



Junk Squad makes clutter its business

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Jan Rosenthal scanned the shelves in the garage, and then pointed out all the stuff that Eric Olson and Jarad Johnson could take. "That and that and that, and wait, what's this?" She peeked into a box. "And this."

Rosenthal and her family were moving out of their home on Stratton Court in Chanhassen, downsizing into a condominium. Moving boxes filled the living room and the upstairs. But one thing she was determined not to move was the junk.

For that she called the Junk Squad. Olson and Johnson are young, strong, and work for the Junk Squad. Neatly dressed in jeans and polo shirts, they are more than happy to haul out an old water heater, an outdated stove, bags of discarded clothes, window screens, tires, toys, athletic equipment, furniture, old grills, lawn furniture and just about anything else that has outlived its usefulness.

For people like Rosenthal, the Junk Squad is a life saver.

Her husband just opened a pet food store in downtown Chanhassen, and between the two of them, they just couldn't find the time to haul everything out, much less have a garage sale or locate places that would take their junk. Instead, they called the Junk Squad. Within 45 minutes of arriving, the back of the truck was full and Rosenthal's garage was empty.

The Junk Squad is the brainchild of Brant Rossman of Shorewood. He read an article about a company that sold franchises for a similar type of business. He did some research and decided that with his background in the scrap metal business, he didn't have to buy a franchise.

"I understand trucking, waste streams and I had a sales background," Rossman said. "I could do it on my own."

"It's not a new concept," Rossman said. "People have been hauling trash forever but the difference is that we're not the guys who show up in dirty clothes . . . You don't want people like that in your house. It's not a comfortable feeling. Instead, for us, it's the valet parking guy look."

"In fact, my second employee was a valet. I met him when we removed a pink toilet and tub from his mom's house. She called a couple days later because we forgot to invoice her. By the way, I asked, 'What does your son do?' 'He's a valet at Canterbury Park,' she said. I said, 'How'd he like to work for me?'"

Since April, business has grown so quickly that he added a second truck and the company does an average of 8-15 jobs a day.

What does the Junk Squad take?

It's easier to ask what they don't take. They don't take hazardous waste, paints, solvents or yard waste.

But they take everything else: Appliances, electronics, furniture, pianos, grills, toys, beds, clothes, and anything else a person has moldering away in a basement, garage, or attic.

Cost is based on how much space is taken up in the truck. A minimum load begins at \$80, and filling an entire truck costs between \$440 to \$465. There are additional charges for electronics and tires because they are taken to specific recycling locations. Anything that is in good condition and reusable is taken to the Salvation Army and Goodwill. Currently Rossman is looking into opening up an inner city retail outlet.

"The bottom line is that we don't fill landfills," Rossman said, "and that people who need stuff get it and we don't pay to get rid of it."

And people who need to get rid of stuff can do so fairly painlessly and efficiently.

Rossman described a recent job in Plymouth.

The customer was a 75-year old man who uses a scooter to get around and is on oxygen.

"He said come clean out my garage," Rossman said.

Rossman and the crew found a garage filled with tools, garbage cans, recycling containers, garage windows, and old doors. "An endless amount of stuff," Rossman said. "It was the heaviest load we ever had. I left there thinking, he never threw anything away."

The largest job filled four truckloads of stuff that included beds, books, a microwave, a lawn mover, to jobs as small as removing foosball table or a piano.

Although people might balk at paying to get rid of their junk, in the end, we offer a value, Rossman said. "You don't hurt your back, you don't dent walls. You don't have a dumpster in your yard. You don't have to figure out where you're going to haul your junk. What if you load everything up and then the Goodwill tells you they won't take what you've hauled? Where are you going to take it?"

Most jobs are done in less than two hours, Rossman said, and some jobs just take 10 minutes. For do-it-yourselfers, it can take hours, days, or weeks to rid your house or garage of all the junk. Most people understand what's involved. We're less expensive than renting a dumpster and we do the work."

Why junk happens to good people

To get a handle on why people seem to have more junk than ever, we sought out Jennifer Swanson of Chanhassen, who is a professional organizer. People hire Swanson to come into their homes to help them organize and manage all their stuff.

Part of the work includes getting rid of stuff.

The Sandwich Generation is particularly susceptible to having too much stuff, Swanson said.

"They inherit things from parents, grandparents, and in-laws when they go into assisted living or when they die," Swanson said. "When that happens there isn't much time to decide 'What's valuable? What's sentimental?' So they just put it somewhere. Then their kids move out but they don't take their stuff with them. The kids don't address their stuff and the parents are afraid of getting rid of it for them. Kids don't think they leave that much behind but think of how much a drawer holds or a closet.

"I tell clients to box it all up and give it to the kids," she said. "It's not fair to the parents to have three bedrooms filled with their kids' things. And when you turn everything over to the kids, they tend to get rid of it in a hurry."

Parents have to be vigilant and clear the decks as their children grow up, Swanson said. Otherwise it's too easy to just accumulate stuff with each life stage, delaying decisions of what they'll do with the things their children have outgrown through each stage of life.

Part of the problem is that some people are reluctant to part with things until they're sure that the items will go to someone who will benefit. In the meantime, the piles keep growing. Swanson has a resource list of organizations that welcome donations like Ready for Success, U.S. Family Services, Vietnam Vets and the Salvation Army.

"Getting rid of junk and clutter is tough enough," Swanson said, "but keeping more from coming into your house is more difficult. More than one client I've had has been in tears when they realize how much they have and become frustrated. 'I didn't realize I had this much stuff!' they'll say. It can be overwhelming. Trophies, awards, mementos can be the most difficult things to get rid of.

"Another solution is selling things through EBay consignment," Swanson said. "It's a breath of fresh air for people. They don't have to guess the value of something and it's easier to part with something when a neutral party tells you, 'this isn't worth anything,' especially in Minnesota, where the hot and cold weather extremes can wreak havoc on heirlooms that aren't properly taken care of. I tell people, 'you have to deal with this stuff.'"

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