

Professional organizer helps south-end family get organized

By Anna Quon

South-end resident Jan Napier knew she'd done the right thing when she asked professional organizer Jane Veldhoven to work on her garage.

"I found my husband peacefully sitting in the garage, cleaning his golf clubs and listening to classical music," she says. "You could barely walk in there before it was organized. It was such a happy sight."

Indeed, Napier's garage is a thing of beauty. White-painted shelves line the walls, which are stacked with containers labelled "Christmas" or "Sports." Tools hang neatly over a workbench, under which an IKEA cart, holding cleaning supplies, is stored.

Veldhoven, tall and attractive enough to be a model, brushes dust off her slacks after positioning a hammer on the wall. The former office administrator and sales manager is doing her dream job. "In most cases when people call me, they have so much stuff, they have no idea where to start," she says, adding with the laugh, "The more, the better!"

Veldhoven's friends recognized her talent for putting stuff in order long before she'd heard of professional organizing. It wasn't until she read about it in a magazine, which also included a Web site for the Professional Organizers in Canada, that she realized it was a career choice.

Veldhoven started her full-time business, Get Organized! Professional Services, about a year ago, buoyed by the organizing trend popularized in magazines like the one she had read and Oprah's *O*.

Her brochure lists some signs that point to the need for a professional organizer.

These include: feeling stressed about the mess in your home or office; missing deadlines at work; feeling overwhelmed by how much you have to do each day; losing track of important documents or items; and spending too much time looking for things. Even moving to a new home could create a need for the help of a professional organizer.

Organizing comes naturally to some and not to others, says Veldhoven, but she adds, "you can learn it." In fact, not all of her clients are chronically disorganized, but, like Napier, have accumulated more stuff than they know what to do with.

"The biggest problem is the stuff doesn't have a home," says Veldhoven, who has organized everything from closets to corporate offices, with her specialty being the home office.

The first thing Veldhoven does when she gets a new job is to meet with her client, preferably two to three weeks beforehand, to discuss their expectations, and to decide what's realistic, given their budget. Then she follows a five-step process Making SPACE, which all organizers use. SPACE stands for Sorting, Purging, Assigning a home, Containerizing and Equalizing (which means that every time you bring in something new, you have to get rid of something else.)

Veldhoven says that when people try to organize on their own, they often make the

mistake of buying the container first, which is sometimes unusable if the right stuff won't fit into it, or if it won't fit into its assigned home. "Everyone has containers they don't use and books on organizing," she says with a laugh.

The fact that more people are now working from home means that they are isolated from the corporate structure that helps employees stay organized. But even employees who work in traditional offices need help with organizing, and Veldhoven has sometimes done half-hour workshops for corporate employees followed by a day of individual coaching to help



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Jane Veldhoven organizes the Napier's garage.

them reorganize their work spaces.

Corporations, she says, "look at this as a chance to clean up, but also as a training opportunity for their employees." It's something she hopes to do more of, and she sees the need in a world where downsizing and restructuring have often left one person doing the job of one-and-a-half or two people, with no time for organizing.

But Veldhoven doesn't do it all on her own. She works with carpenters and interior decorators, and gives her clients homework, such as the sometimes-difficult job of deciding what needs to be kept and what can be thrown away. Napier, who professes to love organizing, got into the spirit of things by having a yard sale, and even painted the walls and floors of the garage.

"Once you call in a professional, you have to do it," she says.

Veldhoven likes the reaction she gets from her clients, once they get started. "It makes people feel so good to get rid of their junk," she says.