

# HOME & DESIGN

News of real estate, remodeling and landscaping

## Organizers wage war against clutter

By Stephanie Fosnight  
Staff Writer

**T**he day Rachael Smith finally said good-bye to her pink pig, her professional organizer snapped pictures.

Highland Park resident Smith hauled the battered plaster piggy bank that she'd made as a child out to the curb for trash pickup as Linda Goldman immortalized the pig on film.

With Goldman's help, Smith had decided it was time to dump the pig. Still, she was delighted when a passerby pulled the pig out of the trash and took it home.

"It made me so happy," she said. "I saw my pink pig go on to have a better life."

The pig was just one of the many, many items clogging up Smith's house. When Smith and her new husband Jake moved into their house last year, they combined not only their two households and wedding presents but also the stuff Smith inherited from her father, who had recently died. And in her father's basement were unopened boxes that he had inherited when his own mother died.

Then, on February 22, 2004, baby Wrigley joined the Smith family, along with all of the ensuing baby gear.

It was clear that something had to give.

In April, Jake and Rachael Smith hired professional organizer Linda Goldman of Altogether Organized in Highland Park. They joke that she should call her company "No More Tears" since the couple never got very far trying to sort out sentimental items on their own.

"Every time we got done she'd run away crying," Jake Smith said of his wife. "I am very unemotional about something I own."

Rachael Smith admits that she is a pack rat, and says Goldman helps her make decisions about what to keep and what to pitch.

"My dad used that tea kettle every morning," she said, pointing to a kettle

(Continued on page A12)



Linda Goldman of Altogether Organized shows client Rachael Smith her new kitchen cabinets--and points out the many cans of tomatoes she found stashed in the cupboard. (Joel Lerner/Staff Photographer)

### Sorting out your stuff, step by step by step

By Stephanie Fosnight  
Staff Writer

**1 Start in one corner.** On one of Linda Goldman's first jobs, she stood staring at the three-car garage packed with stuff and wondered if she was in over her head.

"I thought, what did I get myself into?" Goldman remembered. "But I did one corner at a time. Start somewhere and then move on."

**2. Sort, purge, assign & "containerize"**

Goldman follows these four steps to work her way through a mound of items. She sorts them out and, with the owner, decides what to discard. She

then assigns categories to the remaining objects in order to know how to store them.

"For someone who's emotionally attached to their things, the assignment is very important," she said. Rachael Smith decided to save a set of 7-Up Glasses she'd grown up with, but agreed to store them until her son is old

(Continued on page A11)

**3** Repairing puppy's damage.

**5** Growing superior roses.

**13** In Health & Family: Massage can help hurting hounds.



## Organizers From page A1

on a table piled high with items Goldman had removed from the kitchen cupboards. "But do I need to keep it? She can get rid of it for me."

Goldman is one of a rapidly-growing number of professional organizers who, for an hourly fee, will organize homes and offices. Two and a half years after starting her own organizing business, Goldman has plenty of work and is considering expanding.

"I didn't really know I was organized until I started working in the corporate world," she said. "I was able to finish projects on time and juggle tasks, but I thought everyone could do that."

After leaving a career in human resources to raise her three daughters, Goldman racked her brain trying to think of what she would do when her youngest daughter started first grade. In her spare time she would clean her children's rooms and reorganize her files wondering, "What am I passionate about?" until she realized that she was already doing

what she liked.

"People are looking for a haven from the noise of the outside world and it's hard when your own environment is chaotic," Goldman said. "You want it to be calm and serene."

Jim O'Connor runs his organizing business, Clutter Control, from his home in Lake Forest. He says that he, too, has a passion for making things neat.

"It's a passion but not an obsession. If you're in this job, you don't want people to feel guilty or to put unrealistic demands on them," O'Connor said. "We organize and then show them what we did to maintain it."

A professional organizer charges between \$40-\$200 an hour, according to the National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO). Organizers work in homes and businesses on tasks like creating a filing system; sorting; helping with moves and garage sales; and organizing different rooms.

The field has been growing substantially. Whereas it took

15 years for NAPO to acquire 1000 members, it took only five years for the next 1000 and 500 organizers have signed up in the last six months, O'Connor said.

"There's still a lack of awareness we exist," he said. "There's a misunderstanding, too. We're not maids."

Goldman recently introduced the Smiths to their new kitchen. She'd stacked the cans and spices for easy location, and then pointed out that there were three full containers of cloves.

"She saves me money," Rachael Smith said. "Now I won't buy more cloves the next time I go to the grocery store."

The Smiths are looking forward to a house cleared of clutter with only the most important items remaining as memories of Rachael's father and grandmother.

"My goal is to have a house totally organized by fall," Rachael said. "Next year I can go to work and come home and spend time with my child."



**COVER STORY**

**Sorting** From page A1

enough to enjoy them.

**3. Make piles as you sort**

"Don't go put something away right away," Goldman said. "Let's make a pile, because then we're not zig-zagging."

**4. Consolidate**

Jim O'Connor said an organizer spends a lot of time consolidating similar items, like tools, toys and sweaters, into one area.

**5. Everything in its place**

Everyone can quote, "A place for everything and everything in its place." The trick is actually following the truism, but doing so is the only way to ensure organization.

Of course, it can be harder to maintain a system with children.

"You can't expect kids to be as organized as adults," O'Connor said. "But you can teach them that things go in their place. The younger you start the better."

**6. Curb the clutter**

"Generally, most people who have clutter have too many things," O'Connor said. "We are a nation of buyers and we are a nation of keepers."

O'Connor and Goldman try to help their clients make common sense decisions about whether or not to keep something. For example, Smith wanted to keep the entire large book from her father's memorial service, but Goldman suggested merely keeping the page with the guest list. She also takes photographs for

clients who want the memory but not the stuff.

For parents, O'Connor suggests rotating the children's toys, keeping only some out for play and changing them periodically with other toys in storage, as well as giving away toys that haven't been played with recently.

"Take it out of the room and put it away, and if they don't ask for it in a month, then get rid of it," he said.



Linda Goldman asks Rachael Smith how many potholders she really needs. (Joel Lerner/Staff Photographer)

Linda Goldman and Rachael Smith sort through a box of WWII memorabilia Smith inherited from her father. (Joel Lerner/Staff Photographer)



Linda Goldman asks Rachael Smith if she really needs to keep both of these pots. (Joel Lerner/Staff Photographer)

**When you burn the candle at both ends, it goes out too soon**

Talk to your doctor or go to our **FREE Risk Assessment** on the web.

NATIONAL SLEEP FOUNDATION

[WWW.SLEEPFOUNDATION.ORG](http://WWW.SLEEPFOUNDATION.ORG)

LOWER YOUR RATE • CONSOLIDATE DEBT • GET CASH

**CREDIT CHALLENGED? NO PROBLEM!**

We've helped thousands just like you!

**TURNED DOWN FOR A MORTGAGE OR LOAN?**

**DISCHARGED FROM BANKRUPTCY?**

**SELF-EMPLOYED?**

**NO VERIFIABLE INCOME?**

Residential PLUS

**ONE CALL DOES IT ALL**

**847-966-8300**

**YOU RATE WITH US!**

**Residential PLUS**

MORTGAGE CORPORATION

An Illinois Residential Mortgage Licensee 5621 W. Dempster, Morton Grove, IL 60053

PFG Mortgage Services

taking mortgage consulting to a higher level

272 E. Deerpath, Suite 328  
Lake Forest, Illinois 60015  
P317.295.9599 F317.295.8416  
Toll Free: 888.PFG.PLAN  
Email: [info@pfgplan.com](mailto:info@pfgplan.com)

**Lending For Life.**

Program	Rate	Down	Pts./Orig.	A.P.R.
20 Year Fixed	5.750%	5%	0/1	5.912%
5 Year Interest Only	5.250%	30%	0/0	5.318%
1 Year ARM	3.750%	10%	0/0	3.843%
3/1 Arm Commercial Prop	5.750%	20%	0/1	5.929%

**Free Pre-Approval**

**847-295-9599**

APPLY ON-LINE AT: [WWW.pfgplan.com](http://WWW.pfgplan.com)

Rates as of 5/26/04. Subject to change without notice. Illinois Residential Mortgage Licensee #4781.

Replacement from a unique perspective. Yours.

**Re-visions**  
WINDOW & DOOR REPLACEMENT COMPANY

Call for a Free Estimate  
**(847) 491-1217**  
OR  
**(630) 617-5970**

**MARVIN**  
Windows and Doors

Made for you.\*

[www.revisionswindow.com](http://www.revisionswindow.com)

**WE INSTALL**

- Bay Windows
- Bow Windows
- Sky Lights
- Patio Doors
- Double-hung Windows
- Casement Windows
- Front Entry Systems

Financing Available