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An Organized Life:

Local resident helps people get clutter-free

By Sheila Pursglove, Special Writer

As a child, Carolyn Anderson-Fermann enjoyed organizing her closet. As an adult, she's made a career out of it.

A professional organizing consultant, Anderson-Fermann helps people in southeast Michigan and northern Ohio de-clutter their lives. The Washtenaw County resident founded Simply Organized Life a little over a year ago and runs it from her home.

Her goal is to provide simple, cost-effective techniques for those who are overwhelmed by the vast amount of “stuff” in their lives, and help them gain more time and space to live the life they want.

It's definitely an idea whose time has come – whether you want to straighten the basement from hell or get a grip on runaway e-mail.

“It took me about five years from the time I had the initial idea for this business to actually take that leap of faith off the corporate track,” she said.

In January of 2005, Anderson-Fermann, who holds a master's degree from Michigan State University, chose to step away from a decade in the corporate world and run Simply Organized Life full time.

“I enjoy my work immensely,” she said. “It's very fulfilling to help others not just get organized, but to allow them the peace of mind and time to achieve their goals.”

Anderson-Fermann has been an organizer for her entire life, she says.

“I think organization is a skill that can be learned, but some people, like myself, have a knack for it. I remember organizing my clothes closet as kid, as if it were play. The closet probably didn't need organizing, but it was fun to rearrange the things with the seasons.

“It's still fun now when I work with clients, but the goal is never to make the closet look pretty, although that is often the result. The goal is to help the client find the things they need without struggle.”

Organization is really about being more effective in daily life, Anderson-Fermann explains. She remembers her father and grandfather making little tools — simple things made from stuff they had — to help them save time and solve problems around the house and garden.

“Perhaps I learned from example and applied it to my own life,” she said. “I think I was in the fourth or fifth grade when I made myself a little planner for my homework assignments. This was before the time of the ‘overscheduled child’ or when the schools handed out little planners.”

Anderson-Fermann helps businesses with overall office organization, optimized workflow, desk de-cluttering; paper management, e-mail management, electronic and paper filing systems, inventory systems, ergonomic placement, move preparation, and project management.

On the homefront, she’ll advise on meal planning and laundry systems, study areas for students, home office filing systems, the de-cluttering of closets, basements and garages, and much more.

She also offers event planning, and relocation services – a topic she’s only too familiar with having lived in the Midwest, New England and Japan.

Having grown up in a family that recycled and reused items, Anderson-Fermann teaches clients to do the same.

“It was just what we did and the right thing to do,” she said. “I try to help my clients also eliminate waste of any kind — waste of physical items, waste of time and waste of money.”

Caring for the environment is a natural extension and she wouldn’t want to run her business any other way, she says.

“I am very proud that 90 percent of my organizing clients do not need to buy any new items after working with me. I think this is one of the many things that make my services unique, in addition to my educational background and work experience.”

Anderson-Fermann was honored as a new Waste Knot Program partner in an April 20 ceremony at Weber’s Inn in Ann Arbor She was invited to apply by Joanna Smither, a program assistant at the Department of Planning and Environment with Washtenaw County.

The program, administered by Washtenaw County Solid Waste Program, develops relationships in the local business community to increase waste reduction and recycling activities.

“I had contacted Joanna on behalf of a client to find out how to properly dispose of old paint,” Anderson-Fermann said. “We spoke for a bit over the telephone and once I had the information, I wrote about it on my Weblog and let Joanna know. She then invited me to apply to become a Waste Knot Partner.

“I am honored that I was both invited and am now a part of this program. I am the first and only organizing consultant to be a part of this program.”

Her top-notch organizational skills allow her time to teach seminars through Ann Arbor Recreation and Education, volunteer at the Women’s Center of America and volunteer at this year’s Ann Arbor Book Festival.

A member of the National Association of Professional Organizers, she also serves as director of professional development for NAPO’s Southeast Michigan Chapter.

The National Association of Professional Organizers designated January as Get Organized Month, and Anderson-Fermann shared many tips on her blog. They included buying a shredder. She also offered tips on organizing income tax paperwork, and organizing stress-free holiday events.

For more information, visit www.simplyorganizedlife.com.

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