

## O P I N I O N

COMMUNITY VOICES / Patty Gabal

## Our Seniors Need Our Attention This Holiday Season

**D**uring your annual holiday visit to see your aging parents this season, you may notice that their health is beginning to decline. Their memory may be lapsing, their driving more erratic. They may frequently forget to take their medication, or they may have fallen over poorly placed furniture or area rugs. These are just a few of the signs that an elderly parent may need a change in living arrangements.

By 2030, the country's senior population is expected to double, as is the number of seniors requiring assisted living arrangements and/or long term care, to more than 13 million. Nearly another million will move to retirement destinations in other states. A cultural shift has placed the responsi-

bility of facilitating these moves on the "sandwich generation" of Americans ages 45-54. (Source: *Right-Sized Living CRTS Handbook*)

The prospect of moving Mom or downsizing Dad can be daunting. Fortunately, there are local services available to help. You should begin by contacting the National Organization of Senior Move Managers ([www.nasmm.org](http://www.nasmm.org)). It's also wise to look for a professional who is credentialed as a certified relocation and transition specialist (CRTS).

If the decision is made to move, there are strategies to sorting through decades of collections in order to preserve important items and wisely dispose of the rest. If your parent wants to remain in their home, there are ways to de-

clutter and re-organize their possessions to create a healthier environment.

Don't let yourself become overwhelmed by the big picture. Here are some easy things you can do to get an immediate start:

First, consider potential safety issues. Remove area rugs, rearrange furniture, add lighting. Install safety rails in the bathrooms. Make a list of the medications they're taking and post it on the refrigerator door.

Gently start a conversation with your parent(s) about where they want their heirloom pieces to go. Take notes; it may help down the road to have a written record.

Go through collections of old photos and home movies. After enjoying some time recalling happy memories, you can decide

which images should be kept, converted to digital albums or passed along to other family members.

If you have more time, spend a few hours together in the basement or attic, and start to make piles — "keep," "donate," and "discard." You may be able to throw away a lot of junk before you leave.

Take your own "stuff" home with you, such as old yearbooks and school memorabilia, toys and games, or clothing.

Senior move managers are available to provide knowledgeable advice and physical assistance with every step of this potentially difficult and emotional process. You can request a consultation, during which you will be given advice and resources to plan a move yourself. Alternately, you may find it easier to hand over the

entire process of organizing and sorting possessions and disposing of unwanted items, overseeing movers; arranging shipments and storage; unpacking and setting up a new home; and much more.

You are giving your parents the gift of your time this season. Make sure it's time well spent, helping them improve their quality of life.

*Patty Gabal is a Westport resident and a founding partner of Changing Places LLC, a senior move management service serving Fairfield and Westchester counties. They assist seniors with the unique challenges of downsizing and relocating into smaller residences or assisted living. [www.changingplaces.info](http://www.changingplaces.info)*