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New Jersey

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A BLESSING FOR THE MESSY

IF YOU'RE CONSIDERING CALLING IN AN EXPERT to help you clean up your clutter but worry what they might make of your mess, relax; Deborah Gussoff has probably seen it before. "I always assure people that I've seen worse," says Gussoff, a professional organizer and owner of In Order Inc. (973-744-4835), based in Montclair.



"I'm also incredibly nonjudgmental. I tell people there's nothing to be embarrassed about."

For \$80 an hour, Gussoff will restore order from chaos and confusion, tackling packed basements and attics,

messy kitchen counters, even the most overwhelmingly disorganized home office. Often the main culprit is paper, she says—junk mail, catalogs, and magazines—and she develops systems to help clients manage it. Gussoff recently helped a client work through three laundry baskets filled with unopened mail; inside one rather nondescript envelope was a check for \$10,000. "It was good for 180 days," she says, "and the client had 16 days left."

Never gotten around to sorting through those boxes of old photos? Not only will Gussoff organize them all, she'll purchase albums and fill them for you, or frame the photographs and group them on a wall. For clients planning a garage sale, she'll begin her work weeks before the sale date, to get things organized and handle the advertising or promotion. On the night before the big day, she'll create eye-catching displays using clothes racks, tables, and shelves. The disorganized among us never had it so easy.



THE ERRAND EXPRESS

AS ANY COMMUTER KNOWS, IT'S PRACTICALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO RUN ERRANDS DURING THE week, when you leave for work before local businesses open and return home long after everything is closed. That leaves the weekend, but who wants to spend a precious day off at the dry cleaner and the supermarket? That's the thinking behind the Maplewood Concierge Company (973-763-9779), launched four years ago at the town's train station.

Today, Maplewood rail commuters can have their car tires rotated, prescriptions filled, shoes repaired, and dry cleaning dropped off and can even order dinner and a movie, all while they're at work. Everything will be ready for them to pick up at the train station when they return.

Operating much like a hotel concierge, the company relies on local businesses to provide a wide range of goods and services. Commuters simply place their orders before boarding the train or fax them from their offices; Maplewood Concierge takes care of the rest. And that encompasses everything from ordering flowers and dropping off film to scheduling a plumber and buying groceries. Commuters can even use the service for town-related business such as making tax payments, getting parking permits, and signing up for membership at the municipal swimming pool.

It's no surprise that the service has been a hit. "People spend half their lives commuting, and then they put in late hours," says Bob Klein, chairman of Maplewood Concierge. "By taking care of these things for them, we're giving them back their weekend and improving their quality of life."

BETTER THAN DR. SPOCK

ASK NEW PARENTS WHAT'S THE ONE THING THEY WISH CAME WITH THE BABY and many are likely to say an instruction manual. But New Jersey's moms and dads can bring home something better—a postpartum *doula*. A doula—the ancient Greek term for a female servant who helps new mothers—comes into the home shortly after a baby's birth to help parents adjust to life with a newborn.

“The doula is there to offer support to the mother, the partner, and any other family members that are present,” explains Debra Pascali-Bonaro, a certified doula, whose own practice, MotherLove Inc. (201-358-2703), is based in River Vale.

While a doula assists parents with the basics of newborn care, including bathing, burping, feeding, and diapering, she also takes care of practical things around the house so the new mom can rest. Doulas will cook a meal, do laundry, run errands, and even buy groceries.

In the past, such tasks might have been handled by family members. But many New Jerseyans no longer live near family, and even if they do, their relatives often work. Besides, says Pascali-Bonaro, caring for babies at home has changed greatly in the past 20 to 30 years. “Even the most well-meaning mom or mother-in-law might have outdated information,” she says.

A doula typically spends about three to five hours a day with a new mother for an average of eight to ten days. Fees can vary from \$15 to \$30 an hour, and some medical insurance policies now reimburse for this service. For a list of certified doulas throughout the state, contact Doulas of North America at 888-788-DONA or www.dona.org.



A PET'S BEST FRIEND

WHAT'S A PET OWNER TO DO WHILE HE OR SHE WORKS ALL DAY and the dog is cooped up at home? For four years, the folks at the Elephant Nose Pet Center in Morristown (973-538-5678) have been helping to keep local pooches and other pets happy by visiting them at home, taking them for walks, and just providing some TLC.

“Some business people are away from home morning till night, and their dogs are alone for twelve hours,” says shop owner Julie Pilas. “We'll go over in the middle of the day, take them out, sometimes feed them, and give them a little break. We'll also put them in the backyard and play fetch with them.”

The store offers the service throughout Chatham, Madison, and Morristown for a basic fee ranging from \$8 to \$15 a visit. If there's another animal or a fish tank in the home, the Elephant Nose staff will feed it too at no extra charge. Although the typical session is about twenty minutes once a day, Pilas notes that she has visited homes as many as three or four times a day on request. “Each pet is different,” she says. “We'll go to the home first, meet the pet, and see the routine....It's whatever the family wants. We have no strict rules about anything. We're there to accommodate the family and keep the pets happy.”

The Elephant Nose also provides the same service for clients who are away on business or vacation. “It's more pleasant for the animals to stay in familiar surroundings rather than go to a kennel where they're cooped up and exposed to other animals,” says Pilas. “They're more comfortable in their own home.”

