

Pied Piper of Safe Baths



Most people losing their mobility face long term care in assisted living facilities, but Ladimer Kowalchuk's bathroom solution for a man with Parkinson's preserves his customer's independence and dignity in the comfort of his own home. It's an answer for anyone who wants to 'age in place.'

By Bonnie Toews

When we bought our retirement home in Wilmot Creek, a patch of paradise on the shores of Lake Ontario, my husband and I were typical retirees in denial of what the future held. Wally had just been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, yet we ignored his future needs and glibly looked for a house with a one-level floor on a dreamy location. Five years later, his mobility dropped from 80% to 10%. We then discovered we were living in a house that couldn't be retrofitted for limited mobility without horrendous expense.

The only answer was to convert free space at the east end of our sun room—four feet by 10 feet—into a bathroom that would suit my husband's needs and my increasing stiffness. Our budget was limited so, at first, the task seemed daunting until we discovered Safety Bath Inc. online in Ituna, Saskatchewan.

A bathtub with a door is not a new concept, but when I shopped for one a year ago, I discovered they were in a price range only the 'rich and famous' could afford. Safety Bath Inc., however, offered a *Serenity* walk-in model with dimensions that were only 34 inches wide by 36 inches long and 30 inches high—perfect for our narrow space—and included benefits, which specifically suited us. The bonus: its price fell within our budget.



The president and CEO of Safety Bath Inc.,

Ladimer Kowalchuk, didn't start out as a bathroom designer. He was a carpenter by trade. His dad, Nicholas, was aging, and because he was a huge man over 325 lbs., getting in and out of a regular tub was becoming too difficult for him to manage. What he wanted was a tub with a door, but neither father nor son could find what they wanted.

Eventually, Ladimer decided to design his own walk-in tub and built a plywood model to fit into his father's closet. He took his model to the fiberglass company 30 miles down the highway, and they built him a prototype. His father loved it. Before long, everyone wanted a "safety bath just like that one," and in 1992, Kowalchuk founded Safety Bath Hydrotherapy Systems Inc. His original design was the 'Serenity' model we picked.

"For most people," explained Kowalchuk when I talked to him, "it's easier to get into a conventional tub than it is to get out. People want the longer bigger version, but you use more water, you wait longer for it to fill and to drain, so I recommend someone sit in a model first before they decide. My 350 lb. father was quite comfortable in the Serenity, but if a user is over six feet and 300 lbs. we usually recommend they use the 40-inch stretch version, instead of the 36-inch you have."

Another advantage to the *Serenity* or larger *Stretch* model is that it can be installed in the corner of a bedroom. "If the person is getting progressively worse and ends up in a wheelchair," Kowalchuk said, "you can put up a ceiling track from the bed over to the bath tub and carry them in a chair sling over to the tub. Or you can use the sling to lift them out of the bed into a wheel chair and roll them over to the tub. "

He recommended the corner is a good spot to place the tub because one side is open. "If you want to help someone wash their hair, you can get up beside them. It's easier on the caregiver's back as well."

Unlike imported walk-ins made of steel, the *Serenity* is made of marine-grade fiberglass and only weighs 120 lbs, while the new *So-Lo* designed to replace the standard 60-inch by 32-inch bath tub is acrylic. It too has hydrotherapeutic options with easy access door and low step to minimize hazards and accidents.

Thinking beyond the obvious has made Ladimer Kowalchuk the pied piper of bathroom solutions for all needs. He has developed a line of safer and easier-to-use walk-in tubs for people like my husband who have lost their balance and mobility, for boomers aging in place and for assisted living institutions.

"Everybody's needs are different," Kowalchuk noted. "Most people put a Safety Bath in their home so they can stay there longer."

With such flexible options introducing a realm of affordability with more possibilities to bathroom designs than ever before, word-of-mouth has spread rapidly across Canada. Today Kowalchuk is president and CEO of Safety Bath Inc., an international company with dealer networks throughout North America as well as markets in Russia and Australia. To view Safety Bath models, go to <http://www.safetybath.com>.

As for us, we gained a cozy bathroom we call our mini-spa. In fact, we didn't have to grow old to convert this small space into a bathroom sanctuary . . . now that we know better.

Benefits of Safety Bath Walk-in Tubs

The Serenity and Supreme models:

- Hold the same amount of water as a regular bathtub; larger ones may need a larger water heater because of greater capacity;
- Fill faster and drain faster than larger competitors;

- Provide hot air purges to eliminate the risk of bacteria (pseudomonas) growing;
- Fit into small spaces like a laundry room or even a closet, if necessary;
- Have a wider door that swings outward for easier entry—other walk-in tubs are designed with a narrow door that opens inward, and this could prevent you from quickly removing someone in an emergency;
- Have a low step because the tub floor is only two inches above the house floor, while most other walk-in tubs have a seven-inch step;
- Include hydro-therapy action, which is a standard feature with every Safety Bath model to help people with circulatory problems, arthritis and sore muscles;
- Weigh 120 pounds and is Canadian made from durable, marine-grade, easy-to-care-for fibreglass versus the heavier steel used in some imports;
- Accommodate the limited mobility of people using walkers—wheelchair users may need a lift device;
- Come complete with pop-up drain valve and a removable booster seat; Moen pressure-balanced, scald-guard taps, a Moen adjustable massage/flow hand-held shower head can be supplied as well.
- Are simple to install with template, easy-to-follow instructions, and demo DVD provided as well as Safety Bath's telephone support line for contractors and homeowners.