



**RED COATS**

MOVING SOLUTIONS

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## Packing up a lifetime of memories - for a price

TRALEE PEARCE

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When Ron Burnett's mother was diagnosed with dementia this spring, the decision to move her into a nursing home was one hurdle. The next was what to do with the bungalow she'd lived in since 1975.

This was complicated by the fact that Mr. Burnett, 47, lives in Spain.

On the advice of a friend, he turned to a company specializing in moving seniors from family homes into new quarters.

The staff helped Mr. Burnett sort through the family belongings to decide what to keep and what to auction, donate or sell, and then prepped the Scarborough home for sale.

"Everyone I talk to who is over 40 is running into that problem as far as dealing with a relative or their folks: What do I do with the house?" says the music producer, who recently visited his mother in Toronto.

New companies and agencies are springing up to serve the so-called sandwich generation of boomers, many of whom are simultaneously taking care of their own children and their aging parents.

Whether it's help figuring out what kind of nursing home Dad needs, or assisting an elderly person with downsizing from a rambling family home to a small condo, a new breed of mover is ready to step in and make it happen.

The budding industry's self-regulating body, the National Association of Senior Move Managers (NASMM) has 300 members across North America, up from 70 at its inception in October, 2002.

For every two registered move managers who specialize in seniors, there are probably two more, according to Nan Hayes, the owner of moveseniors.com in Clarendon Hills, Ill., which provides training programs for NASMM.

Senior movers say their role is often part gerontologist, part moving expert and part counsellor.

Services are mostly for-profit, although some public-sector help is available, usually on a paid basis. There is usually a consultation fee of a few hundred dollars to start, but fees can run to the thousands of dollars for a fully facilitated move. The growing niche may owe some of its success to a dearth of individual caseworkers and public home-care services that enable the elderly to stay in their own homes instead of in facilities, says Carolyn Rosenthal, a professor of gerontology and sociology at McMaster University. But transition services filling that void appear to be in keeping with a general trend toward making long-term care "feel more home-like," she says.

The parents of baby boomers are just the start of a demographic wave of age-related moves. Boomers are close behind. Within a decade, Statistics Canada estimates, those who have turned 65 will outnumber those under 15.

"There's a need there with our aging population," says Lara Paul, a gerontologist and case manager of SeniorSelect, a new fee-based, non-profit service run by Catholic Family Services in Hamilton since July. "There's a burden and a stress, especially if family members live out of town."

They need somebody else there to help out."

For seniors, moving is often overwhelming, says Vicky Keyes of Toronto's Red Coats Moving Solutions. "The thought of having to sort through a lifetime of memories on their own, to contemplate leaving behind things that have been with them for [an] entire lifetime, and actually making the move to somewhere totally new - often after being independent all their life - is highly traumatic," says Ms. Keyes, who has been in business for three years and has worked with close to 200 families.

Jennifer Bishop, who founded Transition Squad, the company Mr. Burnett used, says she recognized a need for her services while working as a health-care administrator discharging patients from a Mississauga hospital.

"I thought there had to be a process to make it easier," she says. Now, she sorts personal belongings, hires tradespeople to fix up homes for sale, works with realtors and safely disposes of all garbage, such as old prescriptions.

Having a third, neutral party involved can help family members such as Mr. Burnett with the emotional issues involved, says Ms. Paul.

"A lot of families carry a lot of guilt about having to admit one of their family members to a nursing or retirement home," she says, adding she can help with finding counselling.

When a family is in crisis mode, they may revert to old patterns, says Ms. Hayes, of moveseniors.com.

"All the roles everyone has ever played come back - sibling rivalries, the black sheep, the control daughter," she says. "We can be the bad guy and be the one to convince Mom to give up the casserole dish."

As the field grows, so does the tip-sharing among practitioners. Ms. Hayes arranges for classes on such topics as how to persuade a senior to give up a medicine cabinet full of expired prescriptions, or how to deal with dementia patients.

Jeffrey Norman, 77, sought the services of a senior moving manager when he decided to go into a retirement home. He also decided he was "beyond packing" and wanted help figuring out how to keep his favourite pieces of furniture, especially his beloved grandfather clock.

As he whittled down his belongings with Ms. Keyes' help, he worried that the large clock might not make the trip. Ms. Keyes got out her measuring tape, mapped out his new apartment at a private seniors' residence, and voila - it was in.

"It's a lovely old clock," he says. "The inner workings are three or four hundred years old. It was a wedding present to my grandfather."

Mr. Norman's family and friends offered to chip in with the move, happening this week, but he preferred the independent route.

In Mr. Burnett's case, he found it hard to trust strangers in his family's home. That is, until the moment he got a call asking him what he'd like to do with the \$300 they found under his mother's mattress.

The Transition Squad team also persuaded him to keep a few items to which fond memories were attached, including a hairdressing table and mirror from his mother's days as a hairdresser in Birmingham, England, before the family moved to Canada in 1975.

After a three-week blitz, the house sold in three days. Mr. Burnett says outsourcing some of the practical worries saved him a lot of time and angst.

"I'm glad they were able to do it quickly. As you can imagine, if I had had to do it myself it would have taken a long, long time. Plus it's an emotional trip as well. How much can one take?"