

# Seniors

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## Letting possessions go can be hard on seniors

By Jennifer Szakaly

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*Mooresville resident  
Nancy Baldwin  
can help with downsizing*

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With the weather warming, some people will put on gloves and dig into the task of cleaning out closets, attics, and general clutter.

Mooresville resident Nancy Baldwin is focused on this task year round, and has been for the past 17 years, as she assists older adults with the often insurmountable task of cleaning out the house to prepare for downsizing.

Rather than hire an auctioneer, which is sometimes intimidating, or rather than going the usual route of donating items or holding a yard sale, many individuals turn to Baldwin's service of establishing a tag sale as an alternative way of eliminating the furniture, linens, clothes, cars and everyday household items that can become "extra" belongings when someone is attempting to downsize.

Baldwin describes what she does for each client: "The sale takes place in the home and you actually stage the home to resemble a store. Items are polished or repaired to their best condition so that people can come in to the home and browse through the objects."

Though there are plenty of practical reasons to retain or do away with items before a move, particularly as many seniors experience downsizing into a retirement community, there are plenty of sentimental reasons that drive people to choose the most cherished items that they will keep.

"For men, it is much harder for them to give up anything that they have tinkered with over the years – their workbench, tools, or anything in a workspace," Baldwin said.

For some, Baldwin's service is provided for family members who have just lost someone. "Some people feel guilty about things they think they should take – they might not have a use for mom's full set of china, but they know she would want them to keep it," Baldwin said. Some of those generational differences are obvious when adult children struggle to find a use for items once coveted by the more formal generation of their parents.

Seniors who grew up as children of the Depression often end up possessing far more items in later life, as they were raised with the belief that you should hold on to items that might one day be of use. Compared with our now much more disposable society, these older adults are often retaining many more items than their children or grandchildren will.

And what might be considered by younger people to be junk because an item's apparent uselessness might turn out to be something very important to the older adult.

"The value of the item we have is very closely linked to the meaning it has for us in our lives, so it really is different for everyone," Baldwin said.

As older adults and their families attempt to prepare a home and its

belongings for downsizing, there is immediate trust that is established with the professionals who are assisting with the process – one that can be particularly time consuming.

“I’ve had people describe this as having a daughter for a week or two – this is essentially what their families would do if they had the time or if they lived nearby,” Baldwin said.

This field does lend itself, at times, to scams on seniors due to the fact that the person has access to the home.

Baldwin notes that many clients too willingly hand over the keys for her to do her job. Her suggestion is to always check a person’s references and ask for them if they aren’t readily provided.

## **Want to Know More?**

To find out about tag sales in the Lake Norman area or other tips on how to hire a professional to conduct tag or estate sales, call Nancy Baldwin at 704-607-6225 for more information. Realtors are also usually knowledgeable about who provides this type of service.

Jennifer Szakaly is a gerontologist who lives in Cornelius. Got a question for her?

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