



VALI HEIST: The Professional Organizer

by MICHELLE E. BIGGERSTAFF
photo by JOHN A. SECOGES, SECOGES PHOTOGRAPHICS

In 2006, after working on the Alvernia University campus for 24 years, **Vali G. Heist** embarked on a second career and found her calling when she opened The Clutter Crew, a business that allows her to literally clean house as a certified professional organizer. In her work, she is able to combine her passion for green living, her compassion for people and her amazing project management skills. A believer in giving back, Heist serves on the board of the South Mountain YMCA and will co-

chair the Goodwill Runway Show this year (scheduled for April 24). She lives in Cumru Township and enjoys traveling, reading and spending time with those dear to her.

Q: How did The Clutter Crew – Berks County's only organizing business – come about? I'd worked as an administrator at Alvernia for many years – 19 as financial aid director and the last five as a project manager for the president of the

university – but this is who I've always been. I read an article online about professional organizers. I did research and went to a conference in Boston. I'd always been organized and helped people close to me to get organized. I also always believed in the green aspects of recycling and reusing anything in any way you can. This was a perfect fit for me, so I did it. Yes, I am the only certified professional organizer in Berks County. I belong to a society of professionals in the greater Philadelphia region, but I'm the only one locally.

Q: Who are your typical clients and why do they call you? They call because they feel overwhelmed. Every situation is unique. However, many of my clients are busy, too busy to keep up with the stuff in their lives. Many have children or aging parents who also have stuff that keeps them occupied, so there's not a lot of time for organizing. They call because they're ready to do something [about the clutter]. Most are not opposed to parting with some of the stuff. I am their biggest resource for helping them do everything to get it sorted out the way they want it. I find a home for everything, rather than have it end up in a landfill.

Q: Where are the places unwanted stuff can go? I donate, recycle, barter it for other needed things. I find it a good home through local charities or shelters. Also, The Clutter Crew offers a service to sell goods online. I've had a number of clients make more selling unwanted things than the cost of my fee, so they made money and got organized. It's a win-win situation for everyone.

Q: You're also an author; tell me about *Organize This! Practical Tips, Green Ideas and Your CRAP (Clutter that Robs Anyone of Pleasure)*. When I started my business in 2006, I pitched a monthly organizing column to the local newspaper and they agreed. My book is a guide, a collection of those columns along with more ideas. It was published in 2012. I spent some time in my small but peaceful New Jersey beach house, in the Cape May area, writing it. I love to go there to read too. Home should be a refuge, a sanctuary.

Q: Your beach refuge sounds lovely. Do you like traveling when you're not busy helping people make order of busy lives? I do, but my favorite way to travel is to visit my son, Bobby, who's lived all over. He's in Fort Lauderdale now but has lived in Manhattan, Brooklyn – all over, for his work. I like to pack a bag – when you're organized you can travel light – and spend weekends with him. ■



**3 SPOTS
VALI RECOMMENDS
FOR RECYCLING
UNWANTED ITEMS:**

- 1. Berks Encore:** Clothing, home décor, housewares, etc. 610.374.3195, BerksEncore.org
- 2. Opportunity House:** Cell phones and more. 430 N. 2nd St., Reading. 610.374.4696, ext. 226. Opphouse.org
- 3. EZPC Recycling:** computer equipment. 333 S. Hull St., Sinking Spring. 610.621.4944