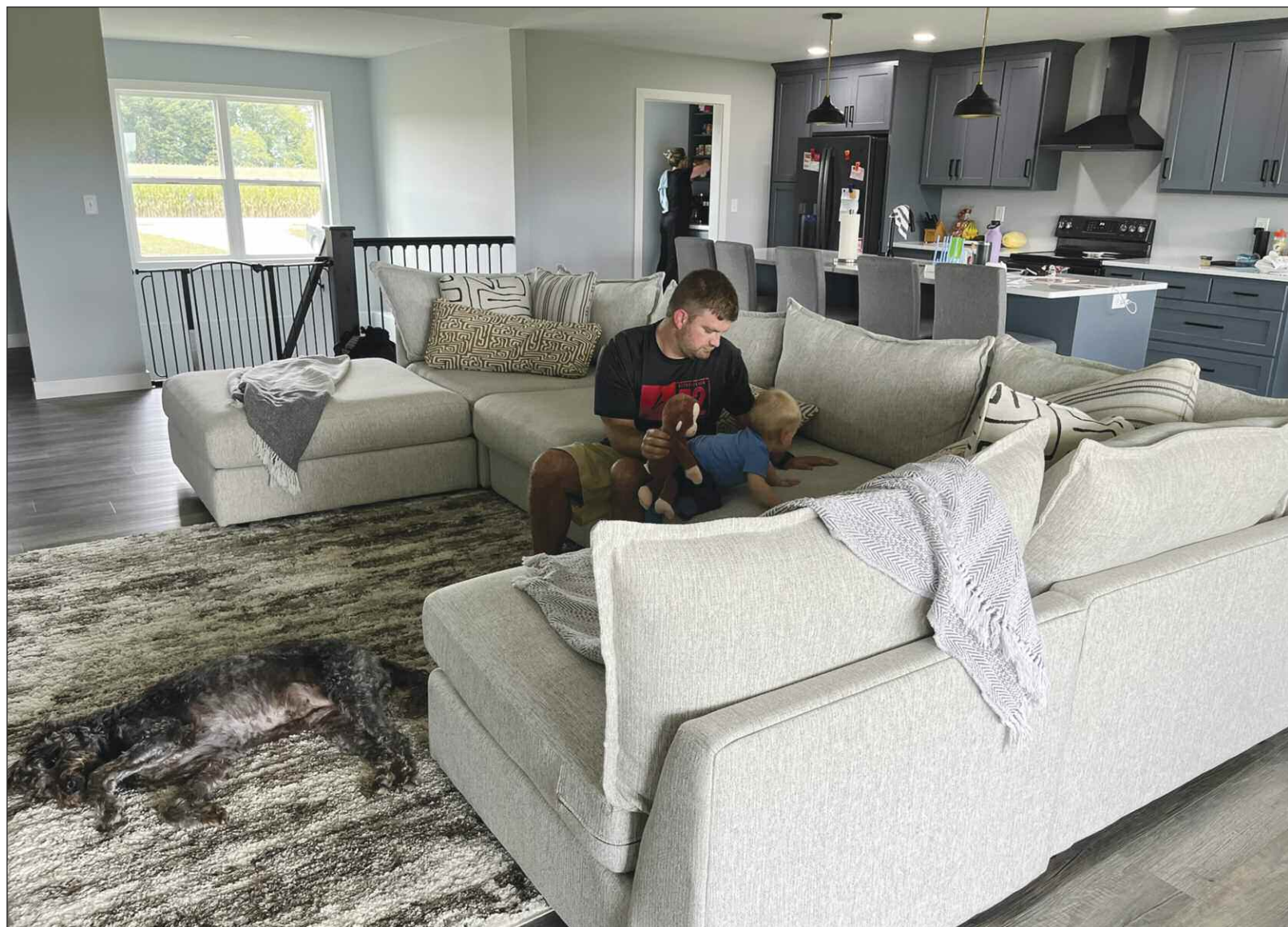
The couple bought a house with land that was east of Portland, but didn't feel settled there.

"We just kind of knew that wasn't our forever home," Katie said.

So when the housing market heated up in 2022, they decided to take advantage of it.

"We sold with almost no plan," Katie admitted.

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The Graphic Printing Company/Louise Ronald

Aaron Daniels plays with his son Porter as his wife Katie works in the pantry and son Palmer relaxes on the rug. "I love the open concept," Aaron said. The Daniels family built a new home in rural Portland this year with a "mother-in-law suite" for Katie's grandmother Frances Weesner.

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Christy Robbins handled the work on installing a new enclosed porch on the Portland home she shares with her father Larry. "I'm not able to physically do anything," explained Larry. "If she's working on something, I'll just make sure I'm out there watching her."



The Graphic Printing Company/Bailey Cline

Father, daughter collaborated on building new enclosed porch

By BAILEY CLINE

The Graphic Printing Company Larry Robbins has always been handy.

His daughter, Christy Robbins, takes after him.

The father-daughter duo recently installed a new porch exterior on their home along Pierce Street in Portland.

"Dad always wanted an

enclosed porch with windows on it," explained Christy.

Years ago, Larry installed white posts and a roof in front of the door

and wrapped screen around the space.

Another doorway outside their home had been redone with pine wood a few years back. They utilized the extra wood for their project this summer, upgrading the porch to a full wooden enclosure with screens. The project took about a week of work, but between Christy's three jobs and duties with her family, she spaced it out over the summer.

Because of Larry's condition, atrial fibrillation, he gave his daughter advice and supervised while she put in the manual labor.

"I'm not able to physically do anything," explained Larry. "If she's working on something, I'll just make sure I'm out there watching her."

Christy noted it took a few tries to get the porch just right.

See Porch page 6

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Top yard

Randolph County Garden Club selected two homes, including the Faddis home at 1555 S. 300 West, Winchester, for yard appeal this month. Pictured is Kruz Faddis in front of the house he shares with his parents Paul and Jennifer.



Photo provided

Suite ...

Continued from page 1
They moved in with her parents, Jeff and Nancy Snyder, and started thinking.

It didn't take them long to develop a plan. They talked to Ohio contractor Russ Sudhoff, a friend of Aaron's. Sudhoff urged them to make a quick decision. He had time in his schedule to build them a house if they acted immediately.

Katie said she and Aaron looked at each other and decided: "We have to do this right now."

They looked at one of Sudhoff's new builds and liked the floor plan. They made a few tweaks and one big change.

They added a mother-in-law suite to one corner.

In this case, it's not for a mother-in-law, but a grandmother.

"She's getting older and need-

ed something smaller and more accessible," Katie said.

The family had been talking about where Weesner should live. It occurred to the couple that space for her could be added to their floor plan. Again, they looked at one another and decided: "We can do this."

And what better place to build than on the Weesner land? (It is now farmed and being purchased on contract by Katie's father.)

Ground was broken in October 2022. By Christmas, the framing was done and the house winterized. Interior work was completed during the spring and the Daniels family moved in July. Weesner joined them in early August.

Her old farmhouse is visible through the window in her new kitchen.

Weesner said she goes over there almost every day, picking up something she's decided she needs or dropping off something she's decided she doesn't need, after all.

The farmhouse had seven or eight rooms, Weesner said. Her new place has three: kitchen, bathroom and a sitting room with a recliner, desk, dresser and a love seat that folds out into a comfortable bed, which is kept open most of the time.

"It was smaller than I anticipated," said Weesner, "but it's OK."

During the earlier deliberations about where she should live, Weesner had looked at assisted living facilities with similar space. Her suite in the Daniels' home, however, has a full kitchen, something she really wanted.

She eats out much of the time, including a daily breakfast with friends in Portland. The full kitchen is more for baking, especially cookies. She also has space to sew, her other favorite hobby. And she has managed to entertain friends in her sitting room.

"They like it," she said. Weesner speaks fondly of the farmhouse.

"It was a happy home," she said.

But it was built in the 1890s and showing its age.

"It looked nice on the outside," she said, "but inside, it was not good."

The plan is to tear the old house down at some point. Weesner understands that. Even so, she will arrange to be out of town when that happens. She doesn't want to watch her home of so many years disappear.

She appreciates, though, being on the familiar land. And she appreciates what Katie and Aaron created for her.

"You don't live forever in good health," said Weesner, "and I think all the plans were made with my benefit in mind."

As for the Daniels family, they are happy with their side of the house.

It's dominated by a large, open living area with a U-shaped sectional for conversations and TV viewing, a large dining room table and a kitchen complete with a 10-foot-wide island, all surrounded with plenty of breathing room.

"I love the open concept," Aaron said. "Katie can be cooking, one boy can be eating, one boy playing and we can all be in the same room."

See Suite page 7

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Christy Robbins plans to make additional improvements to the enclosed porch she added to her home, including replacing the screens with windows. As part of her project this year, she installed a new water fountain to create a waterfall look in the pond in her front yard.



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Porch ...

Continued from page 2
She scrapped the beginnings of their first try when she realized the dimensions didn't match with her vision. She also bumped into a few issues along the way. While replacing the siding with wood to match the rest of the porch, they lost electricity in half of the house. "I hit a wire. Guess where it was?" said Christy. "Clear down on the bottom one. I had to rip it all off to find it."

But after the complications, she was able to build the exterior and attach screens. Also this summer, she installed a new water fountain made to look like a waterfall in their pond in the front yard. (Their old drop-in fountain — Christy and her ex-husband set it up a few years ago for their parents — had started to leak.)

She has two young grandchildren and she worried they could fall in, so she kept the pool shallow. Christy also added some more flowers and

rocks to the display, which sits next to their new porch.

Larry, 87, is retired from Portland Police Department. About three years ago, he was diagnosed with atrial fibrillation. He had a heart attack and has had his heart restarted twice.

"I'm always saying I'll stay until I'm 90," he said. "But, as long as I keep moving, you know? There's days I wonder why. You're just as old as you feel some days."

A lifelong construction aficionado, he co-owned the former Heather Park — now Wind Rush Apartments — and a few other apartment complexes with his late wife, Nancy, for more than 20 years. Larry handled the maintenance, and Nancy served as the manager.

Christy recalled how Larry taught his daughters how to do a variety of handiwork, such as running electrical wire or installing plumbing.

"He's always had us do a little bit of everything," Christy said.

Her handiwork background has also shown in her professional life. She dreamed of being a mechanic when she was younger. Nancy worked seasonally at Sunbonnet Originals for 25 years and for Pennville Custom Cabinetry for more than a year. Through most of the summer, she has worked at Pak-a-Sak in Bryant and had two online jobs.

Christy moved back in with her father about two or three years ago to help him. A registered nurse, she can take care of Larry as needed. She also plans to remodel their house — Larry has lived there for about 23 years — in sections.

Christy plans to winterize their porch annually. She's hoping to make a few adjustments in the future, including changing out the screens for windows.

But she said she's happy with what they've accomplished.

"It took me a while, but yeah, we got 'er done," said Christy.

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The Graphic Printing Company/Louise Ronald

Frances Weesner's home of 60 years can be seen through the window in the kitchen of her new place, which was completed this year. She was ready to downsize from her full-sized house and had considered an assisted living facility, but her three-room suite at her granddaughter's new home has one of the features she was hoping for — a full kitchen.

Suite ...

Continued from page 5
Katie agreed.
"I don't have to go from one place to another to see what these guys are doing," she said, nodding at her children.

Off the kitchen is a pantry with floor-to-ceiling cupboards and a dedicated space to feed the family's dog, Palmer.

Katie especially likes the cabinets in the kitchen and pantry, which they were able to customize to meet their storage needs.

The south side of the living area leads to the boys' rooms and a full bath. On the north are the main bedroom and its bath, plus a laundry room. Everything, including Weesner's suite, is decorated in shades of tan and gray, with wood-look vinyl flooring throughout.

The only carpeted area is the stairway to a full basement. ("Easier to clean," said Katie.) The basement is full but basi-

cally unfinished, with concrete block walls and cement floors. There's an area for watching TV and playing games, an office for Aaron when he works from home, a corner with gym equipment, an area plumbed for a future half bath and, most unusual of all, a full-sized bounce house — Emerson calls it "giant" — a gift to the boys from an uncle.

The Daniels have the bounce house set up so that it can be inflated in about a minute. It has a playhouse, a slide and a ball pit, all enthusiastically demonstrated by the brothers.

It would be a busy household, even without two preschoolers. Katie teaches bio-medical science at Jay County High School and is a nurse in the surgical department at IU Health Ball Memorial Hospital in Muncie. Aaron is a representative for BSN Sports out of Fort Wayne, on the road taking care of area

schools much of the week. He also is assistant basketball coach at Jay County High School, while Katie coaches competitive gymnastics at JC Tumbling & Gymnastics north of Portland.

Not surprisingly, the two sides of the multigenerational household don't have a lot of time to spend together.

Right now, getting from one side to the other involves walking through the three-car garage and climbing some temporary steps until a ramp can be built into the in-law suite.

But all think spending time together will become easier next summer when, if all goes as planned, the lawn will be level, walkways laid and landscaping done.

And — "hopefully," cautioned Katie — a swimming pool will be added to the back yard.

Every generation is looking forward to that.

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