

Northern New Jersey & Rockland County

Lifetime

THE
GUIDE
FOR
GROWN-UP

TM

MAGAZINE FOR GOOD LIVING • OCTOBER 1999 • COMPLIMENTARY

Wedding Bells Booming

Here comes
the prime-time
bride

**BREAST CANCER
AWARENESS MONTH**

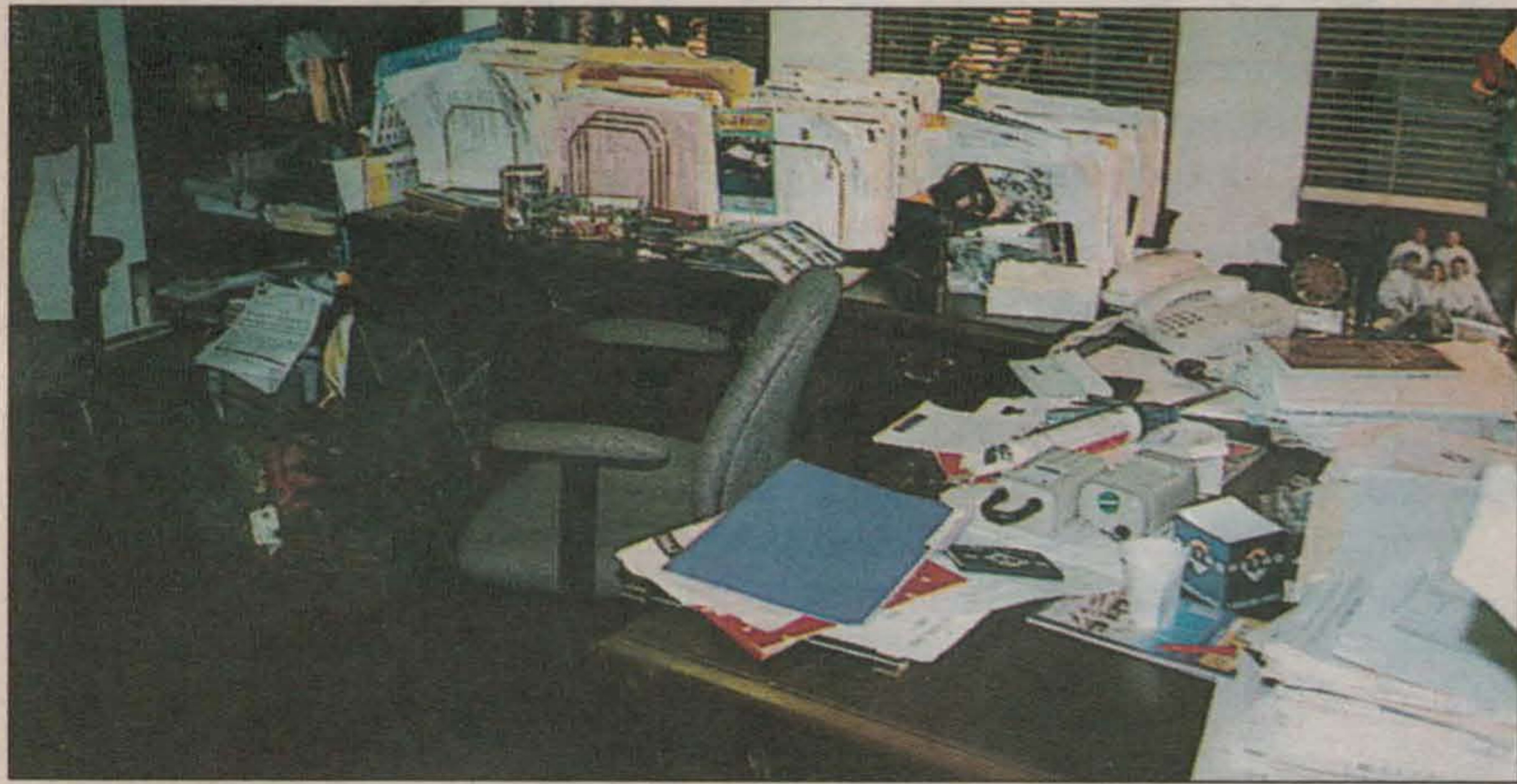
**ORGANIZING PROS
TAKE ON YOUR MESS**

**REIKI'S HEALING
POWER OF TOUCH**



INTERIORS

Bless this mess? No way! Get a pro to organize



Deborah Gussoff, owner of Montclair-based In Order, Inc. discovered a desk, right, where there seemed not to be one before.



By CATHERINE SCHETTING SALFINO

It starts slowly. You buy new towels but can't bear to throw out the old "just in case." So you place them in a spare bedroom, the attic or the basement. The same pattern follows with old jeans, old curtains, old books and magazines. Tax returns that won't fit in the crammed file cabinet. A vase you got for your wedding that you never use but it was given for your wedding so it's bad luck to get rid of it. Costume jewelry from college days. Your husband's clay-stained softball cleats from 20 years ago.

Before you realize it, the spare room is the junk room. The attic is too full to consider refinishing. And the basement looks like it's been bombed.

If any of this sounds familiar, you might want to consider hiring a professional organizer. This person will come to your home, and for an hourly fee, help you pick through your stuff. The organizer helps you decide what to keep (in a stored, organized and labeled fashion) and what can be discarded. This frees you up to spend time doing things you really want to do, instead of

searching for lost items, or fretting about organizing the mess you can't bring yourself to tackle alone.

"The most challenging job I've had was when I walked into a home that had a large finished basement with three interconnected rooms, two of which were filled waist-high with black Hefty trash bags," recalls Deborah Gussoff, owner of Montclair-based In Order, Inc. "Each bag had to be sorted because they contained everything from empty Chinese food containers to savings bonds to gold jewelry. This all accumulated

because whenever this woman had people coming over, she'd swoop everything off the tables and counters into these bags. So she literally had garbage mixed with gold."

Gussoff said people frequently find money, usually in the form of checks. One of her clients actually found a \$42,000 check from a brokerage house lying in a pile of unopened mail.

Terry Schuster, owner of Clutter Free in Fair Lawn, says she's also come across money—regularly,

Continued on page 39

INTERIORS

There's emergency help for clearing out the clutter

Continued from page 37

checks for as much as \$500—in her effort to help people organize. "Some people are consummate pack rats and have never been organized," she relates. "Other clients have always been organized but have moved, had a death in the family, divorced or married—experienced a life-changing event. They get behind and when I arrive, they say they want change because the mess literally makes them tired. They have a dining room that's unusable."

Elaine Bloom, of A Place for Everything in Maplewood, says she tells clients of the 80/20 rule. That is that we use 20 percent of our things 80 percent of the time.

"Once people realize this, it helps them to slim down or lighten up," she says. "It's true with things like clothes, where you have your favorite outfits and the rest just hang there. In the kitchen, there are certain knives and pots that you really use and the rest take up space in the cabinets. And I've found it's very true with people's filing systems, where sometimes they use only 10 percent of their things 90 percent of the time. They never purge their files or even go through them."

Bloom says accessibility is key in organizing your stuff. Keep the things you use most close to you. Keep a filing cabinet near your desk (and use it), so stacks of paper don't pile up all over your workspace. In the kitchen, Bloom says, some people will spend thousands of dollars on a redesign, but won't have dish cabinet logically close to the dishwasher or pots and pans near the stove.

When the organizers meet a new client, they



Deborah Gussoff of Montclair-based In Order, Inc. got these folks out of the closet mess they were in.

usually schedule a free consultation to go over what the client wishes to have cleaned up and talk about what is involved. They all charge an hourly fee, which ranges from \$60 to \$65 for New Jersey clients. They never talk about how long a project can take, because some clients are quicker than others at weeding out their junk.

"And I never take things away myself," Bloom says. "I don't want people having a nervous breakdown. But I try to work with them to figure out what they really need, don't need and what

can go into storage."

The consultants agree that disorganized clients really need behavior modification to make organizing become a part of their routine.

"I only work with people who are ready to work with me," Schuster says. "Sometimes, I will get a phone call from a woman who wants to give my service as a present to her spouse. But if the recipient does not want me as a present, then I decline. I find that being ready to organize or de-clutter is like being ready to quit smoking. It will only work if the person is ready."

Or, they may be forced to clean up their act. Gussoff says she had a woman call her in a panic. She had a leak in her bathroom that dripped into her basement. When she called a plumber, he needed to get into the bedroom directly beneath the bathroom. The only problem, he couldn't open the door.

"This bedroom was off the kitchen, and she used it to throw in extra stuff that she figured she'd get around to organizing 'some other time,'" Gussoff says. "The door was supposed to open in, but it wouldn't budge. So we had to take the door off the hinges and spend an entire day just moving everything out of the room. The plumber came back and did his thing, and that's when we began sorting everything."

The organizers aren't sure if it's misplaced pride or sheer embarrassment that inspires many a client to ask, "Am I the worst you've ever seen? I must be!" Like the professionals they are, they always reserve judgement.

Catherine Schetting Salfino is a freelance writer based in Bergen County.