

Paying to make transition for seniors less stressful

By Jan Ferris Heenan, Sacramento Bee

It could easily have been a two-Tylenol day when Jill Brackmann's 83-year-old mother had to pack up her Carmichael home of 55 years last spring. The house sold within a week, mom was in a wheelchair and a lifetime of memories was stashed in rafters and closets.

Instead, Joan MacTaggart's big move turned out to be a party of sorts, said Brackmann, an only child who lives in south Sacramento.

"We had a bottle of wine and ordered pizza. People stopped by all day," she recalled. "My mother, who's very coherent, said, 'I kept waiting to be sad and I wasn't,' and it was because Lee took care of the business so we could process the emotions. If I had had to be responsible for everything in her house, it would not have been that way."

The Brackmanns contracted with Lee Mahla, a professional organizer whose Sacramento company, Get OrderLee, specializes in helping seniors downsize their households and move – usually into independent or assisted-living facilities. As baby boomers age, and live ever longer, the number of companies like Mahla's is on the upswing, both nationally and across the Sacramento region.

The National Association of Senior Move Managers started with 22 members in 2002, tripled by 2006 and now counts nearly 700 companies in the United States, as well as start-ups in Canada, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, according to Mary Kay Buysse, executive director.

"The demographics are just so compelling; 10,000 (American)

baby boomers turn 65 every day,” said Buysse, from her suburban Chicago headquarters. “It’s not an easy time for the older adults or for the family when mom or dad is told by the physician that they can’t live alone anymore. It used to be such a crisis point for the family. Not as much anymore.”

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