

MIDLANDS BUSINESS JOURNAL - MAY 16, 2003
Omaha, Nebraska

Passion for working with elderly moves Tender Transitions

by Karen Campbell Burmood

A caregiver, a banker and a teacher by day Sheila and Tom Pettigrew and Deb Marasco began coordinating the relocation needs of elderly family and friends out of the goodness of their hearts in 1982. In 1997 they quit their day jobs and made their hobby a business by creating Tender Transitions.

Tender Transitions specializes in organizing and executing all phases of the moving process for clients in the Omaha and Lincoln metro areas. While the main focus is on assisting the elderly, the company also provides relocation services for people of any age.

"Behind death and divorce, moving is the third most stressful thing a person can go through," Sheila said. "Our objective is to take the stress out of moving. We make transitions easy for people by coordinating each and every detail."

As part of providing an all-inclusive relocation service; the owners of Tender Transitions give a professional consultation to customers by assessing each situation on an individual basis and then making recommendations.

If needed, resources such as retirement communities, moving companies, realtors, auctioneers and estate sale coordinators are then contacted. From there the move is organized and executed.

"One of the most significant things we do is help people sort through their items, determine what is most important to them, what they want to give away or throw away and what they want to take with them," Marasco said.

"Most people are downsizing their space, so that for many of them we will organize an auction. We can also ship items to family members all over the world."

"It's really an intimate thing," Tom said. We go through a person's entire life, help shred old documents and go through old clothes. We spend a lot of time getting to know our clients -- It's the nature of our business."

At least one of the owners is there with the client on the day of the move. Once the move has taken place, all the items a person is keeping are put away in his or her new home.

"We unpack everything, get rid of boxes, make up the beds, set up the kitchen and pretty much do everything that needs to be done in the house," Tom said. "We want people to feel as much at home as possible."

In addition to coordinating and implementing moves, special touches are included as part the company's services.

"If someone asks us, we will even video tape the home they are leaving, because a lot of people want to hold on to those memories," Sheila said. "We even take people shopping for new furniture. We also send out moving announcements to our customer's friends and families."

Tender Transitions, which has doubled its business during the first two months of this year compared to the last two months of 2002, offers a free first visit to potential customers. Since each move is different, the cost varies, depending upon the time and amount of services needed.

Marasco said as the elderly population is on the rise and families have become scattered round the country, there is a need for their company.

“The whole nature of our society is changing as our population ages.” Marasco said. “People often can’t be in the same city as mom or dad. Most people are busy juggling work and their own families, which has really changed family dynamics as a whole”.

A report by the US Department of Labor says that 54 percent of Americans anticipate they will most likely to be responsible for an elderly relative. This is why we felt there is a real niche for our kind of business.” Marasco said.

A member of the Better Business Bureau and the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce Tom said the business’s main source of advertising comes from retirement and assisted-living communities as well as from family of clients we have assisted.

“There are so many people who put themselves through trauma they don't need to," he said. “We want them to know there is a business out there and that we can help. We would like to do more advertising to show what an important service this is.”

All of the owners of Tender Transitions have a bias toward helping those in need, Tom said. For many years each has been actively involved with elderly people on a voluntary basis. Sheila and Tom are the executive director’s of Brush Up Nebraska, a volunteer project that paints the exteriors of homes of elderly and disabled homeowners. Deb has been an 16 year volunteer for Brush Up Nebraska.

“We are also the executive directors of Rebuilding Together, and we go inside homes and rehabilitate interiors of homes for the elderly and disabled” Sheila said. "Helping elderly people just comes naturally to us.”