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Operation Organization: A new home office

A professional organizer helps a Penfield woman de-clutter

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Getting organized isn't always as easy as TV's *Clean Sweep*.

"The reality is, there's probably a staff of 12 to 18 people working 80 hours per person to make that happen," says organizing and productivity consultant Ann Michael Henry.

So when the founder of *Mise En Place* in Victor helped Karen Tuccio clear her Penfield home office, it involved a workshop, new software and more than 20 hours of work. Tuccio also made a financial investment — \$189 for the workshop and \$169.95 for the software.

It's a move the 44-year-old doesn't regret in the slightest.

"I don't have the clutter that stresses you out and clogs your brain and interferes with your productivity," she explains. "It's also helped me get my projects done a week ahead of schedule. I never did that before."

A flood of life changes, all at once, didn't help. A month after buying her dream home, Tuccio lost her job to downsizing. The former purchasing agent for Valeo Electrical Systems in Rochester focused on going back to school and pursuing interests such as acting. Organizing, she says, took a back seat.

Henry had Tuccio start by attending a workshop on the GO System, being taught across the country. There, Tuccio learned how to better manage her work, time and paper. She and Henry then took on the office. Related clutter on the dining room "table" — actually a card table covered with a tablecloth — went upstairs to the office and the table got packed up. They also started a two-basket system for downstairs items needing to go upstairs and vice versa.

Henry and Tuccio then set up a tickler system, which allows Tuccio to file items in folders corresponding to when the items need to be handled. It has 31 numbered files for items that need attention on a specific day of the month, 12 files labeled "January" to "December" for long-term reminders and receipts, and two other files called "Casual Reading" and "Waiting for Response."

The system also includes yet-to-be-labeled files for recurring meetings, the boss, projects and people she frequently deals with. Another file, "Follow-up forms," contains a writing tablet for capturing and storing ideas, requests and reminders.

Henry then helped Tuccio install software called the Paper Tiger, which helps users catalog papers so they can easily find them later. To avoid the confusion caused by alphabetical filing (Is it under "Morgan Stanley," "Investments" or "Financial Statements?"), related documents go into numbered reference folders. Users key in what the document is, enter its file folder number, assign it a category and choose key words that they can type in later.

Tuccio and Henry agree the changes have made a difference.

"I think Karen's biggest challenge was having a process in place to manage her paper and everything that was coming across her threshold, and adapting to all the changes that she's gone through," says Henry. "We've put together several processes that are very flexible by their nature and their design, so anything that she encounters ... we can accommodate all of that without a hiccup."

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