

# New way to deal with 'too much stuff.'

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Kristi Berg was in a bind. The company she had hired to clean out her Golden Valley house canceled right before the house was supposed to go on the market. Berg was left with just a few days to get rid of years of accumulated furniture, clothing and plain old junk before stagers came in.

That's when she stumbled upon Empty the Nest, a new, one-call concept in the never-ending battle to get rid of inevitable stuff that a household seems to collect.



A long list of charities (Goodwill, Arc's Value Village, Salvation Army and Disabled American Veterans) take donations, but many of those also have a long list of items they won't accept, including mattresses, exercise equipment, computers and console TVs. Empty the Nest, on the other hand, removes everything except hazardous materials and toxic waste. And, unlike removal companies such as 1-800-GOT-JUNK, it often does so at no cost.

How the one-year-old, for-profit business hopes to make a profit is by reselling the better stuff from its customers at its Burnsville secondhand store.

Co-owner Kris Yohn came up with the concept when a family member ran into a situation similar to Berg's.

"Most of us have too much stuff," she said, "and too many emotional ties to it."

How it works.

To start the process, Yohn and her business partner, Sharon Fischman, meet with a client -- the senior citizen moving into assisted living, a divorcing couple, the out-of-town relatives of a deceased family member. Together, they go through the house and help the client remove whatever he or she wants to keep.

Then, the Empty the Nest crew sweeps in and removes everything in a day or two, including unwanted furniture, broken appliances and rusted shelving.

Yohn estimates that 10 to 15 percent of the stuff ends up in a trash bin. Most of it, she said, is donated, repurposed or sold in their store, ReHome Center in Burnsville.

If Yohn and Fischman think they can make money from those sales -- paying for moving, transportation and scrapping fees -- the client pays nothing. If there's little to sell, Empty the Nest charges for the cost of a dumpster, about \$500 to \$800. About half of their clients pay nothing, Yohn said.

Cost of simplicity.

The downside of the one-call approach is the potential loss of the money a client could raise through an estate or garage sale.

According to Dave Olson, owner of Integrity Estate Sales in St. Louis Park, the sale of the contents of a typical south Minneapolis home can bring in between \$2,000 and \$4,000. That amount drops quickly, however, if many of the items are in poor condition, he said.

Empty the Nest donates unsalable items to local charities such as Bridging, Goodwill, AlphaCiticorps, Salvation Army and women's shelters. And while donated items don't bring in cash, Yohn and Fischman give their clients the charitable receipts for possible tax deductions.

After Empty the Nest cleaned out the Bergs' house, the California-bound couple said they were pleased with the process. So pleased that there were hugs all around.

"This is usually how it ends," Fischman said.

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