

Pare and share

Time is now to clear cluttered closets, donate unused items

By **Marlene Lucas**
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Gifts of Legos, a cashmere sweater, Princess Genevieve Barbie and a flat panel TV may fit under the Christmas tree, but Americans hardly stop there.

Dozens of gifts nestle under pine trees across the nation. Once the wrapping paper is cleared away on Christmas afternoon, where do all these gifts go? Do we have room in our houses for more stuff?

Clear space now for gifts you'll open next week, says Maggie Jackson of Cedar Rapids, owner of The Organized Life, a business that works with individuals and companies.

"Before Christmas, be proactive and talk to kids about things they no longer use. These can be donated to agencies, such as Waypoint (Services for Women, Children and Families of Cedar Rapids)," Jackson says.

Shedding unwanted items is practiced by many of the Y Generation, the 57 million people born between 1981 and 1995. They are the largest consumer group in the history of the United States.

About one in five of the Gen Y will give away at least one of their gifts this year, according to a survey conducted for the Retail Advertising and Marketing Association. Nearly 12 percent of Gen Y respondents have sold a gift online.

Jackson suggests adopting the "one in, one out" rule throughout the year. When you bring something home, something else has to go.

"Start early with kids. This helps you avoid chaos," she says.

She suggests using tape to mark parking spaces for toy cars and trucks, so children know where the toys belong. Don't put toys in a bin and then place other toys on top that must be moved to access the bin.



Liz Martin/The Gazette

Will Jackson, 8, has his toys organized in labeled bins in the basement of his southeast Cedar Rapids home. Will's mother, Maggie Jackson, owns The Organized Life, a company that works with individuals and businesses.

"Keep it simple. Don't stack more than three or four board games. Any more and they'll pull the pile down when they're getting a game out," Jackson

says.

She limits the number of gifts she gives her 8-year-old son, Will.

"We make an agreement," she says. "I give

him three gifts and Santa brings three gifts. That way, he's not overwhelmed. If I bought eight toys, he'd

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play half an hour with them and he's done. Less is more."

We can't always limit the number of gifts we receive, but we also don't have to keep everything we're given, says Judy Siebert of Iowa City, an adjunct professor at Cornell College and professional speaker on being organized.

"We should keep the things we value, the things we use or that have sentimental value. Other things are clutter. It's critical to make room for things that matter," Siebert

says. "Pass on gifts before they are outdated that could make other people happy who have less abundance in their lives."

She evaluates gifts against things she values, which are family, learning, work and play, particularly travel and bicycling.

"When you're surrounded by clutter, you're distracted and can't realize your potential," she says. "It's critical to make room for things that matter."

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