

## New business helps people transition through phases of life

by Terri Johnson

**October 20, 2009**

**LEXINGTON, KY** - Your mother has decided to downsize and move into assisted living. The big decisions are made. Now comes the hard part. Who gets the massive dining room hutch? Who gets the china? What will you do with her 1960s hat collection?

Caring Transitions, a new Lexington-based company helps people move from one stage of life to another with assistance for moving, downsizing and liquidating personal belongings. The company's clients include baby boomers wanting to simplify, divorcing couples requiring the division of assets, elderly couples transitioning to an assisted living community, or those dealing with the death of a loved one and a lifetime accumulation of treasures and "stuff."

The fact is that people are living longer. Our parents may live well into their 80s or 90s. This puts a unique strain on current baby boomers who are trying to juggle jobs, families and their parents' aging process.

Caring Transitions' owner, Lea Nugent, makes life easier for clients in these situations. She helps people address big considerations – goals, time frame and budget. But she also helps with the smaller considerations.

"I help with decisions like what to do with all the stuff that's accumulated in the basement, what furniture will fit in a new, smaller space or the emotional strain of going through their parent's things," Nugent said.

Nugent bought the Lexington franchise for Caring Transitions in July 2009. The Cincinnati-based company has locally owned and operated offices in the United States and Canada, including Louisville and Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky locations.

She completed her certified senior adviser (CSA) training and began working with clients in September. The CSA certification means she has completed a comprehensive course that addresses all aspects of aging – health, social and financial.

Nugent's fees are based on hourly rates or on a percentage of sales for estate or online auctions.

Like some of her customers, her own transition was unexpected. Originally from Arkansas, she earned degrees in psychology and in business from Southern Methodist University and an MBA from Oklahoma City University. She worked for IBM and Lexmark in Dallas and transferred to the Lexmark corporate office in 1995.

After years in sales and marketing management with IBM, then with Lexmark, Nugent's entire department was downsized in December 2008. She experienced typical feelings of confusion and anxiety but then she said she saw losing her job as liberating.

"I was blessed to have a great career for years. I got to travel and work with great people," she said. "Now, here was my chance to step in and be a valuable resource to the community on a much more personal level. Most people don't get that opportunity."

Now, she works from her home office.

“At first I wasn't sure if I could work at home. I thought I would be doing home projects or laundry all the time,” she said.

But she's found that it works. Nugent's husband is also a franchise owner for Great Clip hair salons.

“He works in his office, and I work in mine. Sometimes we meet for lunch in the kitchen. It's great.”

Nugent said she likes the Caring Transitions concept because it offers a much-needed service to the growing senior market. And that market is growing fast. The number of seniors is projected to swell from 39 million in 2010 to 53 million in 2020. In the next decade, people 85 years and older will be part of the fastest-growing age group.

Lexington and central Kentucky is a good market for seniors. It's beautiful and offers a great quality of life for seniors of any age, with attributes like safety, affordability, access to recreation, arts and culture and access to health care.

With all of her clients, Nugent brings unique skills. For a move, she can assess which items have value and which don't. She helps clients dispose of items via estate sales or online auctions, like Craigslist or eBay. For items that cannot be sold, she often recycles or donates them to local charities.

“I want my business to be as green as possible,” she said. “It is easy to just throw things in the dumpster, but that is not the responsible thing to do.”

For older clients, the transitions are often serious and sensitive. Whether a client is moving into a condo or into a nursing home, she said part of her job is to make sure everyone is part of the discussion.

“I talk to the clients about their goals. Then we talk to the kids,” she said. “I'm talking with area priests/preachers, health care discharge planners, eldercare attorneys, bank trustees, assisted living directors, geriatric care managers, etc. I want to become a valuable community resource on senior and eldercare issues.”

Nugent said the most important thing anyone can do is try to be as proactive as possible about retirement planning and aging-related changes.

Nugent's advice for people facing lifestyle shifts is to embrace the change and take advantage of the resources you have. She said she's optimistic and enthused about the next phase of her life as she enters her own “second chapter.”

“A year ago, I would have never expected to be here, but every morning I wake up and can't wait to get to work,” she said.

*Caring Transitions presentations for organizations “Five Wishes” – Living wills in laymen's terms “Who Gets Grandma's Yellow Pie Plate?” – Helping families discuss family assets*

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