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HANDS OF TIME—HANDS DOWN!

By Allison Dahlgren

IT'S THE ANSWER to one of the age-old questions: what do you buy for the person who has everything?

You buy them time. Such is the purpose behind Hands of Time, a personal assistance service that helps simplify lives. The business provides assistance in three areas: errands and personal shopping, organizing and special occasion help.

Lisa Schreider, head of the business, provides that extra set of hands to complete redundant or overwhelming tasks so that her clients don't have to. Her mantra is to "create and maintain order in her clients' homes and lives." She eliminates time spent taking care of basic



PHOTO BY MICHAEL MANNING

needs and shortening to-do lists.

"I am never bored, ever," she said, "it's fun because it's always different." Schreider calls herself a "creative concierge," similar to the title of "personal assistant" or "life manager."

Not celebrities, but residents of Newton, Chestnut Hill and Brookline benefit from Schreider's services. Four years ago, she says, there weren't any other businesses of this type in the area, but now there are a few downtown. They are more corporate, she explains, and her approach is more personal. Comparatively speaking, "It's a fairly new

idea to have someone working on your personal affairs," she said.

What began as an idea to tide her over until a new job surfaced became something substantial on its own. "When I started the business, I didn't realize it would be a full-time career," she said. Schreider initially worked doing public relations and marketing at dot-com companies. "One day they told everyone to clear out their desks, and I was like, 'Oh gosh, what do I do now?'"

Schreider put up flyers inside Coolidge Corner businesses such as J.P. Licks and Starbucks, among others, and began to build a small client base for her new idea: helping people manage and organize their lives. The

business was a perfect outgrowth of her best skills: shopping and organizing. Combining the two into a business just made sense.

Through networking and word of mouth, her business began to expand. Now, four years later, she has 15 consistent clients, some new, and others who have been with her since the beginning. They range from large families, single parents, new mothers and disabled, to the elderly or time-strapped business professionals.

"Hands of Time is ideal for anyone who simply needs more time," she said. "Sometimes time is a more precious commodity than money. I ease their stress."

After four years and a plethora of experi-

ences, Schreider has perfected her creative concierge abilities. "My skills are more refined and I have a huge list of skill sets. Things come naturally to me now, things that frustrate many people," she said. She is able to accommodate more clients and is busier than before. Increasingly, clients are finding her on the web, and now she can now be found on search engines such as Yahoo or Google.

A young American girl in London called one evening with a request for her boyfriend, in Milford, MA. He was entertaining clients, and needed more ties and socks. The girlfriend called Macy's in Framingham and ordered the necessary items. Schreider went to pick them up and drove the package to his hotel. A week later, her check arrived from London. The girlfriend said she had found Schreider's services online, and was so grateful for a solution to their problem. Experiences like this, Schreider explained, make the business especially worth her efforts. "I just love to be able to help people."

In a typical day, her services are bought for a few hours, whether at a client's home, doing research or making phone calls, or in town, doing errands. "I'm at a Whole Foods, Shaws, or CVS at least once a day, sometimes twice," she said. "They all know me at the supermarkets and drug stores. I have a nice relationship with the owners and employees. It's nice to see a friendly face," she said.

Other duties include trips to the post office, bank, library, video store or dry cleaning. Recently she just completed several moving jobs. Clients will also use her to wait for utility companies instead of taking off work to wait at home during the four-hour window of arrival. And if a client requires a service she cannot provide, Schreider can provide the resources to find a match through her contacts. Although she is dedicated to giving others more time, Schreider tries to keep weekends to herself. She is flexible, however, and will adjust her schedule to fit clients' needs. "It's so grati-

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fyng because you are working for yourself," she said. "I couldn't see myself going back to the corporate world after owning my own business. You learn so much being your own boss."

Through the years, Schreider has been asked to perform all sorts of random tasks.

"One client was looking for a pocketbook that was on a mannequin at Neiman Marcus. I went to the store to look and ended up tracking down the mannequin designer who had just changed all of the mannequins. Luckily, he knew exactly what I was talking about. It was a \$900 pocketbook. I was so excited to have found it."



Completing these "little adventures," as she calls them, give Schreider a thrill.

During the November and December months, Hands of Time takes on a holiday theme. Schreider finds herself decorating homes, putting up lights, wrapping presents, shopping and returning—increasingly online—and setting up for parties.

And for those people who have everything—Schreider's goal is for them to have everything in order with more time to appreciate it all. ■

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