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HOMESTYLE

Cleaning up a cluttered home is a daunting task. But it comes easy to Monica Friel, whose specialty is providing...

Professional Organization

Is there a room in your house where you would just as soon keep the door closed so you aren't constantly reminded it needs organizing? Are you unnecessarily paying late fees because you can't seem to pay your bills on time?

Karen McManus suffered from these problems. Nearly four years ago she hired Monica Friel of Chaos to Order to take charge of her mess. "It was my birthday present to myself," said McManus.

"I brought her into one room" that was loaded with boxes, McManus said. "It took over six months to go through them and create a filing system." Now McManus' husband John Baca, can call her from out of town for a business file; she can find something in his files and fax him the information.

"It took us a year to get everything organized." McManus, who has a 5-year-old son, does a lot of volunteer work, and her husband has no clerical help in his job as a commodities trader. "My husband complained a lot about the cost at first, but he sees it is worth it," she said.

McManus and Baca now have an inventory with photos of everything they own. "I had saved receipts from everything we bought, but we would never have done this on our own," said McManus.

"We have a computerized address book we use as a reference for everything," she said. We have copies on every floor of our house so we don't have to go running to find a phone number. And my husband and I each keep one in our organizers.

"Once you do it, you realize how it simplifies your life."

McManus said it was "kind of stressful to go through our papers and learn how to get rid of things. If I save something for a month-an article or a recipe and don't use it, I know I'm not going to. There's a difference between our intentions and our actions.

"There's a discipline in sitting down with someone every week and organizing...I feel more in control of my home life."

While McManus finally gave in to the need to be organized, Friel has always been



AL PODGORSKI/SUN-TIMES
Professional Organizer Monica Friel (right) shows client Carey Meredith how to organize storage space.

this way. "I have always been organized; I always liked order," said Friel. She organized her friends' homes so often she decided to open a business.

Friel said there are lots of people who consider her service a luxury, but some people need it. She has been in business for seven years. She employs five people as organizers while she stays home keeping the business, her life and her family organized.

"We come in and work one-on-one," she said. "We help create a good filing system. I like to tell people to think of their filing system where all current papers are. If they are in a file, they are stacked vertically and are easier to find."

Friel will even give people a filing system for the myriad catalogs they receive in the mail. Her company also organizes kitchens, basements, garages, even photos. "The toughest jobs we do are for the very organized people who want to do it even better," she said.

Some of our clients are very messy. The can't throw out newspapers ever and have a little path through their home to get around. I have seen it as bad as where it's all the way up to the ceiling. Some people

aren't ready to work with us, because they're not at a point where they're willing to get rid of anything at all."

McManus said she couldn't be organized "without someone as skilled as Monica. One of the things I do with her is organize photo albums. If we ever have a fire, that's what I want to take with me."

She said she had created albums for each of their trips. She annotates the photos and keeps ticket stubs, "It almost seems like a luxury but in terms of creating our family history, it is invaluable," said McManus. "That's where we go beyond the mundane."

Friel said she works a lot with plastic boxes, drawer organizers, label maker and filing folders.

"One of the good tricks is to use box bottom file folders and post-it notes. We start with a temporary filing system," she said.

"It's my job to research what's out there. We see people who go out to the stores and buy and buy [organizing supplies] and don't know how to use them and they pile up in the basement.

McManus said she believes she and her husband have reached "a level of organization that makes life more balanced. I still lose the piece of paper we need the most though.

"My son has his toys more organized and understands where things go. To me it's teaching responsibility. He has to keep track of them."

McManus had a difficult time at first throwing things out that Friel suggested. "After throwing out a couple of things I later felt I wanted, we now negotiate if I want to keep things for a couple of months and then decide," she said.

"I have files on the house, our son's health, personal documents, interest files, tickets for events. Once we started doing it, we created files for everything. I can take on other things in our life because I am not too bogged down. I feel I run our home like a business."

Friel said her philosophy "isn't that everything had to be color coded and perfect. It's about efficiency."

Chaos to Order charges \$45.00 an hour with a three-hour minimum. "In order to really dig in," Friel said, "we need three hours."

Chaos to Order, (847) 825-8400