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By Sharon Jayson

Rise in multi-generational households presents a changing family picture

McHENRY, III. — Walk in the front door of Robert and Dianna Hubka's home, and smiling family photos line the entryway. Take a few steps, and framed artwork titled "We Are a Family" hangs at the foot of the stairs.

They take family pretty seriously.

Both 50, they are the parents of three and grandparents to two preschoolers. They were on the verge of empty-nesthood with their youngest son when Dianna's mother, Dorothy Drinan, moved from nearby Round Lake just over three years ago to live in their 1,991-square-foot home.

They converted the 12-by-12-foot den on the ground floor into a bedroom because Drinan, 81, can't climb the stairs. They transformed a closet that housed the furnace and water tank into a space for her clothes. They added a shower to the downstairs bath. They also brought over some of Drinan's bedroom furniture to make it feel more like her home.

"You've got to take care of your elderly. It's just something you do," says Robert Hubka, a union electrician.

Although Americans tend to take pride in independence, and living in nuclear families is the norm, new factors are driving an emerging trend of more relatives moving in together and creating multi-generational households. Among the changes are rising immigration, because people of other cultures often live with extended family, and higher housing costs that are forcing these different age groups to share quarters.

From 1990 to 2000, homes in which three or more generations live together grew more than 38%. The largest segment are those in which the householder lives with an adult child and grandchild, but about one-third of these extended family arrangements are similar to the Hubkas', in which an aging parent joins the nuclear family.

"The Waltons are us now," says Angela O'Rand, a sociologist at Duke University.

With increased longevity, four-generation families such as the Hubkas and even five-generation families are becoming more common, experts say, resulting in a changed family structure.

Vern Bengtson, a professor of gerontology at the University of Southern California-Los Angeles, started a three-generation study in 1970 with 2,000 individuals who were grandparents, parents and young-adult grandchildren. Now it's expanded to four generations and how they live. "We began to realize housing is fluid," he says of these often-temporary living arrangements.

Such multi-generational households are more common among immigrants — particularly Latinos and Asians who have a strong sense of familial obligation and tend to live in extended family households, says Marcelo Suarez-Orozco, co-director of Immigration Studies @ NYU, a center at New York University.

Yoshu Win, 64, of St. Paul and his family came to the USA from Burma in 1999. Nine live in his five-bedroom home. "We like our children to live with us," says Win, who is an interpreter. "This tradition has been passed on from generation to generation."

But that feeling is changing somewhat as immigrants become more Americanized and because they don't have the space to take in aging relatives, suggests Nestor Rodriguez, a sociologist at the University of Houston who directs its Center for Immigration Research.

The Hubkas are a more typical multi-generational household. According to a USA TODAY analysis of 2005 data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, multi-generational households tend to have bigger quarters and more income than households overall: 48% of multi-generational households had an income of \$60,000 or more, and 37% are in housing with four or more bedrooms.

The Hubkas' 22-year-old son, also Robert, works full time for a biomedical company and goes to community college. He says his grandmother doesn't interfere with his family's inner workings.

"She's really good with the fact that she doesn't jump into situations or put her two cents in when it's not really her place," he says.

Drinan says she doesn't want to alter the family routine. "They work hard. I want them to go to a movie or go out to eat or just be together."

Drinan savors her independence. She insists on paying her way at the grocery store, for instance. Because the Hubkas are gone during the day, she wears a medical pendant in case of emergency. She has her own phone line and a cellphone, and she keeps the dog company.

Says Dianna Hubka, "She needed people in her life to give her a reason to keep going."