

# real estate

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**SMART MOVES**

## Declutter tips for downsizing

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No matter your age or income level, if you need to get rid of some possessions due to downsizing, you're likely to be tormented by the process.



Ellen James Martin

Indeed, those at the top of the success ladder often feel the most overwhelmed when they need to purge possessions, says Vicki Norris, author of "Reclaim Your Life ... and Get Organized for Good."

Norris, who was a real estate agent before she started her own organizing firm two decades ago, says the proliferation of inexpensive imported goods and the ease of buying online have exacerbated the problem, particularly for middle to high-income people.

Ownership of too many possessions isn't only an emotional burden; it's also a problem for those who need to make their place appealing to buyers to achieve a successful sale, says Dorcas Helfant, a real estate broker and co-owner of several realty offices.

"Nowadays, buyers want to start fresh in a house that's free and clear. They can't picture themselves living in a place jammed with other people's stuff," says Helfant, a past president of the National Association of Realtors (realtor.org).

Before embarking on the huge task of getting their property ready for market, she urges sellers to create a timeline and a checklist.

"There's a lot of emotional turmoil with any move. But you'll be much better off if you take a strategic, step-by-step approach rather than a disorganized one," Helfant says.

Here are a few pointers for sellers:

**Equip yourself with the right gear for the job.**

Norris says an efficient decluttering and packing program shouldn't require a lot of expensive equipment.

In most cases, cardboard boxes should suffice for your move. Ideally, these should be boxes of uniform size — like the "bankers boxes" sold at office supply stores — that will stack neatly.

After pre-packing the items you're determined to take to your next property, place these in your garage or a guest bedroom not currently in use. If possible, Norris urges you to avoid renting a paid storage unit.

"Storage units can be very expensive. People think they'll just rent one for just two or three months. But the average rental period is at least 15 months. When your stuff is out of sight, it's out of mind," she says.

**Go room-by-room when decluttering and packing.**

Norris says it's very unnerving to approach a decluttering project by working on several fronts simultaneously. Instead, she advises you to tackle just one room at a time, beginning in the "public" areas of the house that will receive the most scrutiny from prospective buyers. These include your entryway, living room, dining room, family room and kitchen.

**Allow extra time to clear through your kitchen.**

As real estate agents observe, most home shoppers won't routinely look inside a chest of drawers and examine your clothes. But many will open kitchen cabinets and are very critical of counter-top clutter.

"Give the kitchen top priority. No one wants to see that toaster or blender on your counter space," Norris says.

You won't want to remove basic kitchen items — plates, pots, pans and utensils — until right before you move. But much earlier, you can pack away seasonal and special-use items.

## HABITAT BLITZ 2017



At top: On Angier Avenue in East Durham, not far from downtown Durham, are new homes by Thayer Homes, BuildSense and B. Wallace Design and Construction. Above left: As the framing team starts to build at 2612 Angier Avenue, three BuildSense team members, (l-r) Erik Mehlman, Leon Meyers and Randy Lanou, stand behind new Habitat home partner Tiffany Byrd and two of her three children Jakarri and Khyvion. Above right: Joanne McClain and her daughter, Samantha, stand with Durham Building Company's lead builders Eric Hedden (l) and Joe Barker in front of McClain's Bingham Street home.

Article by Sally Keeney // Photos contributed

This year, more than 200 families nationwide built a home by partnering with local home builders and volunteers during Habitat for Humanity's Home Builders Blitz week June 5 through 9.

From 12 homes being built in Wake County by 13 home builders during the first Habitat Blitz in 2002, the number of builders, sponsors and homes completed nationwide has risen to more than 1,700 since the Habitat Blitz went national in 2006, according to a recent Habitat for Humanity International newsletter. In 2015, Habitat made a commitment to Blitz annually.

Angier Avenue and Bingham Street in East Durham, not far from downtown, was the site of this year's Durham Habitat Blitz where five homes were built for five families, all of whom are headed by single mothers.

"Our partner families buy their homes and bring 250-300 hours of sweat equity to loan closing instead of a cash down payment," Lakeisha Minor, Durham Habitat's family services director, said. "Tiffaney (White), Anita (Stewart), Tiffany (Byrd), Natasha (Hanks) and Joanne (McClain) all work hard in their primary jobs, and on top of that, they're working hard to earn their sweat equity hours. They're all on track to move into their new homes by mid-July. When they do, their mortgage payments — all of which are under \$650 per month — will be repaid to Habitat, and Habitat will use those funds to build more homes for Durham neighbors. Together we're building strength, stability and self-reliance."

Durham Habitat was among the first affiliates to lead with Home Builders Blitz events," Roxanne Little, director of development for Habitat Durham, said. "Our first in Durham was in 2005 when seven homes were built in just one week. This year's Blitz was the seventh in Durham and so successful that we're already excited to do it again in 2018."

"As chief executive officer of the Home Builders Association of Durham, Orange and Chatham Counties, I could not be more proud of the tremendous charitable spirit of our association," Holly Fraccaro said. "We have built 20 houses through these remarkable week-long programs."

Habitat is all about partnerships, and Blitz partners stand out," Blake Strayhorn, Durham Habitat's executive director, said.

The local builders participating in this year's Blitz are: B. Wallace Design and Construction, BuildSense, Durham Building Company, Garman Homes and Thayer Homes. The foundations and building permits are in place before the Blitz begins, but in just six days, five local home builders each built one house from start to finish — from raising the first walls to the final certificate of occupancy, Strayhorn explained.

"Each builder invites and coordinates a cast of hundreds of their partners to make the home a reality," Strayhorn said. "And, the most important partner is the family who is buying their Habitat home at zero percent interest. The days are long, and each day marks so many milestones. At the end of the week, we have not only five new homes, but also new friendships, new neighbors and a stronger community. Durham Habitat is thankful for all of the partners who made the 2017 Home Builders Blitz a success."

"I told the Blitz dedication crowd that all of us hear a lot about Us vs. Them," Leon Meyers, partner and operations lead of BuildSense, said. "In fact, that's just about all we hear in the news. Habitat and the Blitz event in particular, are about working together for something that all of us recognize as a huge value for the community. Everybody involved in the June Blitz went away at the end of the week with a very strong sense of the power of joint effort."

"Home ownership offers the most reliable path to financial stability for low income American families," Meyers continued. "Habitat's uniquely effective program makes it possible for 30-plus Durham families per year to reach the goal of home ownership — and sets them on a path to success that they might never have achieved otherwise. It's a privilege for BuildSense to support such a powerful force in our community."

"Like all of the builders involved, I want to say thanks to Durham Habitat and the family we worked with — in our case Tiffany Byrd and her kids, Jakarri, Khyvion, and Zoey," said Randy Lanou, architect and founder of BuildSense. "The Blitz is service work for the right reasons. Durham Habitat and the Blitz provided a pathway and opportunity for Tiffany and her family to purchase a house, to earn a home through sweat equity and real dollars."

