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They clean up your clutter

Professional organizers find a career in bringing order to chaos

Those who enter field must chart new paths

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Among the books, boxes, blankets and bikes, the chairs, clothes, carpets and a chain saw, Rhoda Keith could barely pull her car into her garage. Keith's Antelope garage was so crammed that her passengers couldn't exit the car. Her home office was an extension of the same, a paralyzing storehouse of stuff. Keith called Kelli Wilson of Orangevale's A Simple Plan. Wilson is one of several dozen members of the new Sacramento chapter of the National Association of Professional Organizers, and the chapter's president.

Keith paid about \$75 an hour for the service, which includes diagramming work and living spaces, clearing them and developing systems to keep home and office clutter free. In financially stressed times, the bill might seem steep, and Wilson conceded that "a lot of people think of (professional organizing) as not critical -- that it's discretionary." But the Antelope aesthetician didn't mind spending the money. "It gets overwhelming when you have so much stuff," Keith said as she and Wilson worked in the garage. "This is years of this steadily growing. It got to where I had just enough room for the car to fit. ... I didn't want to let go." They worked to win back the garage, lost to years of runaway storage, for a weekend garage sale. Boxes and other goods piled up, some for the sale, others for donation, and more for the trash.

Incomes vary, but a career in organizing can be a successful one, said career counselor Helen Scully of Roseville-based Scully Career Associates. "If they can afford the time it takes to ramp up, I think it's a good career," Scully said. But there are conditions. "Professional organizing is still a fairly new concept, so there's not an existing pattern of need," Scully said, adding that those new to the business "need to realize ... it's not just organizing -- 60 percent of the time it's a small business. They need to ask themselves if that's exciting."

Last week, about 40 women gathered in a meeting room at the University of Phoenix campus in Natomas to celebrate their new chapter. Their businesses' names, like Organized Habits, Clutter Control Angels, **Control C.H.A.O.S** and Out of the Box, speak to their work -- and their varied expertise helping folks like Keith and others. They organize businesses moving from office to office or archive family photographs. Clients who struggle with attention deficit disorder and obsessive-compulsive hoarding also seek their services.

Tonya Piper works with homeowners and churches as head of Rancho Cordova-based organizing firm Control C.H.A.O.S. "It's really not about the stuff," Piper tells her clients. "It has to do with mindset -- it's much deeper than the stuff on your desk. An organizer will find out the root of why that is." Piper, a mechanical engineer by trade, was laid off three years ago. With a baby on the way, she focused on a new career path that could meld experience with enjoyment. She found it in professional organizing, launching her business two years ago. "Organizing was bridging engineering with something I love. Engineering equals solving problems," she said.

Established in 1985, the New Jersey-based National Association of Professional Organizers encompasses more than 30 chapters across the country including the one in Sacramento.

The vast majority of members -- 97 percent, NAPO said -- are female and self-employed. Clients range from small-business owners looking to get a grasp on paperwork to executives to employees seeking more effective organizing systems. "They are so relieved that they have room to breathe, that they don't have to carry all of this around with them," Wilson said. "They look to someone to give them permission to let it go. It's a gift to be part of the experience of them freeing themselves."

And at Keith's home, a breakthrough. Most of the clutter from the garage was gone, as was Keith's anxiety. "Yeah, I have all of this stuff," she said. "But it doesn't define me."

Call The Bee's Darrell Smith, (916) 321-1040.

REGAINING CONTROL

Tips from five organizers in the Sacramento area

Natalie Conrad

Organized Habits of Sacramento

www.organizedhabits.com

Organizes: sales associates and small business owners

Tips:

- * Make prioritizing the next day's workload the last thing you do before leaving work in the evening.
- * Work on your first three priorities for the day before checking your e-mail when you get into work the next morning.
- * Make room in your file drawers. Use only labeled, hanging file folders.
- * Set aside time at least twice a year to purge items in your file drawers and office. Much like a car needs oil changes, offices need scheduled maintenance.
- * Use a tickler file system to manage projects and follow up on tasks and delegation.

Tonya Piper

Control C.H.A.O.S. of Rancho Cordova

www.controlchaosorganizing.com

Organizes: churches, homes and offices

Tips:

- * Whatever you don't use at least once a year, clear out and donate.
- * Use your vertical wall space. Furnish your room with items that compliment your decor and can store items, such as a trunk that also serves as a coffee table.
- * Pick two weekends to tackle the garage, sort goods for sale, donation and trash and plan a garage sale for the next weekend.
- * Put all bills and correspondence in an in-box. Quickly decide which solicitations are worth consideration, and toss the others in the recycle bin.

Melinda Hollis

Out of the Box of Citrus Heights

<http://outofthebox-intoalbums.com>

Organizes: clients' photos

Tips:

- * If you can't recollect the photo, it shouldn't be saved.
- * Dump duplicates. You do not have to keep every photo you ever took.
- * Do not store your photos in the garage, attic or outdoor shed. Your photos need to live where you live. Heat and moisture are enemies of photos.
- * Keep negatives, CDs or any other backup system away from your home so they are protected in a fire or flood.

Holly Graff

Clutter Control Angels of El Dorado Hills

www.cluttercontrolangels.com

Organizes: clients with chronic disorganization, attention deficit disorder and obsessive-compulsive hoarding.

Tips:

- * Make a "five-minute-or-less" plan. Set a time. Have trash bags, recycle bags, a donate box and gloves ready when you start.
- * Break it down into small steps for visible, positive results. Keep it to one hour or less and stay in that one area.
- * Start simple. Go through papers on the desk and floor. Create folders as needed.
- * Every evening, take five minutes to clear your desk and 15 minutes to put away items so they are ready for the next day.
- * Create easy systems, like a mail and bill-paying area and a donate box - donations go in the box and are dropped off weekly.

Gwynnae Byrd

Sac Home Transitions of Sacramento

www.sachometransitions.com

Organizes: clients primarily in the "sandwich generation" who are moving their parents or their children

Tips:

- * Mark boxes for which room they are going to, not where they came from -- try color-coding.
- * Mark boxes of items that will be used immediately in the new house. Make sure they are loaded last on the truck and unloaded first.
- * Reduce children's anxiety by ensuring their new rooms are set up quickly and as similar to their old rooms as possible.
- * Give each family member a "personal box" to keep track of items important to them during the move.
- * Keep all important paperwork with you during the move.

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