



ORGANIZED OFFICE: Kathryn R. Bechen of Organized With Ease was hired by Dan Witt of Dan Witt Builders Inc. to get started right in a new office. "We're not missing any details," said Witt, including his briefcase.

Pros Organize Offices, Homes To Contend With Time Busters

BY MARY HENG

Dan Witt, owner of Dan Witt Builders Inc., questioned whether accumulated office papers needed to follow him when his company moved to a new office.

So he hired a professional organizer. Kathryn R. Bechen, owner of Organized With Ease, rearranged work spaces, schedules and files for Witt and two executives.

"Where people used to spend 15 minutes looking for a pencil, now everything is organized," Witt said. "The office is efficiently arranged down to the 'nth' detail."

The building company fine-tuned its files and storage just in time for

"National Get Organized Week," designated by the National Association of Professional Organizers for this week. The group, founded in 1985, lists two members in Omaha, Ms. Bechen and Jan Limpach, owner of Organizing Plus.

Both local organizers said their businesses are coming of age largely because of a paper flood from computers, copiers and direct mail advertisements. Ms. Bechen said industry figures estimate that the U.S. Post Office delivers 550 million pieces of mail a day — three pieces for every man, woman and child in the country.

"It's information overload. Most of the people who need a professional organizer are successful people," she said. "They're just flooded with paper."

Society has thrown in a few twists as well. Mrs. Limpach said dual-income families have increased the flow of goods into a home while decreasing the time once available to sort through old stuff.

Like cleaning, child care and laundry, the professional organizer targets the needs of hurried Americans in their homes and businesses. In a service industry less than 10 years old, order experts are specializing in computers, time management, filing or closets, said Carol Green, executive director of NAPO.

Ms. Bechen focuses on business processes such as paper flow and information handling. Organization, she said, has nothing to do with obsessively arranged pencils, but with productivity.

About 70 percent of Organizing Plus work has been in homes, Mrs. Limpach said, and the rest in Omaha

Tips for Getting Organized

Here are some tips for getting organized, taken from separate interviews with two professional organizers in Omaha, Jan Limpach and Kathryn Bechen:

- Open the mail at the wastebasket and apply the four "D's." Do, delegate, delay or dump.
- Toss materials unlikely to be used.
- Have "in" and "out" baskets and weed them daily. Insist that co-workers use the "in" box. Bosses can have two "out" boxes, one marked for priority jobs.
- Create a daily "to do" list and keep it handy.
- Allow 15 to 30 minutes at the end of each day to clean the desk and organize work for the next day.
- In file cabinets, arrange the section headers to read from left to right for quick viewing.

companies. The business category will continue to grow, both said, as firms try to make do with fewer people.

"The skills of a professional organizer can make or break a small business," Mrs. Limpach said. "They have to operate with a minimal staff to get the maximum accomplished."

Anti-clutter specialists attack the first task — deciding what to toss — with a battery of questions, prodding pack rats to let go. Is the item needed? If so, when? At home, Mrs. Limpach said she teases people into surrendering old clothing and junk.

"A lot of people hold onto their things as a security blanket," she said. "I try to find humor in what I'm doing so they are able to let go. It makes it easier."

After the pile is reduced, the organizers said they set up systems in filing, desktop supplies, computer files, paper flow or closet storage that complement personal habits and are efficient. If necessary, Ms. Bechen said she refers specialists in computers, office management, stress and sometimes counseling. Then, managers and clerical staff receive a few lessons in the fine art of order.

Both women offer workshops and classes in organization. Ms. Bechen's is through Creighton University, where she draws upon past experience as a librarian and English teacher.

Mrs. Limpach said the working mother syndrome drove her to seek an organizational expert herself three years ago. She wrote to NAPO, and found there were no members in the area. When she left her job at AT&T, she joined the group and began attending conferences.

Nationally, the organizational effort is becoming more sophisticated, and clutter experts apply terms to their

field that sound like learning disorders.

The moderately disorganized, Mrs. Limpach said, spend several hours a week looking for things they need. The situationally disorganized are people such as new parents whose circumstances have led to confusion.

The chronically disorganized — those in danger of losing jobs or whose bills go unpaid because they can't find them — are an entirely new field, Ms. Bechen said.

"Mental health professionals say it can be connected to obsessive compulsive disorder. These people find it painful to throw anything out."

Whether by situation or character, the rising number of pack rats has been good for consultants.

Membership in NAPO has grown from less than 10 members in 1985 to 450 this year.

According to a 1992 NAPO survey, organizers' fees range between \$15 and \$85 an hour.

Mrs. Limpach said she prefers to bid jobs. Ms. Bechen charges \$65 an hour, a fee she said is justified for companies whose executives are snowed under or for sales staffs setting up offices at home to trim corporate overhead.

"For every manager in an office that's making \$50,000 a year, if they lose one hour a day to disorder, it costs the company over \$6,000 a year," she said. "And that's a conservative estimate."

Witt said Ms. Bechen's work improved his office efficiency by more than 30 percent.

"You can get 'I forgot' out of your vocabulary when dealing with clients," he said. "We document all the contacts from our clients. We're not missing any details."