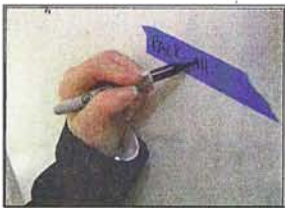


HOMIE

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Moving On Down

For Seniors Relocating From Longtime Homes to Smaller Spaces, A Little Help With the Physical Task and the Emotional Strain



By ANNIE GROER
Washington Post Staff Writer

Last Wednesday, a moving van pulled up to the three-level, four-bedroom Potomac home where Ernie and Ann Stacey had spent the past 33 years, rearing three children among furnishings and keepsakes acquired during a half-century of marriage.

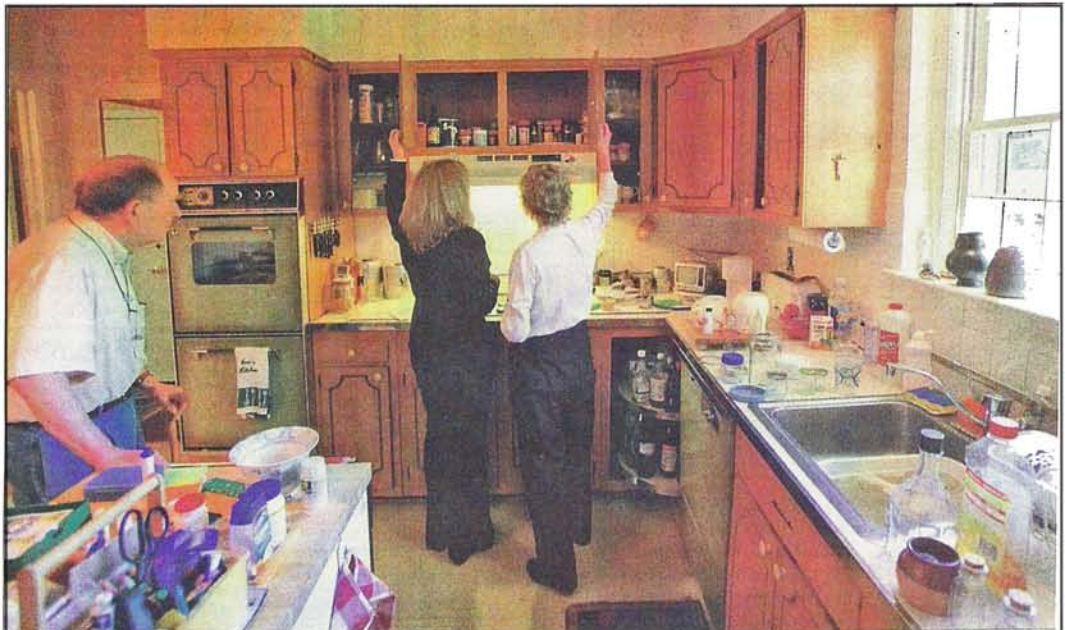
Twenty-four hours and 6.4 miles later, the couple walked into their new home, a two-bedroom retirement apartment in Bethesda, and found themselves blinking back tears of both joy and relief.

"Oh, my goodness, I can't believe these are my things. It's so gorgeous. It looks better than it did at home," said Ann Stacey, 73, as her husband, 81, echoed the sentiment with a simple, "I can't get over this."

The Navy had moved the couple 11 times during Ernie Stacey's military career. This move, No. 12, was overseen by Susie Danick, a retired nurse whose Gaithersburg company did everything from booking the van and planning where to put the furniture to buying a chandelier, adding closet storage and hooking up the cable TV.

Danick's firm, Transitional Assistance and Design, is one of a relatively new type of business that helps older people move from homes that have come to seem too large into new quarters that might easily seem too small and unfamiliar. They help clients choose the cherished furnishings to bring along and arrange the logistics of the move. Part amateur designer and part social worker, Danick said she tries to make the transition as comforting as possible, right down to photographing chairs, tables, rugs and knickknacks in the old house and re-creating as much of that familiarity as possible in the new surroundings.

With seniors living longer and leading healthier lives, their housing options have expanded, said Margit Novack, who started Moving Solutions in suburban Philadelphia 10 years ago and now has five franchises around the country. More people are moving to retirement communities and assisted living centers,



PHOTOS BY ILLUSTRATIONS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Clockwise from top: Move manager Susie Danick and Ann and Ernie Stacey will use blue tape to mark things that will go from the Staceys' Potomac home to an apartment in Bethesda; the three make kitchen choices; Ernie Stacey heads downstairs; the nearly bare den as things are cleared out; the couple study the layout of their new digs.



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Moving Out and Fitting In



PHOTOS BY LEN SPOONER FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Susie Danick and handyman Ted DeBremond, above, prepare the Staceys' apartment at Maplewood Park Place.

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and they need help with the physical chore of relocating as well as the emotional strain of downsizing, said Novack, the first president of the 80-member National Association of Senior Move Managers formed in 2002. She estimated that there are as many as 200 other firms that provide similar services.

Designer Pam Newton of Reston began specializing in senior moves six years ago. "We get the moving company, we help them get rid of things. We'll call in appraisers, refinishers, reupholstery people. We'll purchase new things and get the windows done, the walls. Sometimes we take out builder-grade carpeting and put in hardwood or tile floors. . . . In some cases we're pulling out the tub and installing a roll-in or step-in shower."

Senior move managers usually charge \$65 to \$125 an hour in this area, but costs vary depending on the services required and the region of the country. The Staceys paid Danick about \$3,500, which broke down to \$2,700 for her firm's labor plus \$800 for lighting, hardware and a bit of carpentry.

Newton recently charged about \$25,000 to relocate a woman who moved into a two-bedroom, assisted-living apartment half the size of her previous space. The total included her design fee as well as new furniture, custom painting, and the services of an organizer and project administrator.

The cost of the move is usually separate from the move manager's fees.

Even if seniors cannot afford a fully orchestrated move — which can include throwing out worn items, arranging a charity pickup, buying new furniture and "staging" the home for resale — their children, members of the sandwich generation who are often busy rearing their own offspring and working full time, may pick up the tab.

Senior move managers also appeal to family members who can't bear to oversee every detail of the long, wrenching process.

"We couldn't have done it," said Julie Snider, the Staceys' only daughter, who lives in Vienna. "There is just so much emotion involved in the move and leaving the house. One of my brothers lives in the area, too, but is really busy, and the other one is in North Carolina."

Downsizing is even harder on those making the move, said Erin Martinko, admissions director for Ring House (independent living) and Landow House (assisted living) in Rockville.

"For someone who has a lifetime's worth of accumulation, think of the volume and physical task of doing it. There are the emotions of our things: a woman giving up dining room furniture that she has served holidays meals on, her china closet with all her pretty things," said Martinko. "A lot of the losses are revisited. Often they have lost a spouse, they have lost their mobility. Maybe they are giving up driving, losing their vision, their hearing, their home."

Sometimes it is easier to let a stranger take charge, said Sue Ronnenkamp, a veteran health care administrator who founded Living Transitions in Austin in 1998.

"We are objective, we're not family. It's not my mom and dad or stuff we grew up with," she said. "The parents are more honest with me than with their own kids. They will say they're tired. And the emotional issues don't pop up with an outsider."

Ronnenkamp said she asks each client such



Contacts

For information on senior moving services:

- National Association of Senior Move Managers, www.nasmm.org.
- Guide to Retirement Living, a free local publication, can be ordered at 800-394-9990 or www.retirement-living.com.



A photo of the old place helps ensure proper knickknack placement in the new surroundings.

Expert Advice

- If you want to save money, enlist the aid of family and friends. You don't have to hire a move manager to benefit from the advice of a half dozen professionals!
- Start clearing out spare bedrooms, garage, basement and closets months (at least) before moving. Remember the mantra: Keep, sell, donate or discard.
- Tell everyone (as in, grown children) who is storing stuff at your place to claim it before it gets tossed.
- Address the tricky issue of dividing things among children. If harmony is threatened, consider an impartial round-robin or lottery system.
- Keep sentimental items such as family photos, special pieces of furniture, favorite books and dishes.
- Plan around activities you enjoy. If you play the piano, make room for it.
- Storage pieces are key. Many retirement apartments have minimal closet space.
- Take pictures of how furniture, artwork and knickknacks are arranged so the layout can be approximated in the new digs.
- Spend the night before and the day of the move with family or friends to avoid seeing the home dismantled.



Ann and Ernie Stacey prepare to leave their home of 33 years. Danick said she aims for comforting transitions.

Budgeting for a Move With the Pros

Because this new field requires no license or certification, fees can vary widely. Susie Danick of Transitional Assistance and Design charges \$65 per hour for her services, \$65 for her handyman and \$45 for packers and unpackers. In addition, she estimates that her service to downsize the average three- or four-bedroom home into a two-bedroom apartment runs

about \$1,900 to \$2,700. A one-bedroom is about \$1,200 to \$1,800. Neither amount includes the cost of the move, handyman services or new furnishings. Reston designer Pam Newton's average fee for a similar downsizing job can run \$10,000 to \$15,000 for planning and design, which does not cover the cost of the move, new purchases or renovation.

Creating a Smaller Living Space That Still Feels Like Home



Ernie and Ann Stacey react to their new home, above, then hold hands while they take in the scene.

PHOTOS BY GUY SPORN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST



Move manager Susie Danick shows Ann Stacey new closet shelves.



Ann Stacey marvels at the new den, above, and thanks Danick for all her work.

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common-sense questions as "Where do you spend your time? What chair do you sit in? Where do you work? It could be a desk, a dining room table. I moved a baby grand piano for one man. That was his priority."

Danick said the work is done in phases, an initial visit determines how much stuff is in the old house and how large the new place will be. She works with the family to decide what gets moved, donated, tossed or sold at an auction or estate sale. Several days before the move, she and the clients go through the house at

fixing blue tape to everything going into the van. On moving day, with the house soon to be stripped or left with minimal furnishings, Danick urges the occupants to spend the night with family or friends. The Staceys opted to splurge on a hotel. The next day, their daughter took them out to lunch before they headed to the new apartment.

Ann Stacey, shedding tears of joy, gets support from daughter Julie Snider.



Danick and her husband, Joel, who is also her business partner, already had spent six hours working with a handyman and several tapers to stock the refrigerator and kitchen cabinets, accessorize the bathrooms, hang clothes in closets. Armed with digital photos of the old house, they knew where every painting and throw pillow should go.

The arrival of the Staceys and Snider resembled the "reveal" on a home makeover television show, with the occupants returning to find a completely changed interior. However, the point of this exercise was to make the new digs look a lot like the old.

