



Moving an Aging America Forward

By: Mary Kay Buysse, Executive Director,
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Alice Goodman of upstate New York, widowed last fall when her husband of 51 years succumbed to the cancer he had battled for over three years, stood in her creamy-colored living room and surveyed the scene with a sigh. Her 4-bedroom Dutch Colonial home, nestled on an elm-lined street of young families, had become increasingly difficult to maintain during her husband's illness. Now that he was gone, the upkeep was overwhelming. She was so lonely now, in the same house where she, her husband and their four children had made their lives for decades. How could that be?

Alice thought of her four adult children, scattered across three different states. She was leaving in the morning for Florida, where she would join her older sister, Joan, who is also a widow. There, in a contemporary condominium complex in central Florida, Alice would live just one floor up from Joan. Everything was brand new, and one of her daughters lived only two hours away. She was excited about the future, but she needed one more, long look around.

Encouraged by the rising tide of retiring baby boomers and the desire of many empty nesters to simplify their lives in smaller spaces, moving coordinators for the 55+ crowd have become part of an emerging industry: senior move management (also known as senior relocation). The U.S. population aged 65 and over will jump nearly 80 percent when the Baby Boom generation retires (from 2010 to 2030). By 2030, the elderly will account for one-fifth of the total U.S. population. Did you also know that Americans age 85 and above comprise the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population?

Anyone who has ever moved knows how stressful it can be. It's particularly challenging for older adults and their families when it's time to pack up a home of 30, 40, or 50 years and start over somewhere else. Fortunately, local small businesses all over the country are helping with this transition. A Senior Move Manager is a professional who specializes in assisting older adults and their families with the emotional and physical aspects of relocation and/or "aging in place."

A senior move manager, it is said, moves people - not boxes. Many senior move managers have backgrounds in social work, health care, nursing and psychology, while others come to this industry from the corporate world of project management, technology, accounting or

marketing. What all senior move managers share, however, is a commitment to connecting with mid-life and older adults and a desire to perform meaningful work. In fact, a national non-profit association was created six years ago to support professionals in the senior move/senior relocation industry – the National Association of Senior Move Managers (NASMM).

In October 2002, 22 hard-working and high-spirited individuals from 16 start-up senior move companies came together as strangers in Arlington, VA to discuss developing a professional association specifically designed for the senior move industry. That long weekend of shared stories and incredibly intense hard work resulted in the formation of a single, compelling identity - the National Association of Senior Move Managers (NASMM). Since that time, NASMM's membership has flourished to over 450, as senior move management emerges as a highly valued service for older adults and their families.

A small number of senior move managers are also actual moving companies. Those providers who are not movers work closely with moving companies to complete this critical aspect of the job. Many of these same companies have joined NASMM as affiliate members or Industry Partners. They are NASMM's trusted colleagues in the rapidly growing area of senior relocation, transition and downsizing. Moving companies are valued collaborators in helping NASMM shape the bright future and integrity of senior move management. Without question, NASMM members look to their Industry Partners first and foremost when referring clients to moving companies.

Senior move professionals guide clients through a journey that's often as much about sorting through a lifetime's worth of memories as it is about possessions. They facilitate the decision regarding what to take, what to leave and how to redirect it. They also set up and organize the new home. The growth in retirement communities and the scattering of adult children have created this niche service. Two-income households leave adult children little time to help aging parents pack and move. Other seniors, single or without children, don't have much help of any kind, and are too overwhelmed to tackle the problem alone. Even when family help is available, emotions can run high, making the process thorny and upsetting for everyone involved. Often a move is precipitated by an illness or death of a spouse, as was Alice's experience. Beyond organizational skills, a move manager can often morph into a hybrid of bereavement counselor/mediation specialist/and good friend as older adults begin the long goodbye.

Senior move managers are contacted by various sources: older adults, family members, bank and trust officers, realtors, senior living communities, moving companies, attorneys, geriatric care managers, and others. It's virtually impossible to calculate what a specific move might cost, as the fee can vary considerably by geographic region and the services requested. Most senior move managers charge their fees on an hourly basis, while others prefer to package the cost of the entire job at one price. NASMM members will always outline the cost of a job through a written estimate before you are required to submit payment.

Typically, the move manager draws a floor plan of the new setting, so the client can visualize what furniture will fit and where it will go. Transitioning to smaller quarters often requires a creative and insightful approach. As the client sorts through generations of belongings, the move manager helps he or she decide what constitutes “treasure” and what is truly “trash.” The move managers arrange for consignment, donations and gifts. (Interestingly, some senior move managers note that many adult children don't actually *want* the heirlooms and valuables their parents assumed they would covet.) SMMs will collaborate with movers and plan for storage, set up the new household, and see that the old house is cleaned. Some managers have experience moving frail seniors into nursing homes.

Although specific services vary, most Senior Move Managers can help with some or all of the following:

- Developing an overall move or "age in place" plan
- Organizing, sorting and downsizing
- Customized floor plans
- Arranging for the profitable disposal of unwanted items through auction, estate sale, buy-out, consignment, donation, or a combination of the above
- Interviewing, scheduling and overseeing movers
- Arranging shipments and storage
- Professional packing
- Unpacking and setting up the new home
- Related services, such as cleaning, waste removal, shopping, senior escort, assisting with selection of a realtor and helping prepare the home to be sold.

Some senior move managers provide these services directly; others function in more of an oversight or management role. Senior move managers have extensive, practical knowledge about the costs, quality and availability of various local community resources. Additionally, senior move managers frequently assist individuals who choose to stay in their own homes, but simply require expert organizational skills and solid knowledge of "aging in place" concepts to help them achieve their goal of . . . not moving anywhere, but improving quality of life!

The National Association of Senior Move Managers (NASMM) is nationally recognized for its innovative programs, leadership and expertise on issues related to senior move management, and transition and relocation issues affecting older adults. NASMM requires members to provide two letters of recommendation and proof of liability insurance to achieve General member status in the association. Though potential members can seek insurance on their own, NASMM has contracted with a major insurance carrier to provide the requisite liability insurance for this “high touch, high harm” industry. Only General NASMM members enjoy the exposure of a listing on the consumer-friendly *Find a Senior Move Manager* map of the NASMM website (<http://www.nasmm.org/find/find.html>).

NASMM is also home to several resource organizations who train and counsel individuals seeking to enter this dynamic new field. Furthermore, NASMM encourages continuing education for its growing membership by hosting a large annual conference that attracts nearly 80% of the national membership – an astonishing benchmark in the association world. In February 2009, the NASMM Conference will be held in New Orleans, LA and will offer two keynote speakers and 22 breakout sessions for attendees. NASMM also offers continuing education through its NASMM University© program – cost-effective audio and web seminars on the latest small business information and aging services research. To underscore its commitment to an aging America, NASMM is sponsoring *The Walk to Move Forward*, a member-based philanthropy project dedicated to helping the Gulf State communities with senior relocation issues, following the series of devastating hurricanes in the region.

Clients will often ask NASMM members to manage a move across the miles, such as Alice Goodman’s relocation from New York to Florida. In this event, the NASMM member who is directing the project where the older adult currently is located will connect with another NASMM member at the receiving end and partner with them. NASMM members become familiar with each other from attending the annual conference and sharing information on the lively list serve and five web-based Bulletin Boards that support the membership. NASMM members learn to trust each other and collaborate - to ensure the older adult’s seamless transition from one setting to another.

When Alice Goodman departs for Florida in the morning, she will travel to her new condo, knowing that every possession she cherishes is moving with her and is in its rightful place – family photographs and mirrors hung, the draperies mounted on window frames, her bed made for the evening, and her dishware and glasses stacked in the kitchen cabinets. Her faithful nightstand will, once again, stand watch over Alice that first evening – with telephone, television remote, eyeglasses, and tissues in their expected spots. Someone - a senior move manager - helped to make this lifetime transition a little easier for Alice and her family.

~~~~~ NASMM calculates that, in 2007, NASMM members completed 15,000 moves, resulting in an approximate sales volume of \$37.5 million. Please visit the NASMM website for more information at [www.nasmm.org](http://www.nasmm.org) or call 1-877-606-2766.

#### **THE FACE OF NASMM©**

In July, 2008, the National Association of Senior Move Managers (NASMM) conducted its first annual demographics survey of the membership. Over 40% of the membership responded. Here’s a snapshot:

Senior Move Management is emerging as a growing profession.

- Over 50% of NASMM members have been in business for two years or less.
- The average cost of a move to a one bedroom unit is less than \$2500.
- The average cost of a move to a two bedroom unit ranges between \$1500 and \$4000.
- Half of the members employ between 2 and 5 part time employees.

The most popular services with NASMM customers are (in order):

1. Un-packing and setting up the new home
2. Move planning and move oversight
3. Sorting services
4. Disposal/distribution of remaining items
5. Packing services
6. Customized floor plans

The majority of client moves by NASMM members are to the following types of residences:

1. Assisted Living Communities (84.86%)
2. Independent Living Communities (84.32%)
3. Active Adult Communities (68.65%)
4. Continuing Care Retirement Communities (65.41%)
5. Townhouse or Condo (53.51%)
6. Skilled Nursing Facility (26.49%)
7. Family Member's Home (24.86%)
8. Adult Family Group Home (11.35%)

- Over 96% of NASMM members report their clients are downsizing.
- Over 50% of NASMM members report they are contacted 2-4 weeks in advance of a move.
- 37% report they are contacted 1-6 months prior to a move.
- The majority of NASMM members report an average job takes between 17-24 hours.
- 50% of NASMM members report the older adult is making the initial contact with them for services
- 39% of members report the older adult's child/family is making the initial contact.
- 11% of NASMM members report that a senior housing community is making the initial contact.



Mary Kay Buysse, MS, has been NASMM's Executive Director since 2006. Mary Kay oversees membership recruitment, retention, education and program development, and day-to-day operations for NASMM. With a Master of Science degree in Human Services and Gerontology, Mary Kay has worked in the not-for-profit, association sector of aging services for over a decade.

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