

# Business helps seniors downsize to new homes

By Stacy Parker  
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## OCEANFRONT

**W**hen Bill Bertholf needed to move his 87-year-old mother, Cynthia, from independent to assisted living in Atlantic Shores, he employed Downsize Designers.

"My concern was what we could take and what we couldn't take," he said. "They gave me choices, options."

Ann Armistead and Linda Bergeron - the Downsize Designers - specialize in downsizing and moving seniors. Their services include organizing and sorting a home's contents, arranging for the disposal of unwanted items and setting up the new home.

The two are members of the National Association of Senior Move Managers and vice chairs of the Virginia Beach Task Force on Aging, where they arrange for guest speakers at monthly meetings.

Armistead and Bergeron, neighbors in Chesapeake's Great Bridge, worked together at a furniture store before venturing into the senior-move management business.

They gained experience from assisting their parents and in-laws, who moved from large houses to apartments in senior communities. They've learned to make a piece of furniture fit if a client has owned it for years and wants to keep it.

"We consider their emotional attachment as well as functionality," Armistead said.

Beth Bennett's dining room buffet is being used as a dresser in her bedroom. Bennett, 95, needed to move to a smaller living space in the First Colonial Inn at Hilltop and called Downsize Designers for assistance.

Bennett said the designers used "innovation" in space-saving ideas and decor, including turning her dining room into an office and placing family photos on the kitchen wall.

Making tough decisions

about furniture or other possessions collected for decades can be the hardest part of a move for seniors and their families. That's when Downsize Designers cuts to the chase.

"We're the impartial third party," said Armistead.

She and Bergeron work with clients to determine what will fit comfortably in the new living space. Downsize Designers charges \$60 an hour; managing a move costs between \$1,000 and \$5,000.

For the Bertholfs, the designers also set up a moving company to transport boxes and supervised on move-in day.

"They took care of all those little details," said Bill Bertholf.

Familiarity and keeping everything where it was supposed to be was a big issue for his mother, Bertholf said. Downsize Designers hit the mark.

"When they walk into their apartment, we make sure things are the way they were," said Armistead. "When you're older, you're used to a routine, and it makes you feel comfortable."

The designers take photographs of a client's former residence and try to replicate most of the arrangements, such as items on a night stand or the order of clothes in the closet.

"It's a wonderful service for people who aren't able to help ourselves," said Bennett. "It was the best move I ever made."

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**Ann Armistead, left, and Linda Bergeron, the Downsize Designers, offer service for seniors who are moving to assisted living or other smaller quarters.**