BY MARCIA WEIDNER-SUTPHEN

CLEAN UP *and* HELP OUT

i'm not going to exercise more to lose those few extra pounds i gained over the holidays. **my goal is to feel lighter by getting rid of stuff i no longer use or need in my home.**

My weight loss plan starts with paring down a messy kitchen cabinet where I put vitamins, cold medicines and other pharmaceuticals (including a tube of outdated fungal cream for my cat). Also in the cabinet, on the top shelf, I put four green cocktail glasses that I purchased about 10 years ago. I pull one down, dust it off and try to think of one reason why I should keep it.

I can't come up with anything other than it has a bowl big enough to hold about 4 ounces of muesli cereal with some milk.

In social situations, I used to salt the rims and then fill the glasses with ice, tequila, orange liqueur and homemade sweet and sour margarita mix. I suppose that is why I stopped using the glasses: one margarita led to two and two sometimes led to three.

I pack away the glasses in a box for Goodwill (still wondering whether or not I might want to serve a margarita in a margarita glass someday). I am concerned that I will regret my decision, but according to Berks' own Vali G. Heist, owner of the Clutter Crew, expense doesn't really matter when you're trying to organize your home. "Even if it is something you paid for, if you haven't used it or it's in the way, you need to let it go," she advises.

RIDDING A ROOM OF ITS CLUTTER

We sometimes feel an urgent need to clean our homes in the New Year. For some it's, "garbage in, garbage out," but for others it's not that simple.

According to Vali, it's a nesting instinct. "It always happens and it's not really about cleaning up; it's about attending to a room or space that's disorganized," she shares.

So where do we start? The first step, Vali says, is deciding how you want to use the room or the space most in need of a pickup. Next, she says, is setting aside a specific day and time for the project. "You've got to write it down or you'll never get to it," says Vali, who has a way of encouraging her clients to see a room for its possibilities.

Next, ask yourself the following questions: What's most important to me? How do I see this room? What is my plan? For instance, Vali says if the room is being used for exercise and office work, choose one and stick with it.

To de-clutter, remove or repurpose the biggest item in the room, especially if it's no longer serving its original purpose. Take a good look at everything, piece by piece, and try to think of all the reasons why you should hang on to it. Was it something you wanted to try and sell? Do you have an emotional attachment to the item?

NEXT, ASK YOURSELF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS: WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT TO ME? HOW DO I SEE THIS ROOM? WHAT IS MY PLAN?

If you get stuck or are the kind of person who struggles with making decisions, that's when Vali steps in and holds your hand. "I sometimes need to give people permission to let go of their stuff," she says.

In her book, *Organize This! Practical Tips, Green Ideas, and Ruminations about your CRAP*, she spells out the many ways to repurpose or donate stuff. For instance, to pare down your clothing closet, Vali suggests donating pieces you haven't worn in two years. "If you have items that cost more than $50," she says, "you might consider hanging on to them." If you're having trouble deciding what to keep or what not to keep, Vali suggests inviting a close friend over to help with the decision making. Also, think about keeping some of your summer things in with your winter things so that you can layer long-or short-sleeved shirts under jackets or blazers that can be worn year round.

JUST GIVE IT AWAY

As you de-clutter your home, remember, even if you're not using your stuff, somebody else probably can. And according to Vali, there are just too many places to take your things to just throw them out. Take, for example, my underused, over-sized computer desk with a detachable hutch. I might find a new home for it at Furniture Soup Inc., Reading.

Here you can sell or donate slightly used office furniture, says Tracy McKay, designer and co-owner of the business. All you have to do is photograph and measure the item (it must be suitable for an office environment) and then email the information to the Soup. If it's suitable for resale, you can either bring in the item or the Soup can come out and take a look at it for final approval. If the item is heavy, they

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Furniture Soup also accepts tables, lamps and other kinds of accessories, but it's not a drop off center for just anything, so follow their acceptance process and you just might be able to lighten the load in your home or office. If your furniture doesn't make the grade here, don't sweat it. There are other ways to rid your place of the things you no longer need or use.

There's always eBay if you prefer to try and sell your stuff. If you feel more confident having someone else do the work, including selecting, listing and picking up your items, Vali's discerning eye and expertise is just a phone call away. "Because it's not my item, I can see it for what it really is," she says.

BE KIND TO THE ENVIRONMENT

Today, by law, we must recycle unused electronics including computers, monitors, printers, cell phones, keyboards and televisions.

Berks County Solid Waste Authority, a good electronic recycling option, accepts all electronics in addition to batteries, fluorescent bulbs, air conditioners, dehumidifiers and more. Their hours of operation are Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday from 8am to Noon.

Another good resource, Responsible Recycling Services of Kutztown, accepts electronics, too, as well as cardboard and appliance, at nine drop off locations in Berks, Lehigh and Northampton counties. They also conduct drop-off fundraiser events for churches and other nonprofit organizations. "We make it easy for residents to recycle," says Wendy L. Gorgon-Rodriguez, general manager of the company. The company is in partnership with E-Steward certified facilities to ensure the best practices are used when it comes to breaking down items. Expect to pay a small recycling fee for refrigerators, freezers, air conditioners, dishwashers, washers and dryers.

Did you know that pizza boxes and paper plates, napkins and towels are considered non-recyclable? According to Earth911.com, these items, due to their residual grease, are the worst contaminants in paper recycling. But in the trash they are considered green when they start to break down and release methane gas—a by-product of waste decomposition. In a licensed solid waste sanitary landfill it is considered a valuable source of renewable energy.

Even the federal Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) is on board the green train with its national "take-back day" April 27 from 10am to 2pm for the safe disposal of unused prescription drugs. For more information or to find a collection site near you, visit deadiversion.usdoj.gov.

I hope the DEA will take back my cat's outdated fungal cream. If not I can always put it in the attic—my favorite place to store and hide things out of sight. It's where I put my absurd collection of Beanie Babies (there are close to 100 of them, some supposedly worth lots of money, in a large black trash bag on the floor). Years ago, I squished four beanies to fill gaps in the attic wall to keep cold air from coming in. And, in the future, I could stack the other beanies at the basement door to keep rain water from rushing in—it's my clutter; I'll do what I want with it. Wink.

REPURPOSING IS THE WAY TO GO

Part of being green is making the most of what you have. Check out these cool tips from **thecluttercrew.com** for doing just that!

ANTIQUE FURNITURE.

Store items like mail, writing tools, paper, pictures, gift wrap, crafts and more that you do not want on display.

SPARE CLOTHING CLOSET.

Convert and organize this space for storing crafts, toys, holiday decorations, collections and more.

IDLE DINING ROOM.

Transform the area to reflect your personal tastes and needs. Use furniture or an ornamental privacy screen to break up the space.

RESOURCES

BERKS COUNTY SOLID WASTE AUTHORITY
1316 Hilltop Rd., Leesport
610.478.6362 | co.berks.pa.us/swa

THE CLUTTER CREW
Mohnton
610.914.3483 | thecluttercrew.com

RESPONSIBLE RECYCLING SERVICES
805 Tomahawk Drive, Kutztown
484.641.5156 | responsiblerecyclingservices.com

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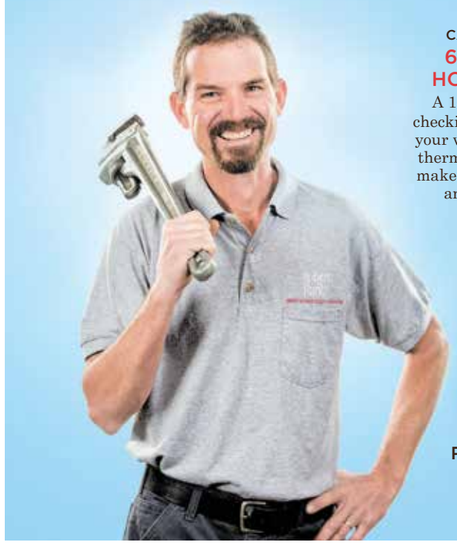

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