

When You Need Some Space – How to Organize Your Closet

By LAUREN LYNCH

With the ink barely dry on the long lists of New Year's resolutions this year, Lake County residents can put their best foot forward without spending hours shuffling through their closets in search of a matching pair of shoes.

"Getting organized is one of the top resolutions people make each year," says Randy Wickstrom, the sole proprietor of Purple Durple Organizers, based in Beach Park.

Since 2005, Wickstrom has been rearranging shelves and adding storage containers to a variety of closets in homes anywhere between Milwaukee and Chicago.

"It's all about time management," he says, adding that each person is unique as to how they manage their space. "I find out who they are and how they live."

Having spent more than 25 years in the hospitality management industry, Wickstrom has been recognized by friends for his "innate ability" to be efficient and organized. A graduate of the College of Lake County — where he currently teaches organization courses as part of the college's personal enrichment program and small business development center — Wickstrom enrolled in some courses through the National Association of Professional Organizers.

During his studies, he stumbled across an acronym that he lives by from the book "Organizing from the Inside Out" by Julie Morgenstern.

"The acronym SPACE is the step-by-step plan to organizing," he says. "The S refers to sorting and categorizing; the P means purge unwanted clothing; A is for assigning items to their specific spots in the shelf based on colors, season, etc.; C advises people to containerize their items; and E is perhaps the most important point — equalizing and maintaining the space by avoiding procrastination."

Simple, economical tips like placing a coat rack in the hall or utilizing a standard shoe bag to be a miscellaneous holder also can keep clutter at bay.

The main key, Wickstrom advises, is to really take the time to identify each article of clothing inside the closet and think to yourself, "Would I still wear that?" If not, it should be placed in a donation box to be surrendered.

"Many people forget that their shape changes," says Clare Mantelman, owner of Organize Now, a home and office organization company based in Barrington that has been operating since 2004.

Clare Mantelman, a member of the National Association of Professional Organizers, teaches courses on organizing at McHenry County College and Elgin Community College that offer insider tips on keeping areas clean. Her courses are taught as a series (12 hours total) over a four-day period. Her next session will take place March 8, 9, 16 and 17 at MCC. For more information, visit mchenry.edu or call 815-455-8588. LEARN HOW TO ORGANIZE

Clare Mantelman, owner of Organize Now, holds up a basket with camis stored in her closet at her home. Leggings and workout clothes are also stored in baskets. Mantelman's son Scott, 17 made the room more spacious by moving his dresser into the closet.

"Every piece of clothing you put on your body should make you feel beautiful," she says. "By taking everything off the hanger and either donating it or retrying it on can often eliminate ill-fitting garments in minutes."

To prevent any distractions that could lead to procrastination, she suggests keeping large garbage bags, a glass of water and the phone all within arm's reach in the room that needs organization.

"It's easy to walk away from the job when the phone rings or you get thirsty," Mantelman says.

As for her favorite organizing tool, Mantelman uses a double rack—which can be purchased at either The Container Store or Target — in the closet to maximize space. If that doesn't work, she'll adjust the top shelf just a couple of feet so that items don't hang on the floor.

"It's all about functionality," she says regarding the planning of each design layout for her clients. "There's a purpose to everything."

Owner of the family-run business Cops Closets in Grayslake, Scott McCloud has kept even the most cramped spaces functional down to the very square inch of space left.

"No closet is ever too small," he says confidently.

He recalls working with a client that owned 200 pairs of shoes she couldn't part with. In order to keep them condensed in one spot — which was a closet the client was convinced could not hold all of the shoes — the designer arranged them in clear storage bins available at Walmart or The Container Store and stacked them on the shelves, making it easy for his client to see what pair was where without opening a lid.

"A lot of people are surprised what we could do to a closet," he says.

According to Wickstrom, thinking outside the box itself may offer solutions when working with a tiny closet space.

"I like to hang hooks inside the closet for purses or backpacks," he says. "Or, I'll install a shelf [near the] top of the closet."

Regardless of its size, McCloud emphasizes that a closet is beneficial not only for an individual's lifestyle, but also their investments.

"An organized closet also adds to the resale value of a home," he says. "When someone comes into a home and sees their dream closet already present, it's an added value. That, along with being an upgraded closet, adds to the value of the home as well, much like a redone kitchen adds value to a home."

Sometimes, the real challenge local organizers face isn't the act of digging through clothes or installing additional racks, but maintaining order months after a closet makeover.

Like a doctor prescribing medication, Wickstrom recites the words he lives by that have proven to be the healing aid to anyone down with the clutter blues.

"Always put things back when you're done using it," he says. "It takes only 30 seconds to do, and it'll save you the time now than figuring it out for a half hour later in the evening."

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