

# HOME&DESIGN

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'I ache for them . . . The people we deal with have been settled for years. They're the ones who really need help.'

— MARY-ALICE DENNY



PHOTOS BY JARED LAZARUS/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

**LOOKING FOR THE RIGHT SPOT:** Carol Krueger of Mary-Alice & Carol helps arrange furniture at Lista Foster's new Pompano Beach villa. She is assisted by mover Jay O'Gorman.



# A Senior moment

## DOWNSIZING A LIFETIME OF BELONGINGS



**DECISIONS, DECISIONS:** Lista Foster sorts through pictures in her new bedroom.

BY JODI MAILANDER FARRELL  
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When her husband died of a brain tumor, Pearl Carter knew tight finances would force her to leave their spacious three-bedroom townhouse in Davie. But faced with the accumulation of 25 years of marriage, the prospect of downsizing and moving on her own was too much for the 78-year-old to bear.

In nearby Fort Lauderdale, Lista Foster was similarly overwhelmed when her husband died after a long struggle with Alzheimer's. Last year's round of hurricanes convinced her that living alone in a beachside condo wasn't safe or practical for a widow in her 70s.

Both women, however, are now happily ensconced in small homes, unscarred by the daunting task of severing their ties to a lifetime of belongings. That's because they left the job largely to someone else — a senior move manager, who sweated the details.

"There are two disturbing things in life: One is death, the other is moving," says Foster, who recently moved into a two-bedroom villa in John Knox Village, a continuing care retirement community in Pompano Beach, with the help of a Fort Lauderdale-based senior moving service called Mary-Alice & Carol.

"At least I didn't have to worry about one of those things."

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## DOWNSIZING

# Movers ease elderly through b

• DOWNSIZE, FROM 1H

Buoyed by the rising tide of retiring baby boomers and the desire of many empty nesters to simplify their lives in smaller digs, moving coordinators for seniors have become part of an emerging industry, especially in retiree-saturated Florida. The move managers — there are 100 to 150 across the country — cater to older adults who don't have the time, desire or stamina to navigate the emotion and stress of a move. Often they are downsizing from a large house filled with memories, not to mention furniture, photo albums, old tax bills, books and linens.

### DEVELOP A PLAN

While services vary, most managers help to develop a move plan; sort and downsize belongings; customize floor plans at the new home; arrange for the donation, disposal or sale of unwanted items; schedule and oversee movers and arrange for storage or shipments to children.

Wearing white butcher aprons with their names printed in red on their chests, Mary-Alice Denny and Carol Krueger placed stickers on every stick of furniture in Foster's condo, designating which pieces would be sold, consigned, donated or kept. They created a computer floor plan of Foster's new place and measured couches, beds and other must-keep pieces to see how to squeeze them into the smaller villa. They even helped her pick paint colors for her new place.

"First of all, you have to stop crying," Denny says she tells customers. "It's very hard. I ache for them. I see myself down the road in the same position. A lot of them don't have children who live here. The people we deal with have been settled for years. They're the ones who really need the help."



PHOTOS BY JARED LAZARUS/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

**BEST FRIEND:** Pearl Carter plays with Nikki, her 16-year-old poodle, in her Davie apartment. She was forced to choose between her dog and her cat when she downsized a year ago from a spacious townhouse.

More than 1.5 million Americans over 65 will move this year, according to Mayflower Transit moving company. Many will leave homes where they lived for decades.

Some are widows moving to smaller homes in other states to be close to or move in with children. Others are couples scaling back to condos. Still others are opting for one-bedroom units and studios in retirement communities.

Senior move managers, who rely largely on word-of-

mouth advertising, don't have to be trained or certified, but they must be insured to belong to the National Association of Senior Move Managers, a group of about 100 managers that formed in 2003. The organization, which offers educational sessions at its conferences, lists 11 members in Florida.

Senior move managers charge \$50 to \$120 an hour. The price is separate from the cost of paying movers and can add up to thousands of dollars. But the high cost of



**MOVING ADVICE:** Mary-Alice Denny tell some of her clients: 'First of all, you have to stop crying.'



**SNAPS PHOTOS:** Sharrn Cofar started A Move Made Easy three years ago in Coral Springs.

homes in South Florida means that many seniors are selling houses for more than they anticipated, freeing up dollars for the luxury of hiring a move manager.

"More and more people are using these services," says Bob Milanovich, director of marketing and resident relations at John Knox Village. "They deal with utility companies, all the phone calls you need to make, how to get rid of stuff — you're paying someone else to deal with the details."



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For Sharon Cofar, a former schoolteacher who started A Move Made Easy three years ago in Coral Springs, the details include snapping photos of objects on shelves and tables so she can arrange them the same way in the new home. Cofar and her workers wear disposable surgical-style booties when they unpack boxes so they don't get the carpet dirty. She carries a tool box packed with Goo Gone, WD-40, screwdrivers, bolts, painter's tape and rubber bands, which she uses to bundle pairs of shoes together so they don't get separated in the move. She hustles into new homes before movers to place extension cords so heavy dressers and cabinets don't have to be moved later.

Cofar works with collectors, antique dealers and other vendors to sell jewelry, paintings and even gold coins that won't make the move. She donates clothing and other items to nonprofits such as Dress for Success and the Elder Resource Network. She helps clients shop for new furniture.

One night before a move, she stayed up until midnight

Before contracting with a manager, the National Association of Senior Move Managers suggests that you ask how long the company has been providing senior move services, if it is fully insured for liability and workers' compensation, if it will provide a written contract and if the company can provide references.

South Florida senior move managers include:

- **A Move Made Easy** in Coral Springs, 954-345-6683 or 888-369-6613; [www.AMoveMadeEasy.com](http://www.AMoveMadeEasy.com).

- **Mary-Alic & Carol** in Fort Lauderdale, 954-493-9935; [www.maryalibeandcarolinc.com](http://www.maryalibeandcarolinc.com).

- **More info:** National Association of Senior Move Managers, [www.nasmm.org](http://www.nasmm.org).

to spray paint a wicker chest for a couple downsizing from a house in Parkland to a condo in Kings Point in Tamarac because the old color didn't match the new surroundings.

"Children may try to help, but it really doesn't work because they are emotionally involved," Cofar says. "It's OK for me to say, 'You don't need six measuring cups, you don't even cook anymore.'"

#### PARING DOWN

Cofar helped Carter of Davie move two months after the widow lost her second husband Paul, who lived with her in a 1,800-square-foot townhouse for 12 years. Before she could move to the two-bedroom apartment she found nearby, Carter first had to get rid of three bedroom sets, three computers, four

sets of golf clubs, several TV sets, a desk and extra water and wine glasses, among other possessions. She also had to find a home for her black-and-white tabby cat, Liza, because her new place allowed only one pet and she couldn't part with her ailing 16-year-old black toy poodle, Nikki.

Her most difficult task, however, was throwing away her husband's favorite worn, leather recliner, a task that Cofar coached her through.

"I needed the carpet cleaned and she had people that did that," Carter says. "A lot of stuff I couldn't even give away, so she had a man who came and emptied the place and moved all the junk out. She got me somebody to do the cleaning after that. . . I just felt I would fall apart if I had to do it all myself."