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Moving out – Experts share tips on making a move go easier

By Thor Carlson

Editor

The prospect of moving for an older homeowner can be daunting. For many, there's 40, 50, maybe even 60 years of accumulated items, and memories, stowed away in their home.

But the new reality for most older people is that a move to a smaller, easier to maintain homestead is somewhere out on the horizon. And from asking the experts, time spent considering factors in making a move on the front end will likely reap big rewards on the back end when moving day finally rolls around.

"I go to speak at a lot of seminars for older people about housing and moving," says Diane Bjorkman, co-owner of Gentle Transitions, a Twin Cities-based firm that specializes in organizing, packing and coordinating moves for older adults. "And I like to praise the crowds that come to those events because they're likely not going to get caught in a crisis where they have to move. It triggers them to start thinking about what they'd need to do if they move, downsizing, things like that."

Move organizing specialists

Gentle Transitions has been in operation for 14 years, with Bjorkman and her husband Bill Lehman having just purchased the business at the start of this year. And at a pace of making at least one move a day, the firm has a deep track record in senior moving.

"The best description I can come up with for people is to think of us like wedding planners of a move," Diane explains. "We talk people through the whole process, including planning the packing, how to take care of utilities, things like estate or garage sales. Quite often, clients will hire Gentle Transitions to even do the packing and unpacking, although the company doesn't do the actual moving.

"We try to replicate their old living spaces in the new spot as best as possible," Diane says. Crews will come in with a camera to capture the look of the old home, work with a floor plan of the new home on how to set things up and box up and label the items for a move.

“We typically can take just four to six hours to pack someone up for a move,” she continues. “Many of our clients physically just can’t make a move or can’t deal with a move because of memory loss. And with a lot of them, their kids are too busy to take time off from work to help them.”

Gentle Transitions charges an hourly rate for its services and will make a free visit to a home to give potential clients an estimate for its services. Diane says that the cost for a typical two-bedroom home move can range between \$1,200 and \$2,000.

“Movers just love it because everything is labeled and organized. It really helps to maximize the efficiency of the move,” Diane says.

Easing the emotional toll

Having worked with many senior moves, Gentle Transitions employees have also found themselves in a counselor’s role when moving day rolls around. And it’s not just the older adult making the move that needs the support.

“I can remember a recent move where we found the son sobbing in the kitchen, the moving process had become so stressful for that family,” Diane says. “In that case, we became the intermediary between the son and the parent to help the move go better.

“Making a move can become depressing for a lot of people and our crews often become their confidants,” Diane says. “They’ve seen what works for other people and they can help people making the move ease some of that stress.”

And a common strategy that they’ve seen work for others moving into a senior housing setting, she says, is to plan a number of visits to that new location before the move occurs. “It really helps to become so much more of a neighborhood before you even get there,” Diane says. “People come into the new place with a lot more connections and the adjustment goes that much better.”

And in many cases, a successful move has the movee with just one regret, Diane adds. “The one thing we hear from a lot of people after they’ve made a move is ‘I should have done this years ago.’ ”

Gentle Transitions is available by calling 952-944-1028 or 651-224-0335.
Information is also available at www.gentletransitions.com.

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