

Maggie Kean's office, before help from professional organizer, Anne Blumer (left) and after (right)!

PHOTO COURTESY OF ANNE BLUMER



THE ORGANIZED MOM

by Emily Puro

“My kids have always wanted to do projects and now I say, ‘Sure!’ We’re able to do it because it’s not a big deal to get everything out any more.”

– Tiffany Shapiro

A year and a half after moving into her southwest Portland home, Maggie Kean’s office was piled high with unpacked boxes, papers to file and computer peripherals both usable and obsolete. “It was a complete and utter disaster,” recalls the mother of two.

Tiffany Shapiro, a Beaverton mom with five kids, ages 10 months to 9 years, was so overwhelmed by the supplies she’d collected for hobbies like scrapbooking, sewing and tole painting, the idea of finding what she needed seemed too daunting to even consider beginning a project.

Michelle Bolin knew where everything was in her kitchen, but because there wasn’t a designated place for anything, says the northwest Portland mother of three, “if anyone else was looking for something, they’d never find it.”

But that was then. Now Kean, Shapiro and Bolin are on the road to uncluttered bliss, thanks to some concentrated effort and the help of professional organizers.

If your home has gone from Art Deco to Contemporary Clutter as your family has grown, don’t despair. With advice from local experts – and the busy moms they’ve helped – you too can regain control of your home, your schedule and your life.

Conquering Clutter

When it comes to organization, clutter is your enemy. One of the biggest sources of clutter, says professional organizer and mother of two Anne Blumer, is paper. Blumer, who owns Portland-based SolutionsForYou, prompts clients to ask, “Do I need this

piece of paper or the information on it? Can I access this information somewhere else, like online, and toss the paper?”

Portland-based organizer Nicole Levine, of Get Organized With Nicole, says taming paper piles saves time as well. She suggests you compile frequently needed information into one system, such as the binder she created for Shapiro to manage her kids’ schools and extra-curricular activities.

But it’s not just paper that causes clutter. Rather than continuing to randomly toss things into the basement, southeast Portland mom Elizabeth Spagat worked with Levine to group similar items, clearly label containers and make sure the things she uses regularly are easily accessible. Levine also helped Spagat “purge” the things she didn’t need, a task that can be surprisingly emotional. Keep the things you’re not ready to discard, Levine told Spagat, but get rid of them in a year if you haven’t used them. “I heard (Nicole’s) voice a year later,” recalls Spagat, who finally gave away her juicer and hasn’t missed it since.

Blumer worked with Bolin to get her kids’ stamping supplies in order, sorting stamps, ink pads and different types of paper into concise, clearly labeled groups. Now the kids, ages 8, 12 and 18, can easily find what they need and keep things in order.

A Launching and Landing Pad

Another common source of disorganization is the constant flow of “stuff” that regularly goes in and out of the house, much of which gets deposited on the nearest surface when we walk in the door. A

The Organized Mom continues on page 22

*Quality Pediatric Healthcare
for Your Child*
The Portland Clinic Pediatric Department
Joseph D. Sweeney M.D., F.A.A.P.
16 years of pediatric experience.

**"We make your
child feel at home."**

**THE
Portland
Clinic**
Pediatrics & Surgery

The Portland Clinic
South Office
6640 SW Redwood Lane
Portland, OR 97224
(503) 620-7358



**BENNETT
SUZUKI
VIOLIN
STUDIO**

PRIVATE & GROUP LESSONS
STARTING AT AGE 2

Eddie Bennett
5635 S.W. Taylor's Ferry Rd.
Portland, OR 97219
(503) 246-9945
e-mail: eddieviolin@aol.com
website: www.eddiebennett.com

Masters Degree, Certified Teacher
Over 36 years teaching experience



EnjoyParentingAgain.com

**Counseling Coaching
Classes**

Practical skills to make
parenting more rewarding

Michael Gorsline, M.A.
Parent Coach / Therapist
(503) 422-9322
Office located in NW Portland

www.EnjoyParentingAgain.com

Call to schedule
your **Free** consultation today



**WOOD
HAVEN
SCHOOL**

GENTLY CONNECTING LEARNING WITH LIFE

Open House
June 1, 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

- Two and Three Day Programs for Ages 3-6
- Extended School day - 8:00 - 1:00 pm
- Waldorf-Inspired, Media-free Environment
- Daily Observation and Play in Nature
- Child-centered, Family-oriented Cooperative

CALL TO SCHEDULE A TOUR
(503) 520-0807
www.woodhavenschool.com
in Beaverton near Hwy 217



SolutionsForYou, Inc.
Organizing Services
Take Control of Your Surroundings

Anne Blamer
Organizing & Efficiency Expert
503-706-3502
Organizing@SolutionsForYou.com
www.SolutionsForYou.com

**Residential and Family
Organizing Services**

Our professional organizing experts specialize in organizing families with customized household and family management systems and routines.

We will assist you with clearing clutter, organizing your child's room, space planning and designing functional closet systems.

Life is simpler when you are organized!
Call for your **Complimentary** Needs Assessment
503-706-3502



Portland Community Ballet


...where *every* student gets a chance to perform

Cynthia Tosh, Artistic Director

Excellence in ballet, jazz, and tap
training for children (age 2 and up)
and adults



www.pdxballet.org • (503) 672-7909
12570 SW Farmington Rd. Beaverton, OR 97005




PICTURE YOUR CHILD IN 5TH GRADE!

**Bilingual. Confident.
World Citizen.**

Spanish, Chinese & Japanese

THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL
Pre-school through 5th grade
www.intschool.org | 503-226-2496
LANGUAGE, DIVERSITY, EXCELLENCE





Harmony Road
Music Course[®]

*Bringing children to music...
step by step
with total musicianship*

**Call for current
class schedule!**

Eastside: 503-557-5151
Westside: 503-626-7181
www.harmonyroadmusic.com

The Children's Gym
Where We Build Able Bodies and Self Esteem.



The Children's Gym is a gymnastics and motor development program for children 1 to 14 years old. Our focus is to reach the heart of children so we can build confidence and self esteem. Classes are small to allow for individual attention.

Now Enrolling! Call Today!
Preschool and Daycares call for field trip information!

1825 NE 43rd (off Sandy) • 503 249-JUMP(5867)
6104 SE King Rd., Milwaukie • 503 654-JUMP(5867)
www.childrensgym.com

Organizing Resources

Professional Organizers:

SolutionsForYou: Anne Blumer; 503-706-3502; www.solutionsforyou.com

Get Organized With Nicole: Nicole Levine; 503-493-7320; www.getorganizedwithnicole.com

National Organization of Professional Organizers (NAPO): www.napo.net; NAPO Oregon Chapter: www.oregonnapo.com

Books:

Organizing from the Inside Out: The Foolproof System For Organizing Your Home, Your Office and Your Life by Julie Morgenstern (Owl Books, 2004)

Organizing Plain and Simple: A Ready Reference Guide with Hundreds of Solutions to Your Everyday Clutter Challenges by Donna Smallin (Storey Publishing, LLC, 2002)

Web sites:

www.flylady.net: The FlyLady's Web site takes an innovative, humorous approach to helping families organize.

www.onlineorganizing.com: Includes a "clickable house" with tips for common trouble areas and other organizing advice and resources.

www.organizedhome.com: Articles on every aspect of organizing for your home and family.

www.shesintouch.com: Web site of Side-tracked Home Executives.

- Emily Puro

designated area – which Blumer calls a “Launching and Landing Pad” – is essential. Depending on a family’s space and aesthetics, the “pad” can be a bench with cubbies, a shelf with hooks, a locker system in the garage, or even just a chair on which you hang coats, purses and backpacks.

“Some people prefer not to see things,” says Levine, “and others think if they don’t see it, it’s not going anywhere.” The key is to design a space near the door that can hold all the things you take in and out on a regular basis. Kean’s family was so impressed with the concept they included a “launching and landing” closet into a recent remodel.

Kids’ Clutter

With play areas, parents should look at the space available and determine a reasonable amount of toys to fit that space. Once the space gets too full, says Blumer, something has to go.

Help children prioritize what they want to keep and what they can give up. Donating toys and books to charity is a nice way for kids to help others and know their toys will find a good home. If children resist giving up toys, suggests Levine, box things up when the kids are away and keep the boxes out of sight. If they don’t ask for the items within a few weeks, they probably won’t miss them.

Again, grouping and labeling are key. Keep similar toys together – such as “action figures” or “vehicles” – in labeled containers. Pre-readers can use picture labels while older kids can write their own.

“The best things are those that are as easy to put away as they are to take out,” says Levine. Large bins and toy chests invite clutter. A labeled container that a child can take with him to play, then refill and return to a shelf (also labeled) when he’s done, works great. Avoiding toys with lots of small pieces helps, too.

Levine often includes redecorating as part of the organizing process with children. “I find that when kids like their space and feel a sense of responsibility for what goes on there, how it looks and how it’s organized,” she says, “they’re much more likely to keep that room organized.”

Synchronized Schedules

Managing a busy family’s schedule is another organizational challenge. The first step is determining how many extra-curricular activities your family can handle; the second is designing a calendar system that’s accessible and understandable to everyone.

Both Blumer and Levine suggest choosing a single



Tiffany Shapiro's craft closet before working with professional organizer, Nicole Levine.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF NICOLE LEVINE & TIFFANY SHAPIRO

Tiffany Shapiro's craft closet after working with Levine.

calendar tool to avoid duplicated or incomplete information. A techno-savvy family with networked computers might opt for an electronic calendar, but most families prefer a large, centrally-located wall calendar. “I think it’s important to have a calendar that’s accessible to the kids so they can get involved in the process of scheduling and understanding how things need to work between family members,” says Levine.

A calendar with spaces large enough for notes – the address of a party, for example, or what you need to bring to a potluck – can reduce accumulated paper. Blumer recommends each family member writes his or her activities using a different colored pen. Not only does it save space, it makes it easier to visualize everyone’s schedule without actually reading the calendar.

A Liberating Change

Most of us are overwhelmed by the prospect of getting organized, but if you start small, your progress can inspire you. “What I consider a really good first project is

something where we can make a big change in a short amount of time,” says Levine. Get drawer dividers and tidy up the utility drawer in your kitchen or go through the pile of winter hats, gloves and scarves at the back of your hall closet. A small project teaches you the organizing process and lets you see the end result so larger projects won’t seem so daunting. And once you get started, you’ll likely be surprised at how much can be accomplished in a short amount of time.

Don’t forget that organization is an ongoing project. It requires you to design systems that work for your family and change some lifelong habits. “I’m certainly not completely reformed,” says Kean, “but I think I’m more aware. If I put something down but not in the place where it belongs, I’m very aware that I’m creating extra work for myself because later I’m just going to have to pick it up and put it where it belongs.”

While it takes time to get organized, the payoffs go far beyond an uncluttered house and a manageable schedule. “I’ve felt more creative because I know things are organized,” says Shapiro. “My kids have always wanted to do projects and now I say, ‘Sure!’ We’re able to do it because it’s not a big deal to get everything out anymore.”

Emily Puro is a Portland freelance writer and mother.

The Organized Mom continues on page 23

Handling Housework

In the never-ending battle to keep your house clean, getting organized can save you time and effort. After all, when you have a place for everything (and everything in its place), it's a lot easier to clean, and when your schedule is under control, you're more likely to find the time.

Professional organizer Anne Blumer of Portland's SolutionsForYou encourages clients to schedule house cleaning on their calendars. "What typically happens is people make 'to do' lists," she says, "but if it doesn't get scheduled into their calendar, it usually doesn't happen."

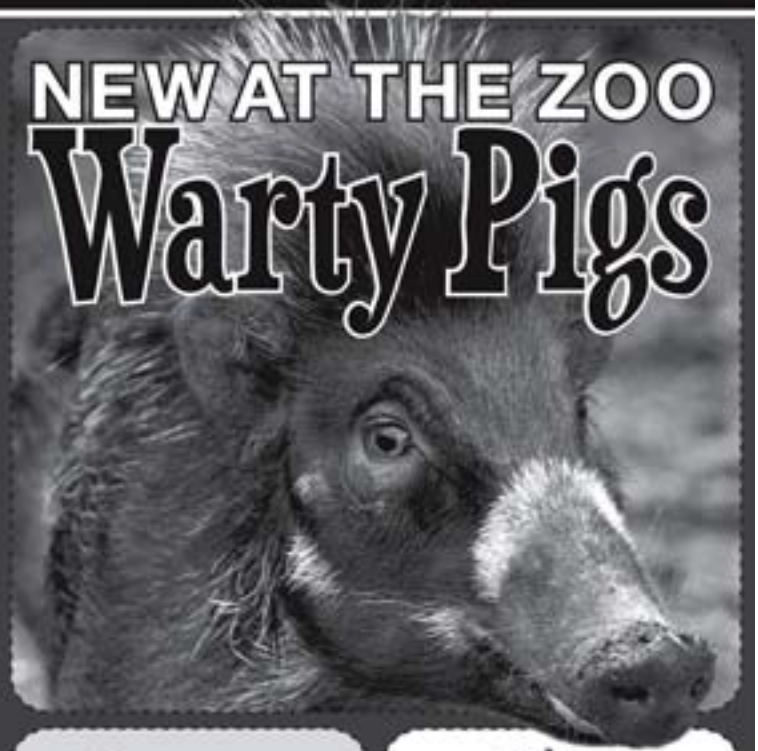
Get the family involved in tidying up, adds Nicole Levine of Portland-based Get Organized With Nicole. Make a game of it, she suggests, by setting a timer for 15 minutes and challenging your kids to pick up as much as they can. "Kids love it," says Levine, "and I've had parents say they've gotten much more than 15 minutes out of it. They'll set the clock three times in a row but the kids are still into it."

And remember, every little bit helps. "If my room is a total mess," says southwest Portland mom Maggie Kean, "I'll say, 'I'm going to put away 10 things.' Then I'll put away 10 things and, more often than not, by the time I get to the 10th thing I'm energized by the progress I've made and I'll actually finish the job." Even if you don't finish, you'll be better off than when you started.

- Emily Puro

SPRING AT THE ZOO!

NEW AT THE ZOO Warty Pigs



**CELEBRATING
WILDFLOWERS**

crafts • Master Gardeners
BLM Botanists

**SUNDAY, MAY 7
10 am - 4 pm**

BEAR FAIR

"repair-a-bear clinic"
bear games & crafts

**SATURDAY, MAY 20
10 am - 4 pm**

**WINGED
WONDERS**

Walk through their world.
**MAY 21 - LABOR DAY
10 am - 4 pm**

PRESENTED BY
H
Hewlett-Packard
Extra charge, discounted for members.

EVENTS ARE **FREE** FOR MEMBERS!¹ Join today at www.oregonzoo.org/join

FOR MORE INFORMATION
ON ALL ZOO EVENTS VISIT
www.oregonzoo.org

OREGON
ZOO
METRO

TRIMET
COME BY TRIMET AND RECEIVE
50 CENTS OFF ADMISSION.
503-238-TRIDE • trimet.org

**Lake Oswego
Montessori School**
2 1/2 - 7 yrs
the school where children blossom

- Certified Montessori teachers averaging 10 years
- Incredible playground, 2 ft. pool, covered area, shade trees
- Indoor ball pit, climbing mats, outdoor garden
- Flexible schedule to meet your needs
- \$100 off first month/family discounts

Visit our website at lakeoswegomontessori.com
(503) 636-8021 • 17823 SW Central Ave.

**Metropolitan
Youth Symphony**
Lajos Balogh
Music Director and Symphony Orchestra Conductor

**Next Concert:
June 11, 2006, 3:00 p.m.**
Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall

**Special Guest
3 Leg Torso**

Audition Sign-Ups Now!

For ticket and
audition information
503-239-4566
or 888-play-mys
www.playmys.org