

Life at Home

Firm lends hand, style to the time-starved

By **Andrea Pyenson**
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When Lynn Davis accepted a job with US Trust in March 2004, it meant she would have to move from Wellesley, where she'd lived for 10 years, to New York. Among the myriad logistical challenges Davis faced, the one that weighed most heavily was what to do with Polly, her 9-year old West Highland Terrier, during and after the move.

Her daughter, Leah, who was in college, planned to spend the summer in Wellesley and could take care of the dog then, but Davis, a single mother, had to start work two months before Leah would be home.

Help came in the form of GoodDeeds, a life management services company founded by Beth Miller, 46, of Newton and Sarah Harris, 36, of Natick. "The first thing I said to them was, 'I have to start a job on March 28 and I have nothing to do with my dog,'" Davis says.

"Simultaneously, I asked them to do a project plan for organizing the sale of my home in Massachusetts, the search for a home in New York, sale and appraisal of some things in Wellesley, finding a vet, a dog walker, and a gym in New York."

Taking care of Polly was no sweat for the partners, who tend to form close connections with their clients. Harris's parents, who live on Cape Cod, agreed to keep her until Leah got home. Then, Davis says, "Sarah and Beth got me the name of a real estate broker who found me the apartment that I'm in. They found the vet. They found someone to take care of the dog [in New York]."

In Wellesley, they had full access to Davis's house, where they organized her belongings for sale, donation, or moving - all with her approval. They also helped Davis sell two of her cars and change the license and registration of another that she brought to New York. And

they arranged to have some of her daughter's things shipped to her dorm. "There was nothing I couldn't ask them to do," Davis says. "They gave me a sense of organization and comfort around moving and/or disposal of my worldly goods."

Harris and Miller, both former executives in human resources, started their Newton-based company in January 2004 and are "having a blast," Harris says. They're so busy - without advertising - that they now have four employees and plan to add more.

"We go into people's homes and become an extension of their lives," says Harris. Typically, a client will hire the company for a single task. "Once they get to know the range of our services, they hire us for other things"

That range includes home project management, personal shopping, event planning, travel planning, organizational services, and research and resourcing. There are few services GoodDeeds offers that clients can't do on their own. But most clients work, volunteer, or are active in their communities, and find that the benefits of using GoodDeeds more than justify the investment - roughly \$85 per hour, no matter the task.

Help wanted

Summations of four recent jobs show the breadth of what GoodDeeds will do. Standard rate is \$85 an hour.



Beth Miller (left) of GoodDeeds counsels Karyn Campbell on an addition to her wardrobe.

SOURCE: Good Deeds

Assignment: Wardrobe update

Client: Karyn Campbell

Details: Wardrobe

assessment and closet organizing; Goodwill drop-off; set up and confirm hair appointment; set up appointment with vendors; personal shopping with client; shop for client; visit to hair salon; final closet reorganization; preparation of outfit note cards

Hours: 15.75

Cost: \$1,338.75

Assignment: Office and closet organization

Client: Greg Pappas

Details: On-site needs assessment; prepare project plan; reorganize closet; sort office possessions; measure for storage solutions; product research and shopping; work with general contractor for desk build-out

Hours: 10.75

Cost: \$913.75

Assignment: Assist relocating to New York

Client: Lynn Davis

Details: Identify resources in New York (real estate agent, pet services);

develop project plan; inventory and sort belongings in Wellesley house; take items to town dump; meet with art dealers, appraisers; sell items; cancel utilities; have oriental rugs cleaned and packed for storage and move; service and sell two cars.

Hours: 39.75

Cost: \$3,378.75

Assignment: Party decorations

Client: Lisa Wallace

Details: Decorating overview; photos; shop for decorations; prepare project plan; decorate house

Hours: 12.5 hours

Cost: \$1,586.78

(\$1,062.00 time,

\$524.78 materials)

Company will help organize your life – and your dog's, too

Karyn Campbell is a financial consultant who took a seven-year break from her career to stay home with her children. About a year ago, knowing she would soon be reentering the job market, Campbell hired GoodDeeds to revamp her wardrobe.

"I hate to shop," says the Wellesley mother of three. But she had attended a few semiprofessional gatherings and felt former colleagues looking askance at her "frumpy little mommy clothes."

Campbell met Harris and Miller at a luncheon hosted by one of her neighbors and called them within a week. "I was in desperate need," she says.

On their first visit, Harris and Miller sifted through Campbell's closet with her, preserving a few pieces while gently weeding out the "junk." Next, Miller took Campbell shopping. They went to one boutique and one department store, where Miller had selected sales associates in advance. Later, Miller bought accessories - shoes, pocketbooks, shawls and jewelry - and delivered them to Campbell's house, with instructions on what to wear with each outfit.

"I feel more put together every day," Campbell says. "If I wake up and have a nursery school meeting, then a nonprofit meeting, then a business meeting, I have an outfit that can carry me through the day."

Miller has outfitted Campbell for three seasons, and says she is trying to "wean her." And

Campbell says she now feels she can shop on her own as long as it's at one of the shops Miller has taken her to.

"Once she's come and done some things for you, it's hard not to keep calling her," Lisa Wallace says of Miller, whom she has known since the two were students at Tufts University. She hired GoodDeeds to decorate her house for a holiday party last December and for a few smaller projects since.

The party was to raise funds for Nazareth Transitional Residence, a home in Roxbury for mothers with HIV and their children. Wallace invited over 100 women. "I could have decorated the house myself, but it would not have looked nearly as good," says the retired layer and mother of three.

A few weeks before the party, Miller came to Wallace's Winchester home with one of her associates. They took pictures of the first floor, where the party would be held. They also sorted through Wallace's Christmas decorations to see what they could use. Then they made up a plan. Two weeks before the party they started shopping for additional decorations. And the day before, they came and installed everything.

"It looked beautiful," Wallace says. "I was thrilled. We had a great turnout." And they raised \$2,000.

Initially, all GoodDeeds clients were women, but increasingly men are beginning to use their services. Greg Pappas discovered them at his health club, Bosse Sports in

Sudbury, which offers some GoodDeeds services through its own concierge service.

"I travel all the time for business and I don't have time to organize my home office or closet the way I want," says Pappas, a partner at a Boston consulting firm. "I'm very organized and things had gotten so out of hand, for me, it was cripplingly painful."

The first thing Miller and Harris noticed when they entered Pappas's office in his Wayland home was not the beautiful cherry desk but the wires running all over it. They found a carpenter to build a piece that holds all the wires and power strips and looks as if it is part of the desk. They also found storage pieces to hold everything on his desk and in his credenzas. And they reorganized his clothes closet, which is in his office.

"It was really terrific, and it's the kind of system you can maintain," Pappas enthuses. "It's a little bit of a luxury item, but it was worth it for me."

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