

[HOME & GARDEN]

Snapshots of Kathy Hadden's Evanston living room before and after a session with organizational guru Linda Goldman and Altogether Organized.



before



after

Sorting Over

EVER FEEL LIKE YOU NEED SOMEONE TO COME IN AND REORGANIZE YOUR LIFE? THERE'S A HIGHLAND PARK BUSINESS THAT'LL DO JUST THAT

By Sherry Thomas

Kathy Hadden remembers a time when her life was, quite literally, a mess. The kitchen in her Evanston condo was so cluttered it didn't function. Her living room so littered with boxes and bags she had to forge a path from one end to the other just to navigate it.

She was lonely. She was depressed. And despite all that, she couldn't stop shopping, accumulating more and more stuff.

"My younger daughter kept threatening to call Oprah," says Hadden, a retired federal investigator. "My mom was a hoarder, so I came by it very naturally — but she had an enormous house."

Soon she admitted what became obvious to everyone around her: She had a shopping problem and a stuff problem, and things would have to get worse before they could get better.

There would be weeks of sorting and organizing, and letting go of habits and objects that were weighing down her life.

But Hadden says she couldn't have even

attempted the transformation if it weren't for the guidance of Highland Park organizational guru Linda Goldman and her staff.

"Linda is a goddess as far as I'm concerned," Hadden says. "They came over, and we talked and we talked. We set a date, but before they left they emptied my front hall, which was completely filled with boxes. I had been saving these boxes to get rid of (other) things."

While Hadden is one of the more extreme cases Goldman's Altogether Organized has taken on, her symptoms were classic.

"There are a lot of people who have trouble letting go of what they have," says Goldman, who launched her home- and office-organization business in 2002. "The hardest part is starting. But once you start, it feels so good and then it gets easier."

Staying organized has become easier for Hadden, but she still needs help. And the Altogether Organized staff is always available for follow-up

visits, if needed, to help clients stay on track and practice good "patterns" for controlling clutter.

For Goldman, that's one of the most important parts of her job. Sharing expertise. Finding solutions. Plotting patterns. Teaching techniques.

"We're helping people purge and helping them set up the space so it's functional and it makes sense to them," she says. "We're helping them develop systems they can live with."

"I think most of us operate more efficiently if we know where to find our stuff," says North Shore designer Karen Rish. "When I come home from work, I don't want to have to look for files. I don't want to have to look for the right mixing bowl."

Goldman and Rish often find themselves collaborating on projects, each doing what they do best to help the client maximize space and create relaxing, restful retreats.

"My comfort level is so much greater," Hadden says. "I'm not hiding in my bedroom anymore."

Rish adds, "What I do and what Linda does isn't about hiding things away. It might be about unifying a collection, or amassing a wall of family photographs as opposed to having odd pictures all over the room."

So when Rish designs a kitchen, Goldman organizes it. When a client has a beautiful collection, Goldman finds fresh ideas to utilize or display it.

"When I approach any design project, I always think about form as well as function," Rish says. "Inherent in that, I think, is a certain level of organization."

We don't expect Goldman to share all of her secrets, but she did come up with five quick tips to help anyone afflicted with a disorganization dysfunction clean up their clutter — and their lives.

- 1 Let go of things you don't like or no longer have a use for.
- 2 Make sure you have a place for every category of item in your home.
- 3 Store those items in a place that makes sense and is easily accessible.
- 4 Spend time pulling things away every day. They are going to get out of order; carve out and have a plan for when you're going to put them back in their place.
- 5 Come up with a system for all the major tasks and stick with it!

For more information about Altogether Organized, call 847/266-9166 or go to www.altogetherorganized.org.