

Cut clutter

— for a more relaxing, organized home —

By Anna Troppens
Staff Reporter

Betty Huotari of Fenton might seem like a magician after her clients behold how they can turn cluttered spaces into neatly organized areas.

But Huotari, of Logical Placement, knows organization takes planning and work.

"There is definitely not a wand you can wave around, and if there was, I would like to buy one," she said.

For homes with children, a study by the University of Michigan says organization is important. The study followed a number of families and found that children who grew up in organized households ended up earning 15 to 20 percent more than those who grew up in cluttered homes.

There are different reasons homes become cluttered.

"I think a lot of people are very rushed," Huotari said. "We're trying to accomplish a lot in a short period of time."

A lot of times, both adults in the household work.

"We also are trying to be involved a lot with our children," she said.

This means attending extracurricular activities, cheering youngsters on as they play sports and helping them

with their homework.

"There is a lot less time left for getting organized," she said.

Signs of problem clutter include counter tops buried under paper and canisters covering kitchen surfaces. Bills might not be paid on time because they are buried or lost, and it might take a late night scramble to finish a project because research papers have been misplaced.

It can reach the point where people are overwhelmed when they walk into their homes. Clutter affects emotions, and they feel anxious instead of happy and calm at home.

"It's affecting the whole household," Huotari said.

Probably the No. 1 reason people haven't gotten organized is they haven't set aside the time to do it, she said.

It's important to have a plan, so Huotari meets with the client to decide what issues exist with the home, and how to solve them. This includes details such as where to drop keys and mail when family members enter the home. If there aren't places, or homes, for objects like keys and mail,

these items can be left in 10 different places.

"That's how things get lost," she said.

Paper clutter can become unsightly

Organization doesn't have to be expensive, she said. Dividers in drawers can be very helpful.



PHOTO BY ANNA TROPPENS

Brandy Sheldon (right) and Erin Newton (back) of The UPS Store in Fenton show organization products to Betty Huotari of Logical Placement in Fenton.

and cause problems with late bill paying. It's a good idea to have a bill paying center, where mail can be opened. Having a paper shredder there is useful for shredding unwanted pre-approvals. In addition, there should be stamps, envelopes and other supplies ready to use as well.

Huotari also suggests to her clients that they touch mail only once. Arranging for automatic withdrawals to be made from a bank account also can simplify bill paying. This can be convenient for those who travel a lot, and it reduces the amount of paper coming into the home. Consolidating credit cards also reduces the number of bills in the mail.

With tax time coming up, Huotari suggests having an envelope labeled "taxes 2005." All papers pertaining to taxes can be dropped into this, so everything is organized and at hand.

Cleaning clutter takes time. "Organizing in a weekend" is a very big misconception, she said. Homes are too big, and there are too many decisions to make. Instead, she suggests dedicating a few hours per Saturday morning for a month, focusing on a particular room each time until the entire house is organized.

Another factor that contributes to the length of time needed to organize a home is the speed of the resident's decision making. People make decisions differently, Huotari said. "It depends on your personality."

For example, some can decide very quickly whether they want to keep something, donate it or throw it away. Others hold onto the item, remembering when they wore it, for example, and thinking about whether they want to get rid of it or not.

A lot of families have issues with clothes and shoes. It helps to find a place to donate unwanted items to. This makes it more likely that someone will let them go since they won't be throwing them away, she said.

With kitchen utensils, remove

items that aren't used and make a temporary place for them somewhere else. If the cook needs an item, it can go back in the drawer.

Organization doesn't have to be expensive, she said. Dividers in drawers can be very helpful. These can organize kitchen utensils, while small baskets and bins are useful in linen closets. Huotari suggests finding out what size bins are needed instead of going out and buying them in all sizes, shapes and colors.

Creative Closets has products, such as shelving and drawers, needed to organize clothes closets, pantries, linen closets and more. Free consultations are available, so clients can see the design for the work and find out what it will cost.

A designer from the firm visits the client to develop a custom design for the area or areas in question. Installation also is available.

Many people believe they need to do all of the work of organizing their home, Huotari said. But, in addition to Creative Closets, there are a lot of businesses in the area that can help. Someone might avoid organizing a closet, for example, because the space isn't fixed and painted. A local business, such as Husband for a Day, can help with roadblocks like this, she said.

In addition, homeowners might decide to hire a housecleaning service instead of spending several hours per week cleaning. They could spend that time with their children instead, for example.

After the home is organized, the work isn't done. To keep clutter from creeping back, regular maintenance needs to be performed.

Information

Betty Huotari of Logical Placement can be contacted by calling (810) 348-1772. More information is available on the Internet at www.logicalplacement.com.

Creative Closets can be contacted by calling (810) 714-5125.

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