

No. 1 'to do' item is to get organized

By Patrick Ball/Staff Writer

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Bedford, Mass. - Almost every house on a street is a big, disorganized mess, according to Karen Kenney, a professional organizer from Bedford.

"A lot of people are confused when it comes to getting organized," said Kenney. "They feel like they're missing a gene, or wondering why they can't keep up."

People generally aren't doing anything wrong, per se, they're just so inundated with everyday life, and the associated clutter, that having an extra pair of eyes and hands is helpful, Kenney said.

"You get up in the morning and you hope to get X, Y and Z done. But, before you know it, the phone rings," she said. "Most of us are going in so many different directions; it's nice to have someone to say, 'Why don't you do it this way.'"

Kenney, 44, got her chops while working as a travel agent. The "vacation girl was drowning in brochures," and Kenney offered to help. "That was what introduced me to filing cabinets," she said. "And I loved it."

Kenney works with downsizing seniors, busy parents, CEOs and entrepreneurs. She works in three-hour intervals, performing tasks ranging from paying bills to cleaning garages to establishing filing systems. Some clients, who are "chronically disorganized," Kenney sees weekly, and she works with others "kind of quarterly."

The first thing Kenney tells most of her clients is to "stop bringing it in." She encourages clients to stop subscriptions to newspapers or magazines they don't read, and donate to others unnecessary items around the house.

"I tell them quite honestly around the holidays, 'Stop giving people stuff,'" Kenney said. "Give them a gift certificate; do something different than a gadget or a thing. Kids, if you see them on Christmas, they're so overloaded with the 9 million things they get."

She also stresses the importance of planning. From meals to what the kids are doing to "what's going on in your world and your spouse's," Kenney says "if you don't plan, you will never be organized."

Kenney said her rates are "pretty reasonable," but wouldn't divulge the actual amounts. "Some people can't afford the services," she said, "so I also offer the DVD."

When she started OrganizingWORKS! in May of 2000, Kenney figured she would eventually pen her addition to the infinite collection of self-help organizing books. In fact, she started writing one, but soon realized that not even she, a professional organizer, actually helped herself by reading the books. Kenney attributes the idea for her DVD to this awareness.

Her DVD, “The Organizing Cheerleader – The Busy Person’s Guide to Getting and Staying Organized,” is loaded with lessons from the adult education organizing classes Kenney has taught at Bedford and Woburn high schools, and will teach this spring at Middlesex Community College.

The idea behind the DVD is this: People can watch it at their own pace, whenever they start a new organizing effort. Kenney will have a booth at HOMESHOW (www.acshomeshow.com) Feb. 1, 2 and 3 at the Shriners in Wilmington, Mass.

“It’s going to be three long days,” Kenney said. “But I just wanted to try it.”

Kenney has long wanted to do the Home Show. She has done a lot of smaller events, like Bedford Day or Middlesex Community College’s annual craft fair. But at Home Show, she is not so interested in handing out business cards; she wants to sell DVDs.

“With organizing,” Kenney said, “they might take your card and it will take them five years to find it.”

For more information about OrganizingWORKS! or “The Organizing Cheerleader – The Busy Person’s Guide to Getting and Staying Organized,” check out www.organizingworks.net and www.theorganizingcheerleader.com.