

Senior MOVE Managers

By Jennifer Bradley, Staff Writer

As parents, grandparents, and other loved ones age, their lifestyles must change as well, including the place they call home. A stressful time in anyone's life is "moving day." To leave a home lovingly filled and yes, even cluttered, with decades of memories and memorabilia is an overwhelming task for the person living there; but for the long-distance caregiver, even more so.

Many companies are popping up around the country, offering practical assistance to long-distance caregivers and compassion to the loved ones needing to change location. These services are not merely the typical brawny "moving guys," but professional consultants, who provide room-by-room guidance in packing, moving, and deciding what to keep, what to donate and what to toss.

Stepping forward

Help is out there, but where? The National Association of Senior Move Managers (NASMM) is a great place to begin. This non-profit organization specializes in exactly what its name says: moving seniors. Visit www.nasmm.org and with a simple Internet search by state, a user-friendly contact list of accredited senior-specialized companies is provided.

Many senior moving services offer the full gamut, including planning/prep and downsizing, packing, moving day needs, settling in and follow-up. For a long-distance caregiver who may not be able to be physically present for the entire process, this is more than helpful.

The most time-consuming tasks are those a caregiver may not think of at the onset of a moving process. Disposing of trash, cleaning house, transferring or disconnecting utilities, and organizing at the new home are all services senior move managers provide. They have knowledge for finding local realtors, repair companies, auctioneers, etc. that a long-distance caregiver might not have of the community where their loved one lives.



Many companies providing this service are using a method which involves mentally “placing” the person’s existing possessions into the new home. With a layout of the rooms, and conversations with the client, these move managers can get a feel for how the person would like their new place to be set up. Instead of just dropping boxes and leaving, these services can be hired to stay through the entire process, from packing to unpacking and even re-decorating.

Some seniors opt to stay at a hotel or caregiver’s home for one night while the service preps the new place. This makes the transition easy and stress-free, moving from one “home” to another, filled with familiar sights and smells.

“Older adults making a home transition have not moved in 30, 40 or 50 years and need to downsize considerably,” says Mary Kay Buysse, Executive Director for the NASMM. “The organizational and physical tasks associated with planning and executing such a move can be daunting.”

Here are some questions to ask when looking for a senior moving service:

- **How long have you been providing senior move services?**
- **What are your professional credentials?**
- **Do you have full liability and worker’s compensation insurance?**
- **What are your fees? They should be provided in writing, as with any contract.**
- **Can you provide references?**

Emotional ease

While hiring outside assistance is great for the practical moving needs, it also allows the family caregiver to spend the time they do have assisting with the emotional transition their loved one is going through. A recent *New York Times* article states that “people who use such services can spend \$1,500 to \$5,000, depending on the selections and nature of the move.” In this case, money may be able to buy happiness, or at least save a headache.

The same *Times* article also stresses how in times of grief, such as the loss of a parent, or confusion due to a quick move, hasty decisions are made which many seniors and family members later regret. And, for those caregivers in their 50s and 60s, known as the “sandwich generation,” strings are being pulled in many directions: from career, to kids and grandkids, and then their aging parents and other relatives.

“For family members living far away, the additional stress of taking significant time away from career and family obligations can present an even greater challenge,” adds Buysse. “Senior Move Management has emerged to fill this gap. For long-distance caregivers, NASMM members provide end-to-end move services. Collaborating across the miles, they work in tandem to offer senior clients and families a stress-free, joyful move experience.”

The transition is not necessarily only for the senior, either. For some adult children, it is as hard for them as their parents to let go of the memories contained in a family home. It may be easier for a third-party to help make the tough decisions with no emotional ties. The aged loved one can also be more honest with a stranger than their own children as to what they really want to keep and the things they don’t.



Running Interference

With the previous in mind, one of the biggest obstacles an elderly loved one may face during downsizing is the dreaded division of belongings among family members. With the increasing number of family feuds being caused by hurt feelings over a deceased relative's possessions, there is even a niche industry developing to keep the peace.

"Who Gets Grandma's Pie Plate?" is an initiative aiding seniors in making just those tough decisions, while keeping everyone happy along the way. A group at the University of Minnesota Extension wrestled with the questions families face and with research, developed educational resources to help keep families connected and not in court. The name actually came from a researcher's family baking dish which was handed down from her great-grandmother and is still used today at family gatherings. The next generation hopes to inherit it someday.

The Wall Street Journal has sung praises for these tools, saying, "It's harder to determine what's fair when dividing personal items, because it's tough to pin a value on a tattered *Winnie the Pooh* book, for example, that three siblings all treasure.... The decisions about dividing up objects are often more emotional, because they have more sentimental meaning."

These worksheets offer a way for seniors to gather family members and discuss what items may have value to them. Certain belongings have significant personal attachment for one relative because of a specific memory, and mean nothing to another.

Barbara H. Morris of Smooth Transitions has developed a workbook entitled "Moving for Seniors" which walks a person through each step of the process. The 55-page guide helps seniors evaluate their options, whether it's time to downsize, how to keep it simple and accomplish the move successfully.

"Most families only go through this process once or twice in their lives and by the time they figure it all out, they will never do it again," she says. "Don't be afraid to ask for help from the experts. This process is hard enough on all parties when everyone lives in the same area, but when distances add another level of anguish to the mix, it becomes even harder."

Tips

Tracy Smith, a relocation specialist at MovingCompanies.us, offers these 10 tips for caregivers helping an elderly loved one move.

- **Plan ahead.** It is essential to allow your loved one time to acclimate to the move. It will only add stress for everyone if they are rushed.
- **Be nice.** Their point of view is completely different from yours. Let them still have control over the situation.
- **Take pictures.** Many times the person has lived in the home for a long time, and pictures will help them take memories with them to the new location.
- **Plan a layout.** Change is hard, especially for seniors. If they have a visual of how their old belongings may fit nicely in a new space, it can ease the transition.
- **Hire movers.** Caregivers may find it is emotionally and physically challenging to take on the entire packing/moving project themselves. There is help for you!
- **Go slow.** Remember, their minds and bodies are slower than they used to be.
- **Communicate.** They need to feel like it is their choice, and you are not taking over. Make sure you tell them what is happening during every step of the moving process.
- **Give them tasks.** Don't do it all for them. If even it's wrapping up items, or making small decisions, these tasks will keep your loved one busy and feeling important.
- **Start small.** Find a room or area with the least sentimental value, such as a bathroom, to begin packing. It goes faster and gives a sense of accomplishment.
- **Give them space.** Listen when they want to revisit memories, even if it takes a while. Let them deal with the emotions of loss and change. Encourage your loved one, and let them know you care.

As a long-distance caregiver, moving a loved one can be a rollercoaster. But, it doesn't have to be one that makes the riders nauseous. Moving and packing assistance is available, as are people willing to take the time to listen and help seniors make this major transition with minimal stress for them and their caregiver.



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