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Top Shelf: Concierges can bring order to busy lives

The term “concierge” conjures up visions of an immaculately dressed man or woman in a posh hotel power-brokering just the right beluga caviar from just the right region of the Caspian Sea, all for the VIP in a room that is not normally even listed in the establishment’s directory.

What if you could have that experience — well, maybe not that experience — from your home? What if there was someone else who could run to the post office, drop off Fluffy at the groomers and pick up the dry cleaning?

Top Shelf has found four concierge services in New Hampshire that can grant your wishes — without all the hassle of rubbing a lamp.

Susan Poirier, owner of Ace Concierge in Suncook, said most of her clients seek her out to “get their lives back in order. There’s just not enough free time. Night and weekends, which are supposed to be free, are filled with doing errands.”

The services a personal concierge offers are as varied as the needs of the people who request the help. Poirier said as long as the request is legal and ethical, she will consider it.

Lynn Sudlow of The Complete Errand in West Lebanon said most of her customers request personal assistant-type help, which can include opening and sorting mail, making phone calls or travel arrangements, finding vendors for other services, even grocery shopping.

“Often people call me with a project they’ve had on the back burner that they just can’t get to,” said Sudlow.

While busy parents and business owners make up the typical concierge customer, Stacey Anderson of Morningstar Errand Service in Hampton makes a point to talk to those over 55. “Concierge services are ideal for seniors, especially if they have some mobility issues,” she said.

Many personal concierges also perform banking errands, such as writing and mailing checks.

“I have a few clients that I deposit checks for,” said Maryellen Koelbel of Harbour Concierge in Dover. “Time is so limited, especially for small-business owners.”

Sudlow even has signing authority on checks for some her clients as well as authority to use their credit card numbers to fulfill various transactions.

Such errands require an enormous amount of trust between the client and the concierge.

Poirier said prospective clients should make a note of how professional the concierge is during the interview. “Ask yourself if the presentation was professional and did you feel you developed a rapport with this person,” she said.

One of the most important questions a client can ask is for references, said Andersen of Morningstar. “And be sure to call them.”

She also suggested asking if the service is licensed, bonded or insured. Andersen’s company is insured, as is Sudlow’s The Complete Errand and Koelbel’s Harbour Concierge.

Sudlow added that prospective customers also should check to see if the concierge is a member of the local chamber of commerce or a professional organization. In addition to being bonded, Sudlow is treasurer of the International Concierge and Errand Association, and Koelbel is a member of the Dover and Portsmouth chambers.

Most personal concierges work within a limited service area, but many, including the four interviewed, will consider performing errands outside of their immediate service areas on a case-by-case basis.

While most requests are more of the water-my-plants variety, a few clients can ask the concierge to go beyond the ordinary.

Poirier was asked by a client to fly to Florida and completely outfit his condominium. "I got to pick out the bed linens and everything," she said.

Sudlow was hired by a man from Pennsylvania who had received a traffic ticket in Vermont that needed to be paid at the courthouse. "He found me from the Web, and I was able to take care of the ticket for him and bill him on his credit card," she said.

She also was asked by a mother hosting a birthday party for 12 girls to reserve seats at a showing of one of the Harry Potter movies. "It would have been too difficult for her and a dozen young girls to do that, so I was able to take care of that for her."

Rates vary by concierge, but generally start at about \$20 an hour. Sudlow of The Complete Errand charges \$40 per hour, a price that includes mileage.
