

Move managers help seniors with difficult relocations

SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE

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Tom Cozens helped his elderly uncle move three times, each to a progressively smaller residence: from a rented guest house to a senior apartment to a studio in an assisted living center.

Lifting boxes was the least of the work. Cozens, 61, also had to soothe his uncle's distress over the unwelcome change and try to persuade him to toss spices with sell-by dates from 30 years ago.

When it came time to move his uncle a fourth time – from the third floor to the first floor of the assisted living center – Cozens hired a senior move manager.

For a fee ranging from \$2,500 to \$5,000, senior move managers will orchestrate nearly every aspect of a move, including helping seniors determine what to take to their new residence, organizing floor plans, hooking up utilities and electronics, hanging pictures and draperies and unpacking items in a way that closely matches how things were before.

"Seniors need help when they have to move," said Linda Diller, who founded Only the Best senior move management in Encinitas five

years ago. "Families are scattered or people have outlived their families. We try to do our part to take away some of the physical and emotional stress."

America's aging population and tendency to outsource unpleasant jobs has spawned a growing industry. The National Association of Senior Move Managers was founded in 2002 with about 20 members. Today, it has 500.

Moving is taxing at any age, said Mary Kay Buysse, executive director of the Chicago-based organization.

For seniors who may have chronic health conditions, mobility issues or dementia, leaving a home they have lived in for decades can be overwhelming.

Adult children, busy with families and jobs, may not have the time or the patience to help, especially when it includes sorting through decades of accumulated possessions.

"For seniors, moving is more complex than putting boxes in a U-Haul," Buysse said.

To smooth the transition, Diller, a former concierge and conference manager in the luxury hotel industry, consults with clients about

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the furniture they most treasure and ways of making it work in the new residence. She takes photos of the contents of every drawer so she puts items back in their proper places. For clients who have dozens of photo albums, she suggests scanning photos and uploading them onto space-saving digital frames.

Cozen's uncle died in March at age 82. Hiring Diller for his final move was well worth it, Cozen said.

"When you're looking after an older person, you need help. You really do," said Cozens, a Carlsbad real estate agent. "She saved my time, my back, my sanity."

If you're considering hiring a senior move manager, keep in mind:

1. Anyone can call himself a senior move manager, so buyer beware when hiring one. The National Association of Senior Move Managers does some limited vetting. Members must provide at least two letters of reference from past clients and have proper liability insurance.

Before hiring anyone, the NASMM recommends asking how long they've been a senior

move manager, if they've had any formal training, if they have professional credentials, if they carry liability and workers' compensation insurance, if they can provide references and if they provide a written contract that details all services provided.

2. Senior move managers may know tricks to make parting with treasured items easier. One woman had a collection of 65 teapots that would overwhelm her senior apartment, Buysse said. The woman chose her three favorite teapots to take with her. The senior move manager shot pictures of the rest and arranged the photos into a poster-sized collage to hang as art.

3. Fees range from \$40 to \$80 an hour and do not include the actual movers, although senior move managers can help recommend a reputable company.

4. Some senior living communities are recommending and even paying for the service for incoming residents. Check to see if yours is one of them.

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