

Turing an upsized dream into realty

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How do you leave a home where you have raised your family after 29 years? You get a move-in service to help shift the memories and make tough decisions.

Plant City – Patty and Raymond Conrad had already raised their kids – all seven of them – when they decided to build a bigger house. A much bigger house. At an age when most people opt to downsize, the couple- both in their 60's made a life changing choice to build a 9,300 square foot Florida cracker style house in the orange groves.

The two story, porch wrapped house, which sits on the edge of a fishing pond deep in the groves off State Road 60 between Brandon and Plant City, is a dream for the Conrad's, who have 10 grandchildren and the 11th on the way.

"When we all get together as an extended family, there are 50 of us," explains Patty, 64. "And we do it four times a year."

So after years of packing everyone into their modest 1,800 square foot home in Mulberry, they decided it was time for a change. It took them five years to get the permit to build on their 50 plus acres of orange groves, some of it planted in the 1930's. The runaround had nothing to do with history, but rather the land's former life as a hydraulic phosphate mine.

They finally broke ground in 2004, and last week the house was move in ready. But after nearly three decades in the same house, they needed help sifting through the contents of their old life.

Like many people facing a big move, they faced tough questions: What to keep and what to buy? Where to put everything in the new house? The Conrads decided to enlist the help of Roma Starkey, a room arranger and designer in Tampa who also offers clients a highly efficient move-in service. Her goal is to streamline the moving process, thinking out the placement of furniture and accessories for clients who are typically overwhelmed.

"I've done everything from 1,200 square foot apartments to people downsizing to assisted living facilities to houses like this," Starkey said. "Many clients feel they have no knack for moving at all. They can't get the visual, much less the organizational plan."

On the Conrads' moving day, Starkey waited at their new house with two assistants, Kim Golter and Rachel Pirozzi from the International Academy of Design and Technology. New mater bedroom furniture was already in place, as were the ceiling fans and lights - all of which Starkey advised the couple on prior to the move. Starkey and her crew planned to instruct the movers on where to put rugs, chairs, tables, sofas, nightstands, beds and bookcases.

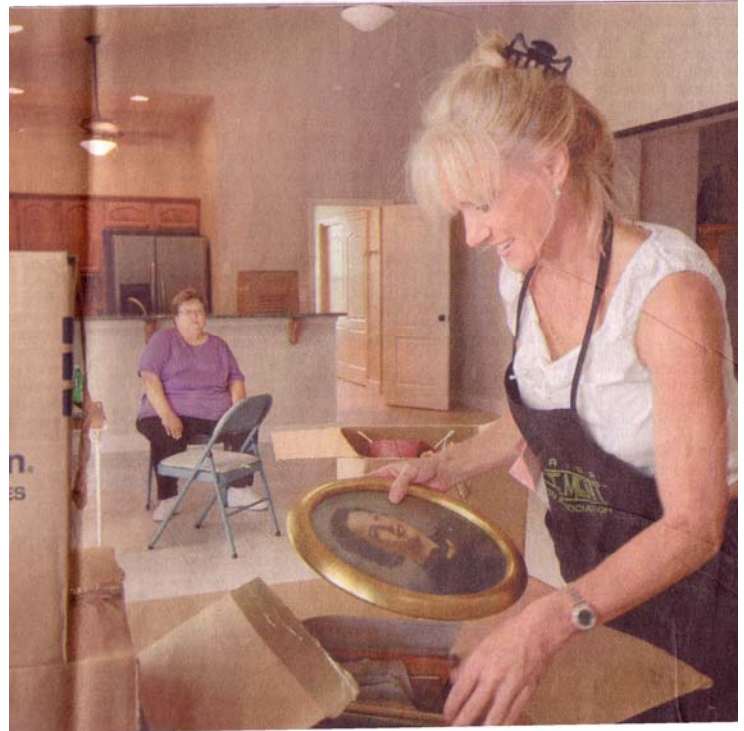
The next morning, they would hang artwork and arrange decorative items, making the house look like a page ripped from a homes magazine.

"We had already walked through the old house and the new one before the move," Starkey explained. "We knew some of the existing furniture was too small for the scale of the new house, se we bough some new things. But I really tried to use a lot of what they had. Most clients already have what they need and what, I just embellish it.

If the Conrads still need it, she will enlist the help of a professional organizer to help place the contents of the kitchen cabinets and drawers.

The idea was to make the transition from old house to new seamless; to make it look like the couple had lived there for years – even if they had just moved in.

That was just what Patty Conrad needed. On moving day, she wasn't in shape to make decisions about which belongings to keep or toss. She was also emotional. "I haven't moved in 29 years. It's a tremendous relief to have Roma here saying "put this here and put this there." She recycled a lot of what we had, the things that meant something to us. We've gone from 1,800 square feet to something much bigger. In our wildest dreams we never imagined the new house would turn out so beautiful."



Roma Starkey unpacks a box of pictures while Patty Conrad watches in the background. Starkey is helping the Conrad family with the move into a 9,300-square foot home