

Cutting through life's clutter with Empty the Nest

Posted under Burnsville, Dakota Co. Tribune Business Weekly on Wednesday 14 September 2011

Burnsville company specializes in wall-to-wall property removal.

by Joseph Palmersheim

When it came time for Hamel resident Genevieve Dykhoff to put her house up for sale, the thought of cleaning out more than 50 years of life's treasures was simply overwhelming.

"(My husband George and I) have lived in this house since 1954, and we have a two-car garage and a shed in the back," she said. "I'm almost 80, and I thought to myself, 'What am I going to do with all of that stuff?' There was no way I could get rid of all of it myself."

In the end, she didn't have to.

Dykhoff enlisted the services of Empty the Nest, a Burnsville-based company specializing in wall-to-wall personal property removal for seniors and homeowners interested in downsizing.

Owners Kris Yohn of Eagan and Sharon Fischman of Golden Valley go through homes and apartments to throw away what is garbage, donate what can be reused, and sell desirable items for profit at the Empty the Nest ReUse Center at 1163 E. Cliff Road, Burnsville.

The business subsidizes its income through the profit of whatever items it can sell, and there is no cost for them to go through a home or apartment.

After crossing paths professionally, Yohn and Fischman hatched Empty the Nest last year. Yohn had been doing online sales in her garage, but after the partnership was formed the pair opened their storefront in Burnsville last December.

"I was a move manager for a local company here in the Twin Cities," Fischman said. "It was called Gentle Transitions, and their niche was that they moved seniors. I was the coordinator – I would coordinate the whole move for the seniors. I saw over and over again that there was always nice stuff in the house after they moved, and it was really hard to get rid of it. It's hard for seniors to get that stuff out to the curb."

When Empty the Nest goes through a house, little goes to waste, Yohn said. Books go to a book service for prisoners, usable food gets donated to food shelves and metal gets taken away by scrap-pers. A typical clean-out takes two days.



Sharon Fischman of Golden Valley, left, and Kris Yohn of Eagan started Empty the Nest, a Burnsville-based property removal service, last year. The company specializes in cleaning out the homes of senior citizens and those interested in downsizing, and does not charge those it helps move. Usable items recovered during the move are sold at the company's Burnsville storefront.

Photo by Joseph Palmersheim

When items are processed, they are taken by moving truck or van to the Empty the Nest ReUse Center, where they are unloaded and priced.

With the exception of monthly sale days, the store doesn't keep regular business hours. Estate sales are announced via Craigslist postings, and appointments can also be made to view items in the store.

"We're playing with what time of the month works best," Yohn said. "Hours are on the website, and we're happy to meet anyone over here at any time."

The store's inventory is arranged by household room.

For example, the room nearest the front features kitchen implements like silverware, plates and nearly anything else that has ever graced a cupboard. For \$50, customers can create a 65-piece kitchen set using materials in the room, Fischman said.

A table outside the kitchen room features vintage items, such as an "Ike in '56" button and old photographs, and a room further down the hall features clothing items.

The largest room, located in the back, features furniture and other large household items.

Despite the labor-intensive nature of their work, both women say they find their business rewarding for a variety of reasons.

"I think I enjoy the looks on people's faces when we're done," Yohn said. "We've had people in tears because the burden is off their shoulders when we move their home. We're helping people with too much stuff, and people without enough stuff, all at the same time."

Genevieve Dykhoff knows the feeling.

"Calling them was the best thing I ever did in my life," she said. "They came in Monday morning, and there was no lollygagging. By Tuesday, everything was gone. It was amazing – I just never knew that places like this existed."

Empty the Nest travels around the Twin Cities area. They specialize in clearing out entire homes or apartments, as opposed to picking up a few items, Yohn said.

Kris Yohn of Eagan and Sharon Fischman of Golden Valley operate the Empty the Nest ReUse Center at 1163 E. Cliff Road, Burnsville. For more information, go to emptythenest.net or call 612-998-0102.

Joseph Palmersheim is a freelance writer from Burnsville.