

## Setting the stage for next phase of life

By Leta Edwards

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Moving day can send shudders through even those with the most positive outlook on life. What to pack. What to get rid of. Years-old surprises under the bed and under the sofa.

It's bad enough when there's a decade or so of accumulated "stuff" to go through. Imagine what it's like to have to downsize from a half-century or more of acquisitions in preparation for a move to a new and often much-smaller place to live.

South Salem resident Carol Simila helps make downsizing — or the currently preferred term, rightsizing — less daunting, including the planning, packing, unpacking and placement of items in their new location.

Simila is a certified relocation and transition specialist. As a senior move manager, Simila's business, Home Sweet Home Transition Services, assists older adults and their families, not only with the actual moving experience, but with the emotional and physical aspects of sorting through and downsizing a lifetime of memories.

"Most older adults making a transition have not moved in 20, 30 or 40 years and need to downsize considerably," Simila said. "Gradually, as they enter their 70s and 80s, people begin to feel overwhelmed by the volume of possessions and the unending task of maintaining them. The organizational and physical tasks associated with planning and implementing such a housecleaning and move can be overwhelming."

Simila describes her job as helping clients move from expansion to contraction mode when she's preparing them to move to a home that's the right size. Her tools range from cardboard boxes and tissue paper for packing fragile heirlooms to a simple room planner that helps give a preview of where pared-down furnishings will fit.

Simila's clients come from throughout the Mid-Valley. When relocations are required outside the area, she connects clients with senior-move managers at their destinations.

### Support following illness or death

If illness or death precipitates the move, those left responsible for moving, such as children and spouses, might already be emotionally and physically drained.



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Senior moving specialist Carol Simila (right) takes a break from packing keepsakes for Midge Hawkins to help her decide on a room layout in her next residence.

### Carol Simila

Education: Masters in Education, St. Martin's University, Olympia, Wash.

Business: Home Sweet Home Transition Services

Professional membership: National Association of Senior Move Managers and American Society on Aging

Licensed by the state of Oregon for packing and loading

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Jerry Beckman is comfortably at home in the South Salem senior-living community of Terrace Lake Park, but it took him two moves to feel settled following the death of his wife a year and a half ago.

During her illness, Beckman had been kept busy caring for her, shopping and tending to the couple's pets. When she died, he knew he couldn't stay in their Creekside home that had so many memories. He also knew he didn't have the focus and energy to tend to the details of a move.

Beckman found Simila's card on a bulletin board at the South Salem Senior Center and also found the support he needed to make the move.

"In about two and a half days, Carol had arranged for movers," Beckman said. "When the day to move came, she told me, 'go have some coffee.'"

Later, when Beckman saw his newly rented townhouse, the furniture was in place, pictures were on the wall and everything was arranged in the kitchen.

"I only asked to have them move one thing, where the TV was," Beckman said.

Beckman's next move was to Terrace Lake Park, and Simila was his support once again.

"She was fast," Beckman said. "And both times I moved she called the next day to make sure everything was where I wanted it."

Simila says that the amount of time it takes to move a client depends on the complexity of the move, including how large the current residence is and how many possessions must be wrapped for moving or storage. She says a three-bedroom home usually takes about a week to move.

### **Handling treasured possessions**

When preparing seniors for a move, Simila helps them to focus on what they will really need in their new place.

"They are not going to need four sets of dishes, for example," Simila said.

She is particularly sensitive to items that seem to have sentimental value.

Collections accumulated during many years are common moving challenges for her.

"Clients have devoted so much time and energy into building them," Simila said. "They often are very valuable and can be sold. The family also takes them."

When BettyLu and Herb Anderson married 15 years ago, each had lost their spouse, so they essentially merged belongings acquired during two lifetimes. BettyLu, 85, and Herb, 92, are now right-sizing from their two-story, three-bedroom, 2 1/2-bath South Salem home to a 960-square foot, one-bedroom, one-bath cottage in a Lake Oswego retirement community.

BettyLu seems hardly fazed by the boxes and belongings that fill nearly every open space throughout the house, as Simila and an assistant pack and tag and help her decide what to take and what to set aside for relatives, donation or sale.

"I'm excited about the move because I'm able to do it in slow motion," BettyLu said.

"It is the right thing to do and the right time," Simila said. She said she's seen seniors wait too

long and be forced to downsize because of illness or physical disability. "If you wait too long, you lose your choices."

Treasured possessions are treated by Simila as they are lovingly embraced by her senior clients. If they are not moved, Simila helps the owner choose family and friends to pass them on to, or suggests a charity, such as Salem's Daue House, operated by the Assistance League.

Occasionally, she arranges for an appraiser to determine whether an estate sale would be useful.

"Estate sellers are interested in valuable antiques and jewelry, as a rule," Simila said. "Most of my clients don't even ask about sales because family has been given most of the really valuable things."

### **Repeat clients**

Midge Hawkins, 86, is using Simila for the third time. The first time she downsized from a large apartment in a complex with residents of all ages to a smaller unit in a complex for seniors only. This time Hawkins is relocating from her Salem residence to one in Keizer.

Simila carefully wrapped a pitcher collection in white tissue paper as Hawkins studied the room layout for her new residence in Keizer.

"She surprised me in that she reads my mind. She really does know what's important," Hawkins said. "I think, 'Oh dear, I'll never find it,' but I always do."

### **Lifestyle and safety concerns**

Simila is always aware of lifestyle and safety issues for the seniors she helps move.

"I might ask, 'What is really going to enhance your lifestyle; will having that trunk in the middle of the room be a hazard?' Most everyone has a walker or some device. We have to make it barrier free."

Simila strongly believes in what she refers to as aging in place, and she helps to make that happen for those who want to remain in their current home.

"I love to see people do that, if they're willing to do what needs to be done to make their current house safe," Simila said. "Most situations could be made safe."

She said, "A lot of people would age in place if builders built houses that span the ages in the first place — from raising children safely to living as a senior with zero-grade entries and no interior stairs."

Simila says she often finds herself in the role of a mediator, but her focus remains on the person she is moving and their well-being.

"Regardless of who hires me — children, a social service agency, family — the senior is my client."

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