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Firm eases burden as seniors downsize

Owner tries to take the stress out of moving

By Bill Wolfe

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Gary Andersen knew the time had come this year to move his mother from her Louisville home into a local retirement community. Mary Andersen is still active and mobile, but at nearly 90, she needed living space all on one level -- and something smaller than the house where she had spent the last 30 years.

But the move demanded a lot of hands-on attention. After three decades in the house, the volume of accumulated belongings was "overwhelming. The emotional attachments were unbelievable. And the bottom line was, there just wasn't room for everything at the new location," he said.

But whom to turn to? "I live in Michigan and am one of four boys, and none of them are anywhere near Louisville," said Andersen, of Grosse Pointe. "Living up here, I didn't know who to even start calling for all the different things required for getting somebody moved."

That's when he heard about Michael Simpson and his Louisville business, Caring Transitions, a company that helps seniors downsize to condominiums, apartments or assisted-living residences. "It was a concept I was not familiar with," Andersen said, "but when I heard about it I said, 'This could be my answer.' "

Simpson "got in touch with my mother and he was so good at building an instant trust with her," Andersen said, helping her accept the need to sell her old home and many of her belongings.

Simpson, a Louisville native, bought a franchise from the Cincinnati-based Caring Transitions parent



By Pam Spaulding, The Courier-Journal
Michael Simpson's Caring Transitions franchise helps seniors downsize to condominiums, apartments or assisted-living residences. He looked over some of a client's items out to be sold.



Pam Spaulding, The Courier-Journal
These are items Michael Simpson arranged for a sale for a move. It's important to "try to help that individual eliminate some of that stress of making those decisions," he said.

company in November 2007 and opened Jan. 1 after a 25-year career in television advertising.

"I knew I wanted to do something in senior care," said Simpson, a graduate of Waggener High School and the University of Louisville who had moved back to Louisville in 2003 after working at several out-of-state TV stations.

With an aging American population, he saw that "there are going to be a lot of people now and in the future that will need some help transitioning," Simpson said. "Most seniors want to stay at home as long as they can. But there comes a time for many of them when they just cannot."

Caring Transitions tries to take the stress out of the move -- and that includes helping senior clients face the realities of life in smaller quarters. "We try to diplomatically and delicately help them make those decisions about the things that they need to take with them versus the things that they simply want to take but really don't have room for."

Moving can be a tough time for clients, who are often "going through a very emotional and very stressful period," he said. It's important to "try to help that individual eliminate some of that stress of making those decisions."

After the client and family members decide what belongings to part with, Simpson schedules an estate sale -- arranging and pricing the merchandise and administering the sale. "Most of the gross proceeds go back to the clients," he said. "We keep a small percentage of the gross proceeds from the estate sale to fund our business."

That percentage varies for each client, depending on the size of the sale and value of the estate. In some cases, sales may be made through consignment shops or eBay. Anything that can't be sold is donated to charity.

Caring Transitions is a relatively new franchising company, with 25 to 30 units nationwide, Simpson said. His franchise area covers eastern Louisville, but with no other franchisees in the area, he can take clients from anywhere in the metropolitan area, he said.

For now, Simpson's running a one-man show -- but he does have lots of support from family and friends, he said. "We're hoping in 2009 we can have some employees on board," he said, and he may buy a second local franchise down the road.

Reporter Bill Wolfe can be reached at (502) 582-4248.

Additional Facts

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transitions

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