

How to deal with downsizing

Whether it's exploring a lively downtown or participating in fun new activities, changing your address can be an exciting time.

Glen Ellyn residents Connie, 60, and Joe Sunderhaus, 59, traded in a 1954 four-bedroom home in Villa Park for a townhome a few years ago.

Their new dwelling carries the benefits of making new friends, having better indoor space, and living in downtown Glen Ellyn, home to shops, restaurants and the train, which Joe says takes the couple to Chicago for day trips to museums and plays.

When Joe, a business software implementation consultant, and Connie, a healthcare consultant, married in 2003 and moved into Connie's family home, it became clear that changes were afoot. "I think Joe's expression at the time was either 'we need to move or improve,'" Connie says. Facing major improvements, the couple opted for a townhome instead of a condo or senior living facility.

The moving process was a positive experience, Connie recalls. Besides the sorting, removing and keeping of items, she had already dealt with personal emotions and life changes with the raising of her children as a divorced mother. Now with Joe at her side, moving was easy.

"I guess I anticipated that there would be an issue because I had lived in Villa Park for such a long time," she says. "I thought that moving would be more difficult, but it wasn't at all."

Planning the big move

Kelly Reid, a licensed clinical social worker for Metropolitan Family Services in Wheaton and supervisor of the agency's Older Adult and Caregiver Counseling program, knows her clients' downsizing concerns.

Reid says they want less home maintenance, reliable transportation, a reduced cost of living and a place near

family or friends. And those who choose senior communities want to increase activities and socialization.

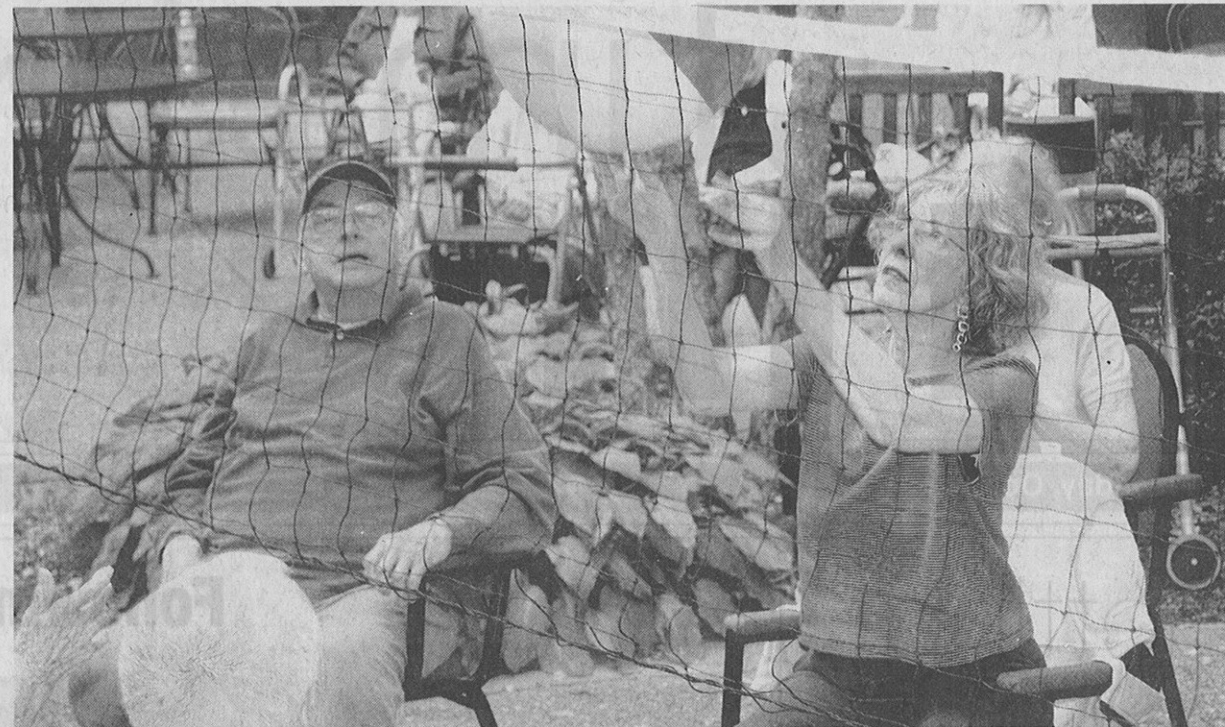
But downsizing does bring on mixed emotions, Reid explains. "There can be some sadness, especially for people who are looking at it as though this may be their last move and the finality of that," she says. "Your adult children can have feelings of loss of the family home."

Planning and thinking ahead is the key. Reid says planning can evoke a sense of new adventure along with feelings of excitement and relief of not having so many responsibilities and belongings.

Breaking down tasks makes the process easier when family, friends and paid services help with sorting items and cleaning out areas, Reid says. Finding a professional counselor also helps people deal with the positives and negatives of moving.

A sudden move

For some people, the move is not as easy. Medical reasons prompted long-



Frank and Karen Reeder keep active by participating in a game of chair volleyball at Mather Place of Wilmette.

port system in place, including real estate professionals they had consulted when they needed to sell.

"Without them, I wouldn't have been able to move," she says. "They came in as a team. They helped organize things and packed boxes. They were fantastic and even brought us meals."

Sometimes people may not find the exact home for their needs. The Reeders found themselves in the situation of not being able to move into the senior independent living community they preferred, The Mather in Evanston, since it was under construction. Instead Mather Place was able to accommodate them by

knocking down walls to create a spacious new apartment.

This new community also gave the couple many social opportunities and activities. The Reeders frequently dine with their neighbors and play bridge with others. And Karen gets to use her talents by writing about the community's happenings as editor of Mather Matters, a newsletter. A physical therapist helps Karen stay in shape with strength training and balance exercises. Frank plays chair volleyball, a seated ver-

sion of the sport, with Karen taking a seat sometimes herself.

And what Karen has learned is that just because people move away from their old neighborhood, it doesn't mean the ties are automatically cut. She keeps in touch with neighborhood friends over lunch and phone calls.

The welcome mat

Mary Kay Bartelt, residence services manager for Mather Place, understands the apprehensiveness of residents who downsized.

"We've had people who may have lived in the family home for 20, 30, 40 and in some cases, 50 years and lived in rather large areas or even in a spacious condo," she says. "Now they're coming to an apartment. They're definitely downsizing and it means eliminating a lot of things. It means communal or congregate living."

Newcomers attend an orientation meeting to acquaint them with floor representatives who are Mather Place residents. The facility provides full dining services and a clinic.

Activities such as joining a book club, voicing opinions in a political discussion group and painting in watercolors "are a big draw here," says Bartelt. Exercise programs such as yoga, tai chi and weight training pump up the residents during the week.

As daunting as it may seem as first, moving to a new downtown or a new community of neighbors can be the right move. "My experience is that once people make the transition and really get acclimated, almost unanimously they say it's the best thing they ever did," says Bartelt. ■

Good moves

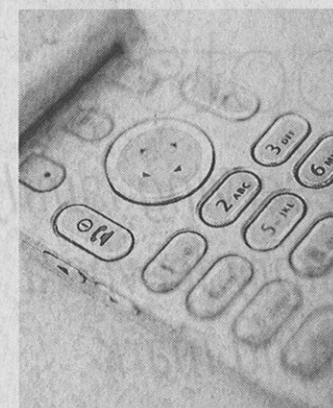
Kelly Reid offers tips to make moving a positive transition, whether it's going to a condo, townhome or senior living facility:

- Plan and think ahead. Assess what are your future needs.
- Break down tasks such as cleaning closets, organizing important papers and donating items. Tasks are done quickly when family, friends or hired help are involved.
- Talk with friends who have moved successfully and ask them how they managed their situation.
- Seek a professional counselor to discuss feelings about moving.
- See what is available in a new community in terms of accessible transportation to stores, your social clubs and activities, and churches.
- Rent if you are unsure about permanently moving. Some senior communities have a month trial period.
- Keep communications open with family if you are moving near them.

time Wilmette residents Frank, 73 and Karen Reeder, 68, to sell their 94-year-old 13-room home last year and to move into Mather Place of Wilmette in February, a senior living independent retirement community.

"Frank took the move much better than I did," Karen says. "I loved my house and I worked very hard on it. I thought that I had another 5 or 10 years to live there. It was traumatic for me, but the people and the staff at Mather Place are very friendly."

The couple was lucky to have a sup-



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Glenda Taylor, manager of Info Plus, takes many of those calls. With a degree in social work and 20 years experience, "I'm kind of an information guru," she says. She draws from a database of 14,000 listings in Illinois. If she doesn't have the answer, she'll find it for you, for free.