

The New York Times

## The New Old Age

Caring and Coping

DECEMBER 30, 2010

### When Moving Seems Impossible

By **PATRICK EGAN**

Patricia Wendler had been trying to sell her Southport, N.C., home for four years. Just before Thanksgiving, she finally got an offer, with one major contingency: Mrs. Wendler, 80, had less than three weeks to move, or no deal.

She and her husband, who died in 2008, had retired to Southport 16 years ago from New Hartford, N.Y. In that time, the Wendlers had accumulated furniture that wouldn't fit in her new apartment, tools she wouldn't need and years upon years of paperwork. "I kind of stored everything," she said.

Her daughter-in-law, June Wendler, described the task of relocation as a "tornado." She called Jane Roberts, a senior move manager in Wilmington, N.C., for help.

Initially, Patricia Wendler was not thrilled. "I was a little resentful," she said. "Why would I need someone like that? I'm not used to having people do things for me."

The Wendlers are among more than 50,000 families to hire a certified senior move manager this year, up from 30,000 just two years ago, according to the National Association of Senior Move Managers. These services don't come cheap: Most move managers charge \$25 to \$60 per hour. A top-to-bottom move can require several days of planning, packing and unpacking, running \$1,500 to \$4,000 or more — not including the cost of the actual movers.

Despite the expense, many families are finding senior move managers indispensable, and not just because they handle the logistics. Tensions can spill over when an elderly parent must relocate. Hundreds of necessary decisions and actions can swallow time the family may not have; the inevitable negotiations and concessions can trouble even the best parent-child relationships.

Surveys show that the elderly overwhelmingly wish to remain in their long-term homes, and to many of them moving represents a loss of control. "These moves usually are precipitated by something that's happened — a health crisis, a death of a spouse, a loss of driving ability," said Margit Novack, a senior move manager in Philadelphia.

A good move manager helps to clear a path to the new home while ensuring that the senior is always in control, regardless of who made the first call. "These people don't want anyone telling them what to do. You have to walk a very fine line," said Ms. Roberts. "We become their surrogate friend or surrogate daughter," added Judy Rough, a senior move manager in Phoenix.

By taking the adult children out of the driver's seat, a manager can help circumvent family hostilities. "It really lets the adult child be their companion in the journey. The adult child isn't the bad cop," said Mary Kay Buisse, executive director of [N.A.S.M.M.](#) "It really lets the family be the family."

In Southport last month, Ms. Roberts helped Mrs. Wendler sort through what to keep and what to donate to charity. She packed everything, hired the movers and then unpacked in the new apartment. She even photographed the interior of Mrs. Wendler's former home so as to reproduce the layout as closely as possible, making sure that if the toothbrush sat on the right side of the sink, that's exactly where Mrs. Wendler would find it in the new apartment.

Ms. Roberts's efforts won over Mrs. Wendler. "She did things I never would've thought of," said Mrs. Wendler. "She was just perfect."



# Journal of Geriatric Care Management

VOLUME 20  
ISSUE 2  
FALL  
2010

*Published by the  
National  
Association of  
Professional  
Geriatric Care  
Managers*

3275 West Ina Road  
Suite 130

Tucson, Arizona  
85741

520.881.8008 / phone

520.325.7925 / fax

[www.caremanager.org](http://www.caremanager.org)

## Hoarding and Elders: Current Trends, Dilemmas, and Solutions

Guest Editor's Message .....2  
*By Emily B. Saltz, LICSW, CMC*

Hoarding and Elders: Current Trends, Dilemmas, and Solutions .....4  
*By Emily B. Saltz, LICSW, CMC*

Evaluating and Selecting Interventions for Older Adults with  
Hoarding and Cluttering Behaviors.....10  
*By Monika B. Eckfield, RN, MSN, PhD Candidate*

Home-Based Intervention for Elderly Hoarders: What really works? .....15  
*By Christiana Bratotiis, PhD, MSW and Kimberlie J. Flowers, MSW*

Rooms of Shame: Senior Move Manager's Perspective on Hoarding .....21  
*By Margit Novack, MCP, cSMM*

Nice Children Stolen From Car.....25  
*By Barbara Allen*

# Rooms of Shame: Senior Move Manager's Perspective on Hoarding

*By Margit Novack, MCP, cSMM*

## Introduction

Senior Move Managers is a new industry of professionals who assist older adults and their families with the physical and emotional aspects of downsizing, relocating, or modifying their homes. Senior Move Management is represented by the National Association of Senior Move Managers (NASMM). The core values and principles of behavior for this new industry, as expressed in NASMM's Code of Ethics, include advocacy, confidentiality, and maximizing client's dignity and autonomy ([www.nasmm.org](http://www.nasmm.org)).

In the context of their work with older adults, Senior Move Managers frequently encounter hoarding situations. Often, the interaction begins with a call, "You've probably never seen anything as bad as this." These "rooms of shame" are typically hidden behind closed doors and the move manager may be the first professional to encounter the problem.

This article describes typical scenarios for Senior Move Management involvement with hoarders and techniques that have been successful in reducing or eliminating hoarding. The purpose of this article is to familiarize Geriatric Care Managers with Senior Move Manager capabilities so they will understand how best to partner with these professionals in hoarding situations.

## Working with Elderly Hoarders

Since most Senior Move Managers work primarily or exclusively with seniors, their typical hoarding client is an elderly individual who has accumulated possessions for decades. Although circumstances vary with each client, hoarding behavior presents a common set of risk factors for elders, including:

### 1. Increased risk of falls

As the individual's balance and mobility decrease, floors covered with debris and lack of adequate pathways around furniture creates significant risk factors for falls.

### 2. Chronic conditions exacerbated

Medication compliance is hampered by the mounds of clutter; pulmonary conditions are made worse by the dust and mold; and home-based services cannot be delivered due to unsafe conditions.

### 3. Increased social isolation

Due to embarrassment or fear of discovery, many hoarders are reluctant to allow people into their home. This reluctance, combined with decreased mobility (lack of transportation, difficulty walking, and inability to drive) reduces social opportunities and increases the hoarder's isolation.

Using "things" to fill needs or to compensate for losses is a common theme in hoarding. For example, after his retirement, a physician begins donating to over a thousand charities. Having lost the prestige of his profession, the physician's donations make him feel important, but over time, the mail fills his home and becomes overwhelming. Eventually, he stops opening the mail and the papers take over his space.

For the isolated older adult, the human interaction involved in the purchasing process can fulfill deep emotional needs. In the words of one hoarder, "I never learned to drive and I can't get around much anymore. I order lots of things over the phone, and they get delivered by UPS. The UPS man is my friend, and I look forward to seeing him every day. If I stopped ordering things, I would be lonely."

Ironically, the need for human interaction can be a motivating factor

for decluttering as well. An isolated hoarder who enjoys the company of the Senior Move Manager may agree to dispose of items in order to keep the Senior Move Manager coming back. The Senior Move Manager or the GCM can use the development of a trusting relationship as a means to promote change in the hoarder's life.

## Types of Hoarders

Hoarding situations encountered by Senior Move Managers in the general community are diverse. Initial contact is typically by a family member or by the hoarding individual himself. Additional sources of referrals include attorneys, trust officers, Geriatric Care Managers, home-based service providers and social service agencies. Sometimes the project involves clearing out a home where the hoarding individual is no longer present. More often Senior Move Managers are called in to work directly with the hoarding individual.

Senior Move Managers are typically contacted for help in implementing a move from one home to another, but when hoarding is a factor, the situation becomes much more complex.

Based on our experience in the field, Senior Move Managers see three distinct types of hoarders:

### The Proud Hoarder

The proud hoarder sees no problem with her living situation, does not want help decluttering, and limits the move manager's intervention strictly to moving belongings from one place to another. The proud hoarder is often in denial about the seriousness of the cluttering situation. In the words of one client, "I need help moving. In the hallway there are about 90 cartons. There are 60 bins in the living room,

*continued on page 22*

## **Rooms of Shame: Senior Move Manager's Perspective on Hoarding**

*continued from page 21*

and 40 more in my bedroom. I'll get rid of some, but most of my things are going with me. Last year I rented a storage unit and put my sofa and chairs in it to make space for my stuff. That's why there is no where to sit. I am moving to a smaller apartment so I can afford a second storage unit...."

### **The Embarrassed Hoarder**

The embarrassed hoarder knows that her living situation is not normal and is humiliated by her inability to change her living situation. She lived a more "normal" lifestyle at some point in the past, and desperately wants to do so now, if only she could only get control over her cluttering. Usually a trigger – perhaps the death of a spouse, retirement, or depression – created emotional needs that are filled by hoarding behavior. Although decluttering is a struggle, the embarrassed hoarder is often receptive to help from professionals. While ongoing intervention to maintain the decluttered environment may be necessary, the embarrassed hoarder has real potential for significant improvement in her living environment. In the words of one client, "I heard about you from someone in my depression support group. My knees are bad and I live in a third story walk-up. If I could clean-up my apartment, I could move to a first floor apartment and life would be easier."

### **The Accidental Hoarder**

The accidental hoarder is someone without a long history of hoarding, but circumstances such as changes in physical and/or mental status, or care giving responsibilities that are all-consuming, have made her less able to deal with the piles that are slowly building at home. The more clutter that accumulates, the more overwhelmed the hoarder becomes. Like the embarrassed hoarder, the accidental hoarder is often receptive to help from professionals. However, the same barriers that contributed to the clutter in the first place make it

harder for the accidental hoarder to make lasting changes. The accidental hoarder will often need to accept ongoing support to maintain any lasting gains.

## **Hoarding situations in Senior Living Residences**

Increasingly, Senior Move Managers are contacted by staff at senior living residences regarding difficult hoarding situations. In these scenarios, the intervention is typically initiated by the community, not the resident. Sometimes an apartment is cluttered because the resident was unable or refused to downsize from a much larger home. The more cluttered the apartment is, the more overwhelmed the resident becomes, and the clutter grows. Clutter also occurs when the elder's physical and mental status deteriorates and she is no longer able to maintain the upkeep of her apartment.

Regardless of the cause, the community's interest is usually in protecting both public and personal safety. When the apartment is pest-infested, the Senior Move Manager's goal is typically to clean out enough debris so the residence can be treated for pests. When the intervention is to improve resident safety, the Senior Move Manager's goal usually corresponds to specific requirements set by the facility. For example, an administrator at an assisted living facility tells a resident who hoards, "The home health agency will not provide services in your apartment unless there are twenty-four inch paths for circulation" or "When you return home, you will be using a walker, so there need to be thirty-inch aisles for you to safely navigate." By accepting assistance to eliminate or even reduce clutter, the resident can avoid possible eviction and remain in her apartment independently and safely for a considerable period of time.

## **Senior Move Managers and Ethical Issues in Hoarding**

In their work with elderly hoarders, Senior Move Managers

encounter many of the same ethical issues as Geriatric Care Managers, especially regarding when and how much to intervene. Issues such as evaluating the competency of a hoarder, balancing autonomy with safety, and defining success in working with elderly hoarders, are just some of the challenges that we face in working with these clients.

### **Case example:**

A Senior Move Manager receives a call from Dr. M, an elderly dentist who said he was considering a move to a retirement community. On the first home visit, the Senior Move Manager observes that every room in the five-bedroom house is piled shoulder high, with only narrow aisles for circulation. The kitchen sink, stove, and refrigerator cannot be seen behind the debris. There is no furniture that is free of clutter. Dr. M sleeps on a cot in the basement and his food is delivered from Meals on Wheels. He appears well-groomed and content with his situation, although he admits that his friends no longer visit him at home and that possessions have taken the place of human connections in his life. He talks about the Collyer brothers, famous hoarders who died in 1947 when they were buried by piles of debris, and wonders if his home is as bad as theirs. He acknowledges that his environment poses a risk, and that he may fall or be unable to call for help. While he hopes this won't happen, Dr. M tells the Senior Move Manager that it's a risk he is willing to assume and he ultimately rejects assistance with decluttering. As an incentive to Dr. M, the Senior Move Manager offers to provide initial services for free. Despite this generous offer, Dr. M still refuses to accept help.

While Dr. M is clearly placing himself at risk, his mental and financial capacity is high. He is independent in all activities of daily living, has adequate finances to support his lifestyle, and he understands the risks his hoarding poses. Using the Risk/Capacity paradigm (Soniati, B., & Malady-Micklos, M. (2010). *Empowering Social Workers for Practice with Vulnerable Older Adults*. Washington

D.C.:NASW Press.), the Senior Move Manager concludes it is inappropriate to intervene at this time. Unable to convince Dr. M to accept help, the Senior Move Manager notifies a local social service agency so he can be monitored, should the situation change.

Another ethical issue in working with hoarders is how to define success and how far to push the hoarder into “clearing out” the space. In theory, success implies reducing or eliminating all clutter and preventing recluttering of the space. However, even if only modest gains can be made through reorganizing and relocating items, this can be considered success as well. For example, if a living room and bedroom can be made usable, even though a second bedroom continues to be unusable, the goal of increased safety will have been achieved.

### Helpful techniques for working with hoarders

Hoarding situations are complex and there is no silver bullet for resolving the behaviors associated with hoarding. Based on our experience in Senior Move Management, we have found certain techniques that are helpful to remember when working with hoarders.

1. **Be non-judgmental:** Although this may sound obvious, not all helping professionals are cut out to work with hoarders. Hoarders are highly sensitive to nonverbal cues. If the hoarder feels judged or disapproved of, the ability to achieve change is dramatically reduced. As a professional, if you find your client’s environment disturbing, it is likely you will communicate this to the client. It is important to recognize your limitations in working with these clients.
2. **Listen closely to the client:** While there may be many agencies and/or family members who want immediate changes made in the hoarder’s living situation, resist the temptation to act too quickly. Be sure to ask the hoarding client

what changes *they* want to see happen, what *their* goals and priorities are, and what bothers *them* the most about their current living environment. For example, you may feel that decluttering an unusable kitchen is the most important place to start, but the client may tell you that the clutter in the second floor bedroom bothers them the most. By listening closely and “starting where the client is at,” the professional increases the likelihood of a successful intervention.

3. **Acknowledge the difficulty:** Most people don’t understand the stress involved when hoarders are asked to part with belongings. The professional needs to listen closely and empathize with the hoarder’s struggles. Don’t offer false hope that change will be quick or easy to achieve.
4. **Opt for low-hanging fruit:** When evaluating where to begin working with the hoarder, start with areas of the home that are less complex so the client can experience accomplishment as quickly as possible. This may help the client feel hopeful and more optimistic.
5. **Praise frequently:** Provide positive reinforcement. Hoarders have felt unsuccessful at handling their environment for years. Positive feedback builds self-esteem. The praise should be honest and not exaggerated.
6. **Group similar items together:** Many hoarders have similar items scattered throughout their home but are unaware of these patterns due to the sheer volume of clutter. Gathering together similar items enables the hoarder see what they actually have and to begin the process of categorizing and organizing their belongings. The hoarder may not agree to part with the items, but pointing out these patterns may decrease the likelihood of continuing to hoard that type of item.
7. **Provide creative disposal options:** Hoarders are major recyclers. Most hoarders believe that virtually every item has a use, and that “somewhere out there” is a person who needs or can use the particular item saved by the hoarder. One hoarder collected children’s toys and would spend each weekend giving toys away to children in poor neighborhoods. Unfortunately, the hoarder was collecting far more toys than she could ever hope to give away. Maintaining a list of charitable agencies and providing donation options that correspond with the client’s values may encourage them to part with items.
8. **Remove items agreed upon immediately:** Hoarders are known to have “removal remorse.” Once the client agrees to part with something, get it out of the house as quickly as possible.
9. **Provide voluntary homework:** Offer clients focused tasks that they can do between sessions. For example, if you have gathered together all the client’s purses and sorted them by color, ask the client to select two purses from each color to keep. Reinforce that the assignment is optional, so clients feel proud if they achieve it, and do not feel guilty if they can’t complete the task.
10. **Contact between sessions:** Use occasional phone calls between sessions to reinforce accomplishments, acknowledge the client’s feelings and communicate that you care.

### Conclusion

Senior Move Managers encounter a significant number of hoarding situations, and as a result, many have developed expertise in working with elderly hoarders. To increase competency with hoarders, many Senior Move Managers pursue a variety of educational opportunities, such as sessions offered at the NASMM annual conference, teleclasses courses offered by the National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization (NSGCD – [www.nsgcd.org](http://www.nsgcd.org)) and online courses offered through eSMMART ([www.esmmart.com](http://www.esmmart.com)).

*continued on page 24*

### Rooms of Shame: Senior Move Manager's Perspective on Hoarding

*continued from page 23*

com). Hoarding is a frequent topic on NASMM discussion threads. To promote a common reference point for communicating about hoarders, NASMM has posted the NSGCD Hoarding Clutter Scale on their blog (<http://nasmm.wordpress.com/>).

Senior Move Managers represent a knowledgeable, professional resource with whom Geriatric Care Managers can partner in working with elderly hoarders. They are well-equipped to handle the labor intensive, sometimes time-critical requirements of working with hoarders. Since they specialize in late life transitions where downsizing is the norm, Senior Move Managers have a variety of proven resources for disposal or

donation of belongings. Since the hourly rate of most Senior Move Managers is considerably less than the rate charged by Geriatric Care Managers, collaborating with Senior Move Managers in hoarding situations minimizes costs to the client.

To locate qualified Senior Move Managers in your area, visit NASMM at [www.nasmm.org](http://www.nasmm.org) and select **Find a Senior Move Manager**. Be certain to ask what kind of experience the Senior Move Manager has with hoarders, since some Move Managers prefer not to work with this population. All NASMM members are insured and agree to abide by the NASMM Code of Ethics.

**Margit Novack, MCP**, is President and CEO of Moving Solutions® and eSM MART™ ([www.movingsolutions.com](http://www.movingsolutions.com)). Since 1996 Moving Solutions has helped thousands of people in the Delaware Valley with the physical and emotional aspects of downsizing and moving. Margit is a pioneer in the Senior Move Management industry and is Founding President of the National Association of Senior Move Manager (NASMM). In 2007 Margit founded eSM MART, a web-based training platform to professionalize the Senior Move Management industry that awards a Certificate in Senior Move Management (eSMM). Margit is a sought-after speaker on hoarding and on late-life transition issues. She has graduate and undergraduate degrees from the University of Pennsylvania.

### Meet Clark

I buried my wife yesterday. She was a hoarder. I loved her and I took care of her, especially the past few years when she was bedridden. After fifty years of marriage, her dying words to me were not "I love you." They were "Don't touch my stuff."

I was surrounded by her stuff for years. I want to get rid of it and reclaim my life.

*This is Clark's bedroom; it is neat and orderly.*

*This is the living room and dining room in the home Clark shared with his wife.*

*This is the bedroom of Clark's wife.*

It wasn't always this bad. It grew gradually, and kept on growing, like an addiction. When did it start? When we were younger, we had company, we did things... then her stuff took over our lives. How did I let this happen? What could I have done that might have made things different?

Clark cleared out much of his wife's clutter from his home. Three years later, like a number of elderly, lonely widowers, Clark took his own life.



Press Archive • January – June, 2010

# WINSTON-SALEM JOURNAL

## IN TRANSITION: A SHEPHERD KNOWS THE TERRAIN

Winston Salem Journal – November 7, 2010

By Fran Daniel | JOURNAL REPORTER

[Margaret](#) and [Donald Sparks](#) have moved nine times in the past 65 years.

“We always moved ourselves,” [Margaret Sparks](#) said. “We were young then.”

But, now in their late 80s, they recently needed help to move from their three-bedroom house in [Winston-Salem](#) to an apartment in a retirement community in [Chesapeake, Va.](#), to live near family members.

The couple found Barnhardt Moving Shepherds, based in [Winston-Salem](#). The company is owned by [sisters-in-law Pam](#) and [Emilie Barnhardt](#).

“We couldn’t have made the move without them,” [Sparks](#) said. “They’ve helped us plan. They’ve done the leg work. They’ve done the hard work. They’ve made recommendations. They got moving estimates. They’ve done everything for this move.”



Serving seniors is a growing branch of the moving industry.

The senior-move management industry has been around for about 16 years and was formalized in 2002 with the founding of the [National Association of Senior Move Managers](#), based in [Hinsdale, Ill.](#), according to the [association](#).

Since that time, the NASMM’s membership has grown from 60 to more than 500 members, the majority of whom are in the [United States](#), said [Jennifer Pickett](#), the association’s [associate executive director](#).

“We’re averaging between 20 and 25 a month,” [Pickett](#) said of the association’s new members.

The [association](#) estimated that its members handled about 50,000 moves last year and the industry had sales of [\\$30 million](#) in 2009.

[Pickett](#) said that seniors often decide to move after an illness, the onset of dementia or the loss of a spouse. Then they realize they need to do something with the items they have accumulated over 30 or 40 years. “It’s [the senior move manager](#) who helps that older adult and their families essentially downsize, relocate and resettle to a new environment,” [Pickett](#) said. “They will pretty much — from soups to nuts— go through everything that you have and figure out what you’re going to take.”

The [association](#) recommended that people interested in hiring [a senior move manager](#) should make sure that [the manager](#) is certified and their company has proof of its [liability insurance](#) and credentials. The association also suggested getting fees in writing upfront and finding out if those fees will be by the hour or by the project.

[Pam Barnhardt](#) is a certified [relocation and transition specialist](#). She is a former higher education [administrator](#), having worked more than 20 years as [a senior administrator](#) in community colleges in [North Carolina](#).

[Emilie Barnhardt](#) is a former physical-therapy [assistant](#) who has spent many years volunteering in the community and for churches.

The two business partners have helped people move or get rid of stuff in their homes for about 10 years. They’ve also had a lot of practice moving their own households — five to six times each, they estimate. They officially turned their organization and project management skills into Barnhardt Moving Shepherds in October 2009.

“We enjoy it,” [Pam Barnhardt](#) said. “We like projects that have a start and a finish. We work well together because we both move at a pretty fast pace, and we just love older people.”

The late [Zeb E. Barnhardt Sr.](#), their [father-in-law](#), was their inspiration for Barnhardt Moving Shepherds. [Pam Barnhardt](#) said they helped move [him](#) from a four-level house in [Winston-Salem](#) that he had lived in for more than 50 years into a retirement duplex and later into an assisted-living community. Barnhardt Moving Shepherds handles pretty much everything to help clients transition from one space to another, including packing and unpacking items and dispersing goods that clients want to donate to [Goodwill Industries](#) and other nonprofit groups.

“We try to throw away very little, unless it really is junk,” [Pam Barnhardt](#) said. “[Emilie](#) is very resourceful. She knows a lot of people in the community.”

Movers are called in to do the actual moves.

Initially, the business partners set up free consultations with potential clients in their homes.

“We try to treat people like family,” [Emilie Barnhardt](#) said.

[Margaret](#) and [Donald Sparks](#) said that the Barnhardts took away all the headaches from their move and did a good job.

“I don’t want a refund,” [Margaret Sparks](#) said.

## New home is a moving experience Expert mover helps seniors and others cope with downsizing

By [Randi Bjornstad](#)

The Register-Guard

Appeared in print: **Sunday, Oct 17, 2010**



Two years ago, Janet and King Martin made one of the most dreaded moves in most people's lives, leaving the spacious home where they spent their marriage and raised their children for a small apartment in a retirement center.

"Moving out of our house after 62 years was trauma enough," Janet Martin said, "but we had a 2,300-square-foot house with four bedrooms and two baths, and we moved into an 850-square-foot apartment with two tiny bedrooms, one bath and a very small living room."

To make the situation potentially even more difficult, "We were collectors," she admits. "We collected everything."

King Martin, who had designed and built the house they left behind, had a workshop full of tools, cars and sports equipment as well as an office full of his architectural tools of the trade. She, an avid needlework fan, had yarn, needles, craft books and two big file cabinets full of knitting and needlework patterns. "I also collected clothes and all kinds of little things — the whole bit," she said. What saved them, the Martins agree, was knowing Diana Masarie, not only a longtime family friend but the owner of a business called Move-In Comfort.

"It's a full service business that includes planning what to take, designing the new floor plan, sorting and organizing, bringing in other service providers as needed — and, on moving day, actually doing the move for them so that when they go to their new home, it's all set up with their furniture in place and everything put away," Masarie said.

She started her business seven years ago, honing her skills as a "senior move manager," but since then Masarie has branched out to work with ready-to-downsize baby boomers and anyone else who finds the moving process emotionally too daunting or physically too taxing to do alone. She's helped a family in Florida who had a disabled member who was moving to Oregon, coaching them on how to handle things on their end and physically resettling their loved one here. She has expanded her business to include helping people "age in place," making their homes less cluttered and safer to occupy as they become physically less able.

While earlier life moves often embrace the anticipation and self-congratulation of building up — marriage, kids, acquiring nice things — moving in old age is completely different, Masarie said.

“It’s not going up. It’s going smaller, maybe even to congregate living,” she said. “It’s letting go of the backdrop of previous life. There’s a lot of grief in letting go, and many people need help with that.” She got the idea for her business after helping move both her parents and her mother-in-law, Masarie said. “They seemed overwhelmed, even after they’d been thinking about this for years in advance.” At that point, she had no idea she was about to embark on a new career, “although I knew I wanted to do something with senior advocacy,” she said. “I had moved a lot in my own life, so I guess I had been in training for a long time.”

Her friends said she should look on the Internet to see if anyone else was doing what she was proposing, “but I was single-minded and just started to create it for myself,” Masarie recalled. “Then, about six months later, my brother told me about a story in Time Magazine, and he said it was just what I was doing.” In fact, there’s even a trade association — the eight-year-old nonprofit National Association of Senior Move Managers — that accredits members based on the satisfactory completion of courses dealing with ethics, accountability and safety in carrying out other people’s moves, plus continuing education in the still relatively new field.

The organization’s website lists eight member businesses in Oregon and 12 in Washington; Masarie was the first in either state to join the association, in 2004. “Back then, there were 78 people in the whole country, and now there are about 500,” she said.

As anyone who’s ever done it knows, orchestrating a move is no fun, starting with getting rid of stuff that has accumulated through the years and proceeding to packing, loading boxes on the truck and figuring out where to put things at the other end.

With Masarie or her fellow move managers on the job, much of that burden is shouldered by someone else. The service varies by the complexity of the job, usually ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000, “but many times the cost is offset by being able to find places to sell things people no longer want or need,” Masarie said. “In some cases, it’s completely paid for.”

She starts with setting up a timeline for getting the move accomplished, as well as a list of all the things that have to be done. She visits the home-to-be, measures everything and notes the location of outlets and thermostats as well as doorways and window heights so she can help her clients know how much and which pieces of furniture will fit comfortably.

She helps set priorities for treasures to keep, give away to family members and friends or donate to charities. She arranges for estate sales and house cleaning and deals with utility companies to end service on one end and have it turned on at the other by the time the move is complete.

She’s a go-between with the moving company as they pack up the household, and she’s there at the other end to accept the load, arrange the furniture and unpack and put away belongings in their new places. “She even made our beds,” Janet Martin marveled. “All we had to do is arrive at our apartment, eat the dinner sent up to our new home from the dining room and slip between the sheets.”

The Martins started working with Masarie nine months before they actually left their home of 62 years in Eugene’s south hills for a retirement center. Their apartment, where they prepare their own breakfast and lunch, overlooks the Willamette River. They take dinner in the center’s dining room with the other residents, who number about 180 people in 120 apartments.

“It’s hard to be this age — it’s a different kind of life when you give up your house and move to a retirement center,” Martin said a bit wistfully. “It took us a good six months to feel at home.” Mostly, it was the loss of space. “King doesn’t have his workshop, and he doesn’t golf any more,” she said, but admits she “was ready to give up cooking every meal, so I enjoy eating dinner with the group.” They initially met with Masarie once a week “but then we took off November and December” for the holidays, King recalled. “After that, we worked hard.”

Masarie would arrive and say, “OK, Janet, let’s hit the cabinets in the breezeway today,” King said. “She would put things on the table and ask me to divide them into things I couldn’t live without, things I wanted to keep in the family, things to sell and things to give away. When that was done, she would put them back where they were, but marked and grouped according to my decisions. I could still use everything, but I had to put them back in the right groups until the move.”

The couple didn’t want to rent a storage unit, so they had to choose carefully what they would take and what they would relinquish.

“We did that for everything — furniture, cookware, clothing, everything,” she said. “You can’t let yourself be emotional; we were pretty cold-blooded. When I look back, I am amazed that we were able to do it, because I am pretty sentimental. But without someone like Diana, I don’t think we could have.”

To accommodate the much smaller living room, they kept a loveseat but sold the matching 10-foot couch, she said. “I had lots of copper cookware hanging in my kitchen, and I was sure all that would have to go, but when we walked into the apartment, I saw that she had found places for most of it.”

Hard as it was to leave their previous home, “It really helped to come in and see our pictures and furniture already in place,” she said. Two years later, she doesn’t remember every detail clearly, “but I’m sure we were terribly tired — and relieved.”

She had only one “crushing blow” in all of the move, King said. “The estate salesperson accidentally took all of my Christmas ornaments that I’d gotten through the years, and when I realized it I called but they had all been marked for sale,” she said. “I didn’t want to put her out, so I didn’t say anything, and all that ended up being sold. I guess I could have bought it all back, but I didn’t.”

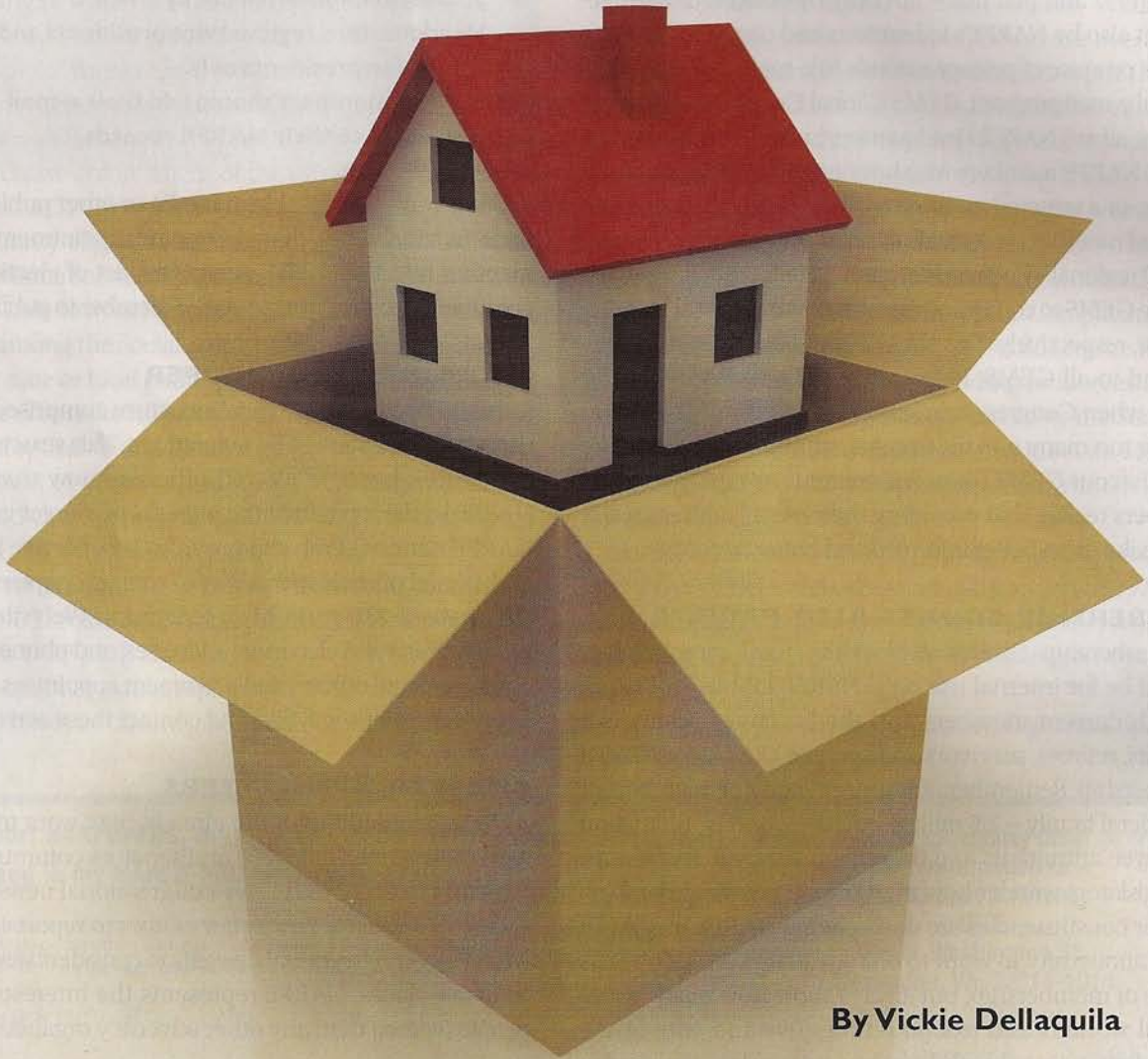
All in all, she’s rearranged “only one or two things” from the way Masarie placed them during the move two years ago, Martin said. “But that’s it, and that’s not surprising — no two people ever see everything the same way.”

“There’s a lot of grief in letting go, and many people need help with that.”

— Diana Masarie, **STARTED A BUSINESS THAT HELPS PEOPLE RELOCATE**

# Legislative Report

# Downsizing A Lifetime of Memories



By Vickie Dellaquila

**I**magine living in your home for many decades and now deciding that you have to let go of your house – and a lifetime of belongings and memories – and move to a smaller home. Downsizing and moving are difficult and overwhelming. In fact, moving is one of the most stressful events in someone's life, and having to downsize your belongings to fit into a smaller place only adds to the stress of moving. So, whether you

are considering a move to smaller quarters or to another state, helping a loved one prepare for a move or needing to reduce the clutter you have accumulated over the years, good planning and organization can take some of the stress and sadness out of downsizing.

Like many seniors, NARFE members Linda and Marshall Richards went through the downsizing process. The Richards had raised their family in an 1,800-square-foot home with a three-car garage on a one-acre lot. They were enjoying their retirement but realized that their house and yard were just too large for them to take care of. So they downsized to a 1,200-square-foot home with a much smaller yard. "It was the best thing for us to do," says Linda. "We could not keep up – it was just too much." The Richards were able to incorporate most of their furniture into their new home. What they didn't want or need, they gave to family members and charities, and had a garage sale. For many seniors, reducing home maintenance is one of the biggest reasons to downsize.

NARFE member Charles Anderson and his wife also went through the downsizing process as they moved from a three-bedroom home to a life on the road in a mobile home pulled by his Dodge pickup truck. He researched and planned for quite some time before the two hit the road. The Andersons let go of many of their possessions and stored some items at their daughter's home. But they didn't find it at all difficult to give them up. Charles says, "As you grow older, you need less 'stuff'. Don't let your house own you, or don't have an anchor, which is what a house can be."

## GETTING STARTED

If you see a move in your future that will require downsizing, it is never too

early to start the downsizing process. A good place to begin is in those rooms that are not regularly used, such as the

basement, attic or spare bedroom. Oftentimes, items that you have forgotten about turn up in these locations, and

## Downsizing and Moving Tips

- ▶ **Be sure to give yourself enough time to plan and get help from family, friends or professionals when you start downsizing because it can be physically and emotionally overwhelming. If you want a professional in your area to help you during this process, visit [www.nasmm.com](http://www.nasmm.com) (the National Association of Senior Move Managers) or [www.napo.net](http://www.napo.net) (the National Association of Professional Organizers).**
- ▶ **De-clutter and start in rooms that are not regularly used. Remember – everything you own takes time, space and energy to maintain. Think hard about whether something is worth keeping.**
- ▶ **Let go of those things that you don't really need or are not likely to have use for in your new location.**
- ▶ **Give things to family and friends. If your granddaughter loves your crystal punch bowl, give it to her now if you are not going to use it. Make your adult children pick up their belongings that you have been storing for them.**
- ▶ **Donate to charities, historical societies, museums, theatre groups, churches and synagogues.**
- ▶ **Consider selling items at auction; in garage and estate sales, and consignment stores; and on eBay and Craig's List.**
- ▶ **If you are moving a long distance, keep in mind that it is expensive to move. Decide whether an item is really worth moving or if you should consider selling or donating it, or replacing it in a smaller size, such as substituting a love seat for a sofa.**
- ▶ **Consider having the mover pack your items instead of doing it yourself. Yes, it is more expensive; but movers have experience in knowing how to pack correctly. You also avoid collecting and buying boxes and packing materials.**





you might be pleasantly surprised to find them. You also may find some forgotten items and wonder why you ever kept them in the first place. It's then a very easy decision to let go of some of these items.

You also need to think about the furniture you might bring with you when you are moving to smaller quarters. Decide what furniture you already own and really like. Many times, people either inherit a piece, or buy something they don't really like or get tired of but feel the need to keep it. And if you find that some of your furniture won't fit in your new space, this is a good time to sell or donate it, and buy the "right-size" furniture for your new home.

You also need to consider how far you will be moving and take into account the costs associated with a long-distance move. One of the best things you can do in this case is to take a long, hard look at what you have and decide what makes sense to move or get rid of. Does it make sense to move a mattress and box springs that are 20 years old? It probably would be better to have a new set delivered to your new home shortly after you move in.

**LETTING GO**

NARFE member Mary Ann Blazer did careful research when she and her husband decided to downsize from their 2,500-square-foot home to a 360-square-foot RV. The Blazers made certain that they knew what the RV lifestyle would be like before taking the plunge. Mary Ann gave some of their possessions to charities, family and friends. For many people, it is difficult to give up memorabilia or items related to a hobby, but keeping a small piece of it can help. Mary Ann, who loved taking care of the garden at her old home, now has small potted herbs on the RV. She also kept a

few small gardening tools that she uses when she visits her daughter's home. Mary Ann downsized her collection of photos and kept the ones that are most important to her in the RV – a family photo album and a framed photo of her daughter in her wedding veil, which sits on her nightstand.

Everything you own takes precious real estate space in your home, so you really need to think carefully about what is important. Ask yourself these questions:

- Will I use this item again?
- Can I borrow one if I find that I need it?
- What is the worst that will happen if I let this item go? It is probably not the end of the world to let a rarely used blender go to charity.

If you are downsizing to a very small space, such as an assisted-living facility, or helping a family member move to one, the same process applies. But there are some other considerations. Assisted-living facilities often provide most of your meals, so you don't really need all of those place settings, kitchen gadgets, and pots and pans that you currently own. The living room probably won't accommodate a large sofa, but a love seat and a chair or two should work well.

**TIMELINE / RESOURCES**

As you go through your possessions, making decisions about what makes

sense to keep, it's a good idea to put together a timeline. For example, if you plan on downsizing and moving in the next six months, you will need to schedule some time to go through each room in your home on a regular basis. You also will need to line up the resources that you will need: charities, consignment stores, auctioneers and other people who may purchase things, and other services you might need, such as a real estate agent, professional organizer, cleaning service, and/or moving companies.

It's important to "say goodbye" to your old home, and those traditions and customs you experienced there, so consider taking pictures of special places in your home. You also may want to take a little bit of your old home with you – tulip bulbs from the garden, a bird feeder or a special door knocker.

Downsizing and moving can be an emotional rollercoaster. It's normal to feel sad when you let go of decades of belongings, many with memories attached. But remember that you are starting a new chapter in your life.

---

*Vickie Dellaquila is a Certified Professional Organizer® and owner of Organization Rules, Inc., in Pittsburgh, PA. Her company provides senior downsizing, relocation and residential organizing services. She is the author of the book Don't Toss My Memories in the Trash – A Step-by-Step Guide to Helping Seniors Downsize, Organize, and Move and the Moving Workbook. Visit [www.OrganizationRules.com](http://www.OrganizationRules.com). NARFE members receive a 20-percent discount on the book by visiting the Web site and entering coupon code "NARFE" on the shopping cart page (valid until May 10).*



**Press Archive • January – June, 2010**

## **DAILY NEWS**

### **New service helps elderly, families handle daunting tasks of sorting, packing and estate sales**

BY Phyllis Furman

DAILY NEWS BUSINESS WRITER

Saturday, February 13, 2010

At 92, Sylvia Lieberman is determined to remain “as independent as possible.”

Yet when Lieberman – who recently published her first book, a children’s title – was preparing to face the daunting task of moving, she didn’t head out to gather packing supplies.

Lieberman, a retired medical office manager, called Adrian Walter-Ginzburg, a moving specialist who helps elderly New Yorkers and their families with downsizing, relocating and liquidation sales.

Walter-Ginzburg, the owner of a Caring Transitions franchise on the Upper East Side, went through every closet and drawer in Lieberman’s one-bedroom apartment in the Riverdale section of the Bronx, where she’s lived alone for 42 years after her husband died.

Walter-Ginzburg helped her determine what to keep, what to toss and what to sell.

When movers arrive in Lieberman’s home on Tuesday, they’ll find her possessions neatly packed and ready to make the trip to her new home, a studio apartment in a complex for seniors in Los Angeles.

The cost of Walter-Ginzburg’s services, \$2,000, was “worth every penny,” said Lieberman, whose L.A. apartment will be a half hour away from her daughter, Beverly Hills psychiatrist and author Carole Lieberman.

“It’s a wonderful business for seniors,” Lieberman added. “It takes the emotional and physical labor off of their shoulders.”

Relocating the elderly has traditionally been handled by family members who step in to help them prepare for a new chapter of life in what's often a stressful time.

But busier lifestyles, scattered families and an aging population have made it increasingly difficult for children or other relatives to sort through decades of possessions on their own. Relocation services can fill the gap.

"It's a question of time," said Walter-Ginzburg, who taught gerontology in Israel at the University of Haifa before buying a Caring Transitions franchise in July 2009. "We look in every drawer. We help sift through the memories."

Virtually nonexistent a few years ago, there are now 21 moving services in the metro area that are members of the **National Association of Senior Move Managers**. Caring Transitions, a national chain launched four years ago, has two other local franchises. For each person assigned to a job, Walter-Ginzburg charges \$50 an hour. A typical job costs between \$4,000 and \$6,000, she said and, if she handles the sale of an item, she gets 40% of the sale price.

Walter-Ginzburg's company recently was hired by an Upper East Side woman to clean out her mother's apartment in Pelham Parkway in the Bronx.



Produced by The Advocate and WBRZ News 2 Louisiana

## **Moving expert offers advice on downsizing households**

By EMILY KERN HEBERT

Advocate staff writer

Published: Mar 29, 2010

Barbara Morris freely admits that moving can be one of the most traumatic events in a person's life no matter what age. To that end, she founded Smooth Transitions, a company that specializes in household downsizing and estate dispersal.

"Once upon a time, we counted on our family to do all this stuff for us," Morris said. "Let me tell you, it's a lot easier working with a neutral." Morris gave an often humorous presentation Tuesday at St. James Place on deciding to move, making it easy and surviving the process.



First, Morris encouraged older adults to make a move while they were still in good form — both physically and mentally. She started her business when her mother-in-law moved from her longtime home. “My mother-in-law wanted to move while she was in

charge, while she could decide where she was going to go, what she was going to take,” Morris said.

“Do you want to leave it to your kids to decide where you’re going to go?” Morris asked. After deciding it’s time to move, Morris said, start considering what you want to take, give to others, sell or donate. Use sticky notes on big pieces of furniture and other large items, writing down what you’ve decided.

Morris said it’s important to keep a list of who gets what. Consider giving furniture to adult children. “The best thing is you can visit it and you don’t have to dust it,” Morris said. But, she added, don’t be surprised if children aren’t interested. “Don’t be disappointed if your children don’t embrace your treasures,” Morris said. They may have smaller homes or different tastes.

Morris also noted some of the common household items that can lead to clutter. Magazine collections can quickly get out of control. Since April issues have already arrived, toss everything from before January, she said. Consider giving older issues to family or friends or donate to a business waiting area.

Morris held up an empty plastic butter tub and empty Cool Whip container and asked for a show of hands of people who had 20 of each. Getting rid of all but three or four would be a significant first step in downsizing, she said. She also encouraged people to get rid of old radios, TVs and telephones currently sitting in garages. Many groups will take appliances and rehab them, she said.

One of her clients owned 12 eyelash curlers. Another had two grocery bags full of empty pill bottles. Morris said she asked the woman whether she was planning to start her own pharmacy or become a drug runner.

When you bring something new into the house, get rid of one or preferably two items, Morris said. “Remember what our new mantra is — keep it moving,” Morris said.

Another big area where clutter collects is our closets, Morris said. “This time of year, we’re going to start changing wardrobes,” Morris said. Take a good look at each item and ask yourself whether it fits, if you wore it recently and if you will wear it again. Don’t just shift clothes to the other closet, she said. If you think you’re going to lose five pounds, forget it, she said. If you no longer wear high heels, get rid of them. If you wore a pair of shoes once and found them too uncomfortable, don’t just store them in the closet, Morris said. “Get that clothes in the hands of somebody who is really going to use them,” she said.

Stop saving the new nightgown you bought for if you have to go to the hospital. If you’re at the hospital, you have to wear their gowns, Morris said. “Go ahead and start wearing the good stuff,” she said. “Use the good towels. Use the crystal, the silver. You deserve it.” Morris said she didn’t want anybody to leave her workshop and “start tearing into a closet.”

Start with a single drawer instead. “Start small, but stay at it,” Morris said.

ON THE INTERNET:

<http://www.movingforseniors.com>.