

Moving older parents to smaller places is emotional, important task

By Kathy Carrier | The Grand Rapids Press

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“Moving is very stressful, not only for the person who needs to move, but their loved ones,” said Barb Bestrom, of Caring Transitions of West Michigan.

“It’s right-sizing, not necessarily downsizing,” explains Bestrom’s husband, Bryan, co-owner of the local franchise that is part of a national company that helps families and individuals move, downsize and disperse household goods.

The Bestroms started the business after Bryan Bestrom’s experience helping his grandmother (now deceased) make a senior move.

“Right-sizing is a goal of improving lifestyle based on today’s needs not yesterday’s.”

Listening to an elderly parent and what they want when making a move is important, Bestrom stresses. Take their needs into consideration, he adds.

“Is the potential new residence close to family, does it have a proximity to services, community or church organizations, and is it a safe environment?”

“The most important points are to be well-organized and have empathy for your parent,” said Bill Robberson, of San Francisco. “What would you want, if it was you?”

Last summer, Robberson helped move his mom, Stevie Robberson, into an elder care facility in Grand Rapids.

“Finding a place for my mom and the timing was a process and lots of work — mainly because I wanted to be sure she knew they were her choices,” Robberson said. “Ensure your parent is ready for the next step, and that it is their choice.”

Moving day

When moving day arrives, try to arrange the new home with some of the same familiar comforts, Barb Bestrom said — it will help ease the stress on an older person.

“Mirror or duplicate their former home with the same colors and some of the same furniture,” she said. “Put the bed against the same wall, and familiar items in the same places, according to what your parent is used to.”



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Barb and Bryan Bestrom, owners of Caring Transitions of West Michigan, help Bryan’s mother, Elaine Hoopingarner, sort through some of her household treasures. For most families, moving an older parent or loved one is never easy — especially if it’s a move from a home the person has lived in for years.

Before a loved one moves in, have the bed made, arrange clothing and personal items in closets and drawers, and have essentials in the bathroom and kitchen organized as they were before.

She said this helps make the new residence feel like home.

One of the difficulties of such a move is giving up treasured pieces due to lack of space. There may not be room for the family dining room set, all of the living room furniture or any number of other personal, family and household goods accumulated during a lifetime.

“Identify what family members may want, what could be donated and what has any resale value,” Barb Bestrom said. “In the end, many belongings end up finding a home, and you don’t end up losing anything that may have sentimental value.”

Sorting things through

“Even before we moved my mother to an elder care home, she had started dividing up the family photos and had created a special album for each child,” said Paula Kopp, of Wyoming.

Three years ago, Kopp helped her mom and stepfather, the late Robert and Charlene Richards, move from their home in Wyoming to an assisted living facility.

“They were able to take some familiar furniture, plus they were able to take their dog, which really helped.”

“When it comes to our elders and, in particular, parents who have been in a home for many years, moving is one of the most — if not the most — inconvenient and uncomfortable experiences anybody can ever go through,” said Amy Miller, Realtor and associate real estate broker with RE/MAX SunQuest.

“The idea of moving all the stuff that has accumulated in closets, basements, attics, garages and our lives, can be just too overwhelming for most people to handle,” Miller said, adding such a time can be very challenging for the elderly as well as for their grown children, some of whom may live in another city or state.

When an elderly loved one has to move, much of that clutter is left behind — often in a loved one’s former home. Items need to be cleaned, updated and given a fresh, new look before they can be sold.

“It really was and still is about organization, great assistance and advice, and asking for help in the right places,” Robberson said, adding he relied on trusted friends and professionals in Grand Rapids to help manage his mom’s move and the eventual sale of her home, and he also visited every four to six weeks, for several days at a time, to oversee the process.

TIPS

Ask yourself ...

Although living in one’s home may become more difficult as a person ages, it still is hard to know when the time is right to make a move. If you have trouble with any of the following, it may be time to downsize.

- When you need to keep things clean and orderly, but are physically unable or have no energy or desire to do so.
- When you no longer can locate things or remember where they are stored.
- When you no longer enjoy memorabilia because it’s lost in the clutter.
- When you cannot move around your home comfortably.
- When you neglect other pursuits because you have to care for things at home.

Source: Caring Transitions of West Michigan

On the Web

A Place for Mom: The discussion board lets you talk to others coping with elder care challenges and offers links to stories about related topics, such as **pet separation** and **convincing mom and dad to move** when they don’t want to.

National Association of Senior Move Managers: nasmm.org

Books

- "Don't Toss My Memories in the Trash: A Step-by-Step Guide to Helping Seniors Downsize, Organize and Move," by Vickie Dellaquila
- "Moving Mom and Dad: Why, Where, How and When to Help Your Parents Relocate," by Sarah Morse
- "Moving for Seniors: A Step-by-Step Workbook," by Barbara H. Morris

“Being long-distance, it’s important to set up a support system of friends that can help,” Robberson said. Coordinating with siblings also is key, as is delegating which family members will handle different aspects of the move, such as legal, financial and real estate matters.

Estate sale

“I ask my clients to have the estate sale ‘now’ instead of waiting until they’ve died and leave the job up their children,” Miller said. “This one thing makes a huge difference.”

Although many household or personal items may have sentimental value, they may not be priceless antiques, nor should they be considered junk.

“All of the items should be (handled) with care and respect,” Bryan Bestrom advised.

“We sorted out the family stuff, donated some items, then had an estate sale service come in for anything left that had some value,” Paula Kopp said. “The final step was a Dumpster.”

“You can’t keep everything,” Kopp said. “But, some of the things that meant the most to me, I packed in boxes to save.”

To clear out a home quickly for resale, Miller recommends having an estate sale. Once the home is cleared out, Miller develops what she calls a “punch list” for any repairs, updates and housing code requirements that need to be addressed.

“Clearing everything out of the home gives the contractors easy access to the house for repairs, plus it allows us to update, remodel or easily stage the house, if necessary, to get it ready to sell,” she said.

Revamping

Miller also encourages family members to get involved with the revamping process to quickly fix up the home for sale.

“We peeled off all of the wallpaper, ripped up the carpeting, then painted the walls a neutral color,” Kopp said. To shorten the time frame for a sale to happen, often within a 30-day period, Miller also arranges such things as the appraisal, required inspections and title search.

“Do the last things first,” she advised.

Some elderly folks, though, may have difficulty accepting that the house they’ve lived in for years may need a completely new look in order to appeal to a younger homebuyer.

“People would much rather buy a finished house ... than buy one they have to update,” Kopp said.

Updating may mean a number of things, from power washing the home’s exterior and touching up paint to ripping out dated carpet, refinishing floors and removing wallpaper. A coat of fresh paint in a neutral color, installing new bathroom fixtures and replacing overgrown plantings all help revamp an older home’s look to be more appealing for sale.

The process really works, Miller said. “In the end, everybody is happy.”

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