

# Daily Herald

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## ‘A better way’: How one suburban woman is helping families make senior downsizing and transition less of a crisis

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Dave Oberhelman



*Kathleen Cantillon runs an estate sale in River Forest on May 17. A Caring Transitions franchise owner, Cantillon helps ease seniors' transition from their former home to their next residence. Dave Oberhelman/[doberhelman@dailyherald.com](mailto:doberhelman@dailyherald.com)*



*Caring Transitions franchise owner Kathleen Cantillon, right, and life partner Paul Garcia attend a February training session at Caring Transitions' corporate headquarters in Cincinnati. Garcia also works with Cantillon in the franchise covering an area roughly from Villa Park to Burr Ridge, and Darien to Oak Park. Courtesy of Paul Garcia*



*At an estate sale May 17 in River Forest, Deborah Ryder, right, pays Caring Transitions' Kathleen Cantillon for an item she'd successfully bid on at [ctbids.com](http://ctbids.com) Dave Oberhelman/[doberhelman@dailyherald.com](mailto:doberhelman@dailyherald.com)*



*Paul Garcia removes a storage bracket from a garage wall for purchase at a River Forest estate sale on May 17. Dave Oberhelman/[doberhelman@dailyherald.com](mailto:doberhelman@dailyherald.com)*

For more than two decades Kathleen Cantillon used what she learned in Northwestern University journalism school to support companies in issues management and crisis communications.

Then her own crisis situation hit, familiar to many as the baby boomer generation ages.

Her parents were moving into continued care. Their house quickly sold. An overwhelming task had to be done fast — assessing what, out of 3,600 square feet of possessions, could fit in their new place.

“That whole process is super-emotional and stressful and sad, when you see a lifetime of possessions being taken away in a junk truck,” said Cantillon, who grew up in Downers Grove and now lives in Oak Park.

“There’s got to be a better way than this,” she thought.

After more than 20 years in her old job, Cantillon switched careers and bought a franchise of **Caring Transitions, which assists people in downsizing and relocation.**

“I was burned out. It also feels really good to do something that helps people directly,” she said.

Among more than 300 Caring Transitions franchises nationwide, **Cantillon and her life partner, Paul Garcia, handle a territory roughly from Villa Park to Burr Ridge, and Darien to Oak Park.**



Other Caring Transitions franchises cover Elgin, Fox Valley, and the North, Northwest and South suburbs.

Clients may be heading to a retirement facility, moving from a large house to a smaller one, or going through a divorce.

“We serve whoever needs a downsize in transition,” Cantillon said.

One key to Caring Transitions is its **online estate sales auctions, available at [ctbids.com](https://ctbids.com)**. Searchable by item or ZIP code, items are sold individually or in lots with \$1 opening bids. Cantillon likes to group items in lots worth about \$40.

The online auctions circumvent gated communities that don’t allow estate sales, and are an alternative for homeowners who don’t want people traipsing through their house. Cantillon also will ship smaller items nationwide.

Caring Transitions works with families to declutter a home, takes pictures of items for sale, and posts the pictures and descriptions on [ctbids.com](https://ctbids.com). After at least a week, online the bidding closes and Cantillon schedules pickup times with the winners.

The client makes 65% of the price, Caring Transitions takes 35%. She's just four months into the business, but Cantillon said an online bidder gained a dining room table and chair set for \$1.

“People get some real bargains, and the clients get the item rehoused and some money toward their move,” she said.

At a May 17 estate sale in River Forest, no more than two or three customers at a time came to pick up their items or lots — a bicycle, grouped pet supplies, a dish set — though the sale also was open to walk-ins.

St. Charles resident Bob Munaretto said he has picked up online auction items at four different Caring Transitions sales. On May 17 in River Forest, he got seven lawn and garden tools for \$30.

“You can't buy that at Home Depot,” he said. “I put in my ZIP code, so then I see the things that are within whatever radius I wanted to see them in. And then if they're within that radius I take the time to look through them when I'm sitting on my couch.”

Cantillon and Garcia were among a group of five working the May 17 estate sale, and they have eight people they can call depending on the work required. They hope to double their

employees within the year. They also have contacts with services to remove unsold items.

To prepare for a new residence, Cantillon will take photos of a client's existing home layout to see how they'd like to best arrange things in their new residence.

She'll create a floor plan and work with the client to furnish their new space.

Then, Caring Transitions will oversee the move-in.

“We don't actually move all of their things, but we do pack up their things nicely and in a way that when we get to their destination we can quickly unpack them and get the beds made, get the towels out, put the dishes out so they're ready to go,” she said.

The online auction works by bid, but other tasks such as decluttering, itemizing and packing are priced on an hourly basis. The company provides free estimates.

Cantillon recently conducted a sale in Burr Ridge for people who had an exquisite walnut buffet they couldn't take with them. A young couple brought it home.

“It just feels so good to know that piece is going to be serving another family for another 40 years,” Cantillon said. “It was in great condition, it was gorgeous. I wanted it myself, but I have to fight every urge to get more things in this business.”