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Magic touch: Can't dig out? Local business is there to help

By Rod Spaw

October 19, 2012, last update: 10/19 @ 7:25 am

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Jaclyn Ray, AKA "the Clutter Wrangler," sorts paperwork at a client's home. David Snodgrass | Herald-Times

Jaclyn Ray loves clutter. Well, maybe "loves" is not the right word, but she certainly isn't scared of it. After all, without clutter, she couldn't make a living straightening out other people's messes.

Ray is the "Clutter Wrangler," a professional organizer who recently transplanted herself and her business from Toronto, Canada, to Bloomington, where her husband teaches at Indiana University.

She's already lined up a list of clients in her new home town. Clutter, it seems, is international.

Ray has been in the business of tidying up after people for 10 years, but she says she was born to it, being one of those rare children who preferred a neat room.

Now, for a fee, she will show you how to keep what you have from taking over your life, whether it is an unmanageable mangle of things in a closet or a chaotic schedule that doesn't leave time to catch a breath. You see, clutter does not just exist in the physical spaces we inhabit; it also accumulates in the obligations and responsibilities of a full life that keep tripping up our good intentions to get to the next thing on the list. Both have the same basic cause: too much stuff; not enough time and/or space to deal with it.

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That's where Ray comes in. She speaks order to chaos and helps people set priorities and let go of what they no longer need.

"A lot of people just call and say, 'I don't know where to begin,'" she said. "A lot of people are looking to me to ask the right questions."

Ray said the process often involves finding out why people are attached to certain things. Ray asks: Is an item sentimental? Is it useful? Do they like it; or do they just have it?

"You have to give yourself permission to say your tastes have changed," she said. What she brings into a household is an objective perspective, someone who can look around and say, "You don't need 10 sets of sheets." Ray says few of her clients would qualify as hoarders, people with a compulsion to collect and keep large quantities of objects of no apparent value. Instead, she said most of her customers simply are having difficulty dealing with "an average amount of clutter."

"There are just moments in your life when you end up with a lot of stuff," she said.

One of her first clients in Bloomington was Mother Hubbard's Cupboard, which operates a food pantry and maintains three community gardens. The organization needed room in its garden sheds for tools and supplies, and Ray volunteered her expertise for the task.

The results were "amazing," according to Stephanie Solomon, director of [education](#) and outreach at Mother Hubbard's. She said Ray not only helped the group figure out how to store what it really needed, but also how to operate more effectively.

"She teaches you how to organize and maintain that organization in a way that makes your day-to-day work style more efficient," Solomon said. "It was just amazing how much easier it was to maintain the space once she went through it."

Ray said much of her clientele in Toronto were women — moms with growing children, working women and women whose grown children had moved away and were left with a household that needed reducing.

Balancing what you have with where you keep it is critical, said Ray.

"If you have a house the size of a football field, you can have a jukebox collection," she said.

Ray said there are sure signs of when clutter is becoming overwhelming. If the piles of stuff around a house creates stress, becomes a distraction or causes someone not want to go home at the end of the work day or not to invite friends over for dinner, then there may be a problem.

"If you're at the point where you think you need off-site [storage](#), call a professional organizer," she said.

The wrangler in brief

Jaclyn Ray, the "Clutter Wrangler," is a professional organizer who specializes in helping people get rid of what they don't need and then organizing the rest so that they may enjoy a clutter-free life.

She works both with households and small businesses. She charges \$35 an hour for a three-hour minimum appointment.

Ray also offers time management services and can help with such things as organizing bills and [payment](#) schedules, doctor appointments and even planning vacations.

She has operated her business for 10 years exclusively by bicycle.

[Find out more](#) about her business by going to www.clutterwrangler.com or by calling 812-330-2353.

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