

# Keep. Toss. Donate

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Linda Ely believes there are two types of organizers in this world: the ones who are born organized, and the ones who are self-made.

"I'm the second one, I wasn't born an organizer," Ely said. "I didn't fall in love with it until I reached what I call organizing rock bottom."

Ely is the owner of Organizing Matters, which she founded about 20 years ago in Houston. She moved to New Jersey four years ago, and migrated her business.

She offers organizing and decluttering services and tips to homes in Monmouth and Ocean counties. Her business started after she found herself overwhelmed and overwhelmed.

"My life was a mess," Ely said, "As I pulled myself out of it, I just fell in love with what it did for me and the control I felt. You can't control the weather. You can't control people, but you can control the stuff in the world."

## Make time

Ely said clutter can easily creep up on you, especially in times of transition or stress.

She recommends going through your home and going through every item in your house.

"I try to touch everything in my home once a year," Ely said. "What that does is it forces you to acknowledge that it's there. If you can't touch it, that's a problem."

"If you're on the phone and your hands are idle,

## ORGANIZE YOUR STUFF

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**FASHION FIX:** 732-233-3129, fashionfix1@aol.com or fashionfixnj.com

**ORGANIZE AND MAINTAIN:**  
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**ORGANIZING MATTERS:**  
732-807-5055, info@organizingmatters.com or organizingmatters.com

pull your desk drawer open and just meander through. and ask, "Do I still want that? Do I still love that? Does that still serve me?"

She said the minute you forget about an item you have in your home is when it starts to take up unnecessary space.

Marina Mahnken, the owner of the professional home organizing business Declutter My Clutter, said it's all about forming healthy habits.

Declutter My Clutter offers services in Monmouth and Middlesex County.

"A huge mistake I see with clients is they're obsessed with this idea of perfection," Mahnken said. "They say, 'I'll get to it later because I don't have time right now to make it perfect.' Don't let perfect be the enemy of done."

Websites like Pinterest, while they can be great for grabbing ideas, also can be detrimental to progress, Mahnken said.

Don't get caught up in unrealistic goals. Instead, make the "right time" for



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Organizing Matters offers organizing and decluttering services and tips to homes in Monmouth and Ocean counties.

yourself throughout the day.

"Everybody's so overwhelmed. Nobody's able to focus on what they're doing," Mahnken said. "A big thing when I come into a home is making sure we keep the focus. I make sure they limit their distractions. I make sure their children are being taken care of, they're not looking at emails, they're not accepting phone calls."

## Start small

John Odalen, the owner of Organize and Maintain, based in Trenton, and the author of "Real Value: New Ways to Think About Your Time, Your Space and Your Stuff," said to always start small.

"You don't have to accomplish everything at once," Odalen said.

When it comes to decluttering, it's not a one-and-done deal. He coaches his clients to not just transform their homes, but also their mindsets.

"Think about how the space is going to look and feel and operate once it's decluttered," Odalen said. "That will motivate you to continue."

With a closet, weed out what you don't wear and imagine getting dressed in five minutes in the morning versus 20 minutes, he said.

Try dividing your de-organizing project into sections.

Christie Maruka, Jersey-based stylist and founder of the mobile clothing store Fashion Fix, said she tells her clients to divide their closet

## Experts offer advice on how to declutter your home

into three piles — keep, toss and donate.

"The majority of women have so much clutter in their closet and it's all items that they never wear," Maruka said. "I would say 30 percent of the stuff they actually wear and 70 percent is just laying in the closet."

Start with the "Keep" pile, then go through any items that are ripped, torn or stained and put them in the "Toss" pile. Lastly, go through the items you never wear with tags still attached, unflattering fits or old trends.

## Problem areas

Entrance points, like a mud room, is a major problem area, Mahnken said. Homeowners will just come in and drop or throw all their stuff down without any system.

Ely noted that it's important to create "drop zones" for your home. You need a place to put the handbags, the backpacks, the totes, the coats.

"Make yourself put all that junk away by the end of every night," Ely said. "You might not be able to every single night, but try, try try."

Main areas of the home also can be challenging.

Mahnken said during her initial free consultation, she'll do an hour-long walk through of the home.

"I get to see everything and really hear what they have to say," Mahnken said. "What has been working for them, what hasn't."

Whenever she reaches a problem room, she always asks her client, "What's the function of this room?"

"The answer is not always what you think. There (have) been so many times where I walk

into a home and the original intention for a room isn't what the person is using it for. It's about what your purpose is."

## Let go

Ely knows it's much easier letting go once you find the perfect new home for your once loved possessions. She recommends your local consignment shops. For old books, check out your local library. Try Habitat for Humanity in Monmouth County (habitatmonmouth.org) or Northern Ocean Habitat for Humanity (nohfh.com). Audrey Taylor, the restore donations scheduler at Habitat for Humanity in Monmouth County, said the Monmouth location is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesdays to Saturdays. They also offer free pickup.

They accept furniture in good condition, dining and kitchen wear, tables, chairs, major appliances eight years or younger, handbags and jewelry. They do not accept clothing or shoes.

Linkages, 4261 Route 33 in Tinton Falls, is a favorite of Mahnken's, who likes to keep it local. Linkages provides transitional housing options and case management for families at risk. They accept kitchen supplies and small household items. More information is at 732-922-0400. Mahnken has a list of local charities and consignment shops on her website, decluttermyclutter.com, under the "Resources" tab.

Maruka recommends Rebagg.com for selling handbags, Therealreal.com and Tradesy.com for designer luxury clothing and accessories.