

# WORCESTER *Living*

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## Let go & let the concierge

### Not just a rescue fantasy, concierge service has gone mainstream

By Cheryl Reeves

No time? Stressed out? Feel like tossing your BlackBerry into Indian Lake? Join the club. But get ready to relax: Now you can leave life's little (and big) details to someone else. Personal concierge service is just a local phone call away.

Case in point: When "Rescue Me" star Denis Leary and his sister Ann Marie Coleman began planning an 80th birthday bash in Worcester for their mother, Nora, they quickly realized they needed help. Leary's shooting schedule posed myriad conflicts and Ann Marie was time crunched with a demanding job and parenting duties. She picked up the phone and called Worcester concierge Eileen Cremin. From that moment on, Ann Marie and Denis experienced a huge sense of relief.

"Eileen listened to our ideas and then handled everything from the flowers to the chef and beyond. We barely had to lift a finger," Ann Marie said. "The brilliance of it all was the quality and attention to detail that Eileen brought to our Irish-themed party: bagpipers, an Irish flag flying, Irish linens — she even chose a country club that had an Irish look with its stone walls and lush greenery."

Even Denis, used to celebrity perks and personal assistants, was highly impressed at the results. "Wow, I can't believe how smooth that went down!" he said.

Although it was once the sole province of the rich and famous, the kind of personalized concierge service used by the Leary family has moved into mainstream America and is now more affordable — some services start at \$35 an hour and many offer customized membership packages.

The service is so universally appealing that now everyone (students, working parents, retirees, even hospital patients) can find help getting everything from a perfectly organized closet to a college coach to a new car. Time is precious, so the saying goes, and today's concierges will help set you luxuriously free.

By paying a concierge to research, brainstorm, plan and organize — not to mention doing all the time-consuming legwork — you can save money by avoiding expensive mistakes. A well-established concierge comes with experienced, vetted contacts and referrals, plus creative ideas to suit a variety of tastes.

"The sky really is the limit," says Cremin, who reports tripling her client list since launching her business in 2002.

"Once people try it, they soon can't get enough. It goes from walking the dog to sending in a gourmet meal to handling all kinds of tedious, time-gobbling errands and projects."

Having transcended the confines of the hotel, concierge service is "a trend perfect for the modern, busy lifestyle," says Katharine C. Giovanni, president and co-founder of the Board of the International Concierge and Errand Association.

The ICEA, founded in 2001, initially included a handful of professionals and today boasts hundreds of members from around

the globe.

Giovanni believes the demand for the service will continue to grow. “What’s truly great is that it’s not just a service for the rich, but a service that makes everyone feel very rich.”

It can also be a deeply humanitarian service that helps people feel cared for and supported.

Barbara Wellman, president of Black Tie Concierge, caters especially to enriching the lives of the elderly by giving them (and their families) peace of mind.

Why the name Black Tie? “Everyone,” says Wellman, “deserves a little class in their lives, and seniors, especially, have earned it.”

When 85-year-old Elinor Kent of Framingham broke her hip, Wellman sprang into action to help the elderly woman while she recovered in a rehab center. A widow without family in the area, Kent needed help with all sorts of things such as working with caregivers, bill paying, meals and even having her beloved West Highland terrier, Stuie, cared for and brought in for weekly visits.

“I make sure people never feel like they are alone with the weight of the world on their shoulders,” says Wellman. “And if you live a long distance from your parent, I can fill the gap between your visits and be an enormous help in making sure your parent has every need fulfilled.”

Black Tie can help find appropriate health care providers, reduce fall hazards in the home, organize important legal papers — and even serve as a watchdog by making impromptu visits to nursing homes to ensure clients are being well treated.

Some service providers prefer the term life manager over concierge. Beth Miller, president of GoodDeeds, says, “We offer more customized, long-term assistance to our clients. It’s all about trust, efficiency and knowing their taste.”

At an hourly rate of \$95, GoodDeeds can set up a new house, provide specialized staffing such as chefs and personal trainers, as well as provide research services to help clients find the perfect flat screen TV, college coach or vacation plan.

“Research is a very exciting niche to fill,” says Miller. “People can put the time they’d normally spend Googling for hours to better use.”

Lisa Wallace, a lawyer and mother of three teenage boys, asked Miller for help in planning a family trip to Europe.

Specifically, she needed to get tickets to the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, Italy. Notorious for long waits, some gallery visitors find themselves standing in line for up to five hours — especially in the high season of July.

Says Wallace, “Beth Miller had one of her Italian-speaking employees secure our museum tickets and when we arrived, I thought ‘thank goodness!’ because there was a huge line and the temperature was over 100 degrees. Because of GoodDeeds, we were able to stroll right on in.”

Wallace also needed help decorating the family’s new summer home on Cape Cod.

“We’d just shelled out the down payment, so we didn’t want to spend a ton of money on an interior decorator. Beth kept us within our budget and it was a lot more fun shopping in local stores and online with her than doing it alone. Plus she helped give me confidence to make lots of decisions.”

Not only does a concierge or life manager open doors of possibility, she keeps yours firmly closed to anyone but the best. Forget crossing your fingers in hopes your home contractor won’t abandon you mid-job: your concierge already knows through experience who has a great track record — and who doesn’t.

“One client described the service as feeling cradled,” says Cremin. “I do love protecting and empowering my clients so they can better balance family, work and home.”