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Editor

LIFESTYLE

Experts offer tips on organizing kitchens, closets, desks



Be strict

La Grange Park resident Julie McLaughlin, a married mother of three grade-school-age children, has been meaning to clean out her closets since she and her husband put an addition onto their home several years ago.

Time got away from her, but she thought the chance would come this fall, now that her youngest is in first grade all day.

She was wrong. "I feel like I'm busier now than I ever have been," said McLaughlin, who works part-time at The Suburban LIFE and does publicity for Brookfield-La Grange School District 102. "I clean around here and do June Cleaver stuff. I guess it's just been low on my priority list, too."

Anna Wildermuth, an Elmhurst-based personal image consultant, agreed to help McLaughlin bring order to her bedroom closet, which included business wear from the early 1980s, maternity clothes, knock-around-the-house clothes, old Halloween costumes and newer, business casual clothes.

"Usually today, people have too many clothes and usually not the right ones," Wildermuth said.

Wildermuth told McLaughlin to start by sorting everything: put all the pants together, all the blazers together, all the shirts together, and so on. Then, organize by color in each of those groups — put all the black pants together, khaki pants together, and so on.

Next, try on everything. "If you haven't worn it in two seasons, take it out of your closet. If you can't fit into it, take it out of your closet," Wildermuth said. "Do the same for your accessories."

Also take out anything needing mending, buttons, or other work, and get those problems solved.

When shopping for fall and winter clothes this year, Wildermuth advises, make sure you already own at least two or three things that will "go" with your latest purchase. Otherwise, the item will languish in your closet, waiting for the perfect complement. Or, if you can afford it, buy complete outfits at one time rather than a shirt here and slacks there.

"If you're not good at mixing and matching, make sure everything you buy goes together," Wildermuth said. "You ought to be able to walk into your closet and make a decision (about what you are going to wear) in five minutes."

When Wildermuth was done, more than half of McLaughlin's closet was piled on the floor, ready to get piled into bags and donated to charity. What was left was divided into sections: sleepwear, work clothes, casual clothes, separates.

"She was great," McLaughlin said of Wildermuth. "I needed somebody to tell me what to get rid of. Then I don't have to worry about it."