

De-clutter your life 15 minutes at a time

By Sabrina Nucciarone

The holidays are over and the Green Bay Packers won the playoff game which sent them on their way to the Super Bowl.

With all the hoopla, it is hard to tell exactly what brought almost 50 people out to Kiel Public Library on a cold winter Monday night, but it is sure that the topic of how to “de-clutter your space and your life” has people knowing they have stuff to get rid of, and lots of it. The problem that most people have is once they determine they have too much stuff is what to do with it.

Helping to facilitate suggestions on how to identify and solve the 10 most challenging problems in organizing is Colleen Dennison’s goal. Dennison, a five-year National Association of Professional Organizers member and someone who says she spent hours in her bedroom as a teenager arranging and rearranging her closet, had several recommendations for the KPL audience.

One of the most recurring situations in society today is many middle-aged people are inheriting the belongings of their parents or in-laws—by the houseful. Adding to that are their own extra household goods which are stored in the corner or in a spare bedroom, important paper items for filing piled up, and duplicates and triplicates of items which often get packed away and stored in an unused corner, a spare bedroom, basement or attic. It is not order—it is chaos.

Even without inheriting the belongings of others, family life is hectic and there is not always time to keep a handle on what to purge and what to keep. The point of critical mass can cause a great deal of stress.

“What we think of as organization can

actually work against us. If you can’t find something, you go out and buy a duplicate,” Dennison said. That is a mounting problem if it continues.

Three subtitles on a paper she handed out to attendees separated and introduced the 10 organizing problems and a suggested best practice to correct each one. Everything in its place, follow the paper trail, and just contain it are the tenets by which Dennison follows to help her clients organize clutter and put things in their rightful places—whether they be kept, donated or trashed.

Dennison’s mantra of organization is “simplify.” Once you go through your drawers, closets and boxes, even in 15-minute increments as she suggests, she said you will find things you have been looking for and can identify the disposition of the rest by using a simple method.

With or without the luxury of time (as in some estate situations), Dennison suggests purging should be done by setting up three bins or stacks, one for items to be kept, one for donating, and one for trash. Each might require further separation and might have its own proper method of storage or carrying container. For instance, kept items might require special containers and/or locations—such as wool sweaters during the summer; things to donate, unless it is breakable or cumbersome, a large plastic bag will do; trash might need separation by things which require shredding—such as papers with names, addresses and personal information—from ordinary recyclable paper goods.

Dennison brought a portfolio flip-chart of examples which depict a more expensive way to organize what has been de-cluttered and a less expensive alter-



Colleen Dennison spoke to a large audience at the Kiel Public Library recently about how to de-clutter their homes and their lives.

Gina Kabat photo

native. Resourcefulness and shopping at thrift or discount stores, or even using repurposed items from around the house can multiply the uses of a space which was once a source of stress.

For instance, creating a mail center which serves as the clearing house of all paper items coming in can be dealt with easily if all the tools are right there. A vertical file keeper for incoming and outgoing bills, envelopes, stamps and stapler, tape, scissors and writing utensils on an upper level and the trash can, a shredder if needed, a recycling receptacle on a lower level can help source incoming items—such as the mail and sale papers—quickly. If a drawer is not available for the desk set items, use a basket to put them in. It is decorative, creates a

neater appearance, and instead of searching for the stapler, you know where it is and where it should be returned.

Getting rid of things in a step-by-step process and the idea behind de-cluttering and organizing is to simplify your life so you can do the things you enjoy. If the job is overwhelming and you need assistance, people such as Dennison are available to help. She admits the decision on what to do with items is the biggest one people have to make—especially if the decision has its foundation in sentimentality.

There is one thing Dennison notes that is comforting in the cleaning out. “Everyone has clutter. It doesn’t get done in one day,” she said.