

COVER STORY



KATHY KENNEY PHOTOS FOR THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

PUT YOUR HOUSE ON A CLUTTER DIET

THIS NEW YEAR'S resolution is to get trim. But instead of shedding some pounds, you'll reduce what's accumulated around the house.

By Nora Firestone
Correspondent

It's not inches from around the waist that she plans to shed in 2012. It's cubic yards of excess from around the house.

Alice Gregory purchased her parents' Virginia Beach home five years ago and inherited generations of its contents. She's tried to clean out

and organize to accommodate a clutter-free lifestyle and room for her growing home-based business.

"I needed an organized office," she said, but "I was getting lost in the memories."

In November, Gregory called upon professional organizer Nancy Watson of Harmony at Home Organizing, who took on the role of a home-

fitness trainer of sorts. With a fresh, objective perspective Watson guided Gregory to prioritize, set specific goals and weigh the importance of "stuff" in the organizational process. Shaping up for 2012 has become a joy for Gregory since then.

For many reorganizing the home ranks high among New Year's resolutions.



Homeowner Alice Gregory, left, considers what's worth saving with help from professional organizer Nancy Watson.

"As life's events unfold, the complexity of our daily lives increases," Watson said.

The most common clutter people face is an over-accumulation of papers, clothing and sentimental items, which they often simply don't know how or how often to address, she said. Avoidance and procrastination may settle in, perpetuating a draining lifestyle marked by disorganization and mental chaos.

The overstuffed room over her garage shaped the point of most contention for Gregory.

"It was always there, nagging at the back of my mind," she said. "Things do have energy," she noted, adding that negative energy can "drag you down ... you never feel like you can completely relax" with so much left undone.

Watson redirected Gregory's attention from the less-important guest bedroom she'd wrangled to the room over the garage, which, once complete, will serve as both storage for rarely used necessities and a resource library for business. Clearing and reorganizing took four people nine hours, but it has reduced her anxiety and increased energy, Gregory said.

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de-clutter

Determine what you need
Remove things as soon as you decide to part with them.

Think twice before making purchases.

Create new habits
Organize items by function, color, or alphabetical order - the way best for you.

Designate
Assign places for wallets, keys purses and mail.

Kids
Once children leave home, they must take most of their stuff with them.

about the cover

Cover design by Luis Vuilches, The Virginian-Pilot

First she had to learn what to keep, what to relinquish and how to store and organize those things she needed.

Letting go of heirlooms that her parents and grandparents loved “almost seemed like a betrayal, or a negation of who they were and how important they were in my life,” she explained.

“With many clients, that is the fundamental issue, the stumbling block” to progress, Watson noted. The professional reorganizer re-framed the situation for Gregory, asking if her parents would have intended to pass on a burden.

Watson, whose certification includes a specialty in chronic disorganization, helped Gregory determine the sentimental, monetary and useful values of things and guided her in “transferring ownership” of those that didn’t serve her, but might serve someone else via donation, auction or estate sale.

Value, Watson said, most often lies in sentiment and usefulness, not in the resale price.

The pair then assigned a home to every keeper and a system for maintaining a functional, productive and comfortable space.

Applying the same techniques during the course of everyday activities enables Gregory to gradually and logically systemize throughout the home.

To others embarking on re-organizing, Watson recommends determining what you need, what you love and what you can let go. Remove things from the home immediately after deciding



Alice Gregory's den after it was professionally organized by Nancy Watson.

to part with them. Office supplies may be donated to schools and charities; linens may be brought to animal shelters; some items may be sold. Take advantage of local shredding and electronics-recycling events, which she lists at her website, www.harmonyathomeorganizing.com.

If donating or recycling a computer, remove the hard drive first and destroy it with a hammer or by soaking it in water, advised Brian Byrne of Geeks on Call in Virginia Beach.

Create new habits for or-

ganizing and storing things by devising a system that flows with your natural thought process—perhaps according to function, subject, color-coding or alphabetical order, Watson said.

Designate a place for keys, wallets, mobile phones and purses that’s practical, manageable and neatly contained. Deal with mail immediately, feeding the junk to a heavy-duty cross-shredder and assigning an in box for daily access and files for bills to pay and pending items.

“Getting organized is re-

ally a lifestyle,” according to Jennifer Ford Berry, professional organizer and best-selling author of the “Organize Now” series.

Berry described it as an “inside-out process” based on “L.I.V.E.,” her acronym for “List”ing goals, schedules and tasks; assessing the “Internal environment” of stressors and negative thinking that present obstacles; creating a new “Vision” of the life one desires; and arranging the “External environment” to align with these ideals.

Paper “is everybody’s

worst nightmare,” Berry said, because it’s “going to show up at the house, every single day, without being invited.

Throughout the home start by organizing the space that’s “causing you the most stress,” Berry advised, but don’t underestimate the importance of the bedroom, which should be a sanctuary.”

Insist that children who’ve left home remove their belongings by a deadline; resolve not to keep more than one bin of mementoes per child, she added.

And then there’s that black hole of disorganization: the garage.

“It’s the largest room in the home, yet people treat it like an over-sized junk drawer,” said Jaime Diethofer, co-founder of GarageEnvy.com. Establish “the functionality of the space,” take measurements and draw a plan, he recommended. Utilize ceiling space, cabinetry and PVC slat-wall systems for storing sporting goods, tools, yard equipment and more. Consider features such as motorized garage door screens, thermostatic fans for temperature control. Folks can increase garage parking, too, without changing the home’s footprint by adding subterranean space or lifts to the ceiling.

Another way to control clutter? Don’t let in the door, organizers urge. Maintain an organized home by changing shopping habits. Beware of “the high of the buy,” Watson warned. Think twice before purchasing, and consider whether or not a new object will be worth the hours you’ve worked to pay for it. Realize that “savings is what you invest; it isn’t what you didn’t spend on an item that you purchased.”

We tend to forget, Berry said, “that the stuff we acquire requires maintenance, responsibility and energy.”

Don’t waste resources caring for the meaningless, she advised. People who value time more than things can free themselves for the “stuff” of life: family, dreams, fun and meaningful goals.

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