

## Local concierge take care of the details

By JENNIFER PITTMAN - SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

Posted: 12/29/2008 11:57:21 AM PST

SANTA CRUZ -- On the eve of her children's elementary school book fair, Stacy McMillan realized she hadn't yet begun working on a large, fold-out display of teacher-recommended books due by noon the next day. And, there was no way she would get it done.

Enter Karissa Paxton, the detail-oriented, local, private concierge who makes your to-do list hers.

Paxton, a local wedding and event planner, recently launched Coastside Concierge in Santa Cruz to help a growing list of clients in need of a little extra help managing everything from holiday decorations to registering their car and running family errands. McMillan called Paxton at 7 a.m. the next morning and turned over the task.

"I gave her a picture of what I wanted it to look like, the name of the school and the teachers," McMillan said. "At noon there was an absolutely darling decorated safari-themed stand-up display for the fair. You don't have to spell it out for her."

The mother of a 7- and a 10-year-old and wife of a school teacher, McMillan returned to her full-time sales job in January. Like many, she has

an ambitiously long list of things to do each day.

"For stuff I just can't manage, I call Karissa and she's bailed me out," she said.

Paxton steps in to pick up dry cleaning, buy milk and get it in the fridge.

"I give her my garage code and say send me the bill.' It was either get milk or go do something like see my kids' performance," McMillan said.

After about six months of working with Paxton, McMillan says the hardest part is seeing through the immediate maze of tasks to figure out what you want her to do.

Although some clients are more high profile than others and companies also hire Paxton to help get their clients situated when they come into town, McMillan is increasingly the type of client that concierges are serving. She describes her family as "firmly middle, middle class" income. "It's not like I'm a rock star or anything."

According to Katharine Giovanni, cofounder of the Pennsylvania-based International Concierge and Errand Association, the private concierge industry is growing dramatically nationwide and is serving a diverse clientele. "We live in a time-starved world," she says, and hiring people to do errands is not just for the rich.

"Everyone is trying to squeeze 36 hours into a 24 hour day," according to Giovanni. "We are time brokers who will do the things that have to be done so you can do the things that you want to

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do like spending more time at the office or with your kids."

The concierge association, founded in 2001, lists more than 600 members on its Web site but Giovanni says there are actually thousands of concierge companies in the U.S. ICEA has doubled in size in the last two years alone, she said. "The industry is growing like a brushfire and is sweeping the corporate and real estate world. Companies around the U.S. are now offering concierge services to the employees and/or clients, and real estate management companies as well as hospitals are now offering lobby concierge services."

Jordan Keller launched Scotts Valley-based Attend Two Concierge a year ago with her mother Mona Robertson. Initially they set out to build a pet sitting and dog walking operation but that business idea quickly grew into a full scale errand business aimed at busy, dual income families who just don't have time to get tasks done. The pair walks dogs but they also research online gifts, shop for groceries and they handled decorations for the local Rotary club earlier this year.

"We're basically just your go-to girls," Keller said. "Whatever you need doing, we get it done. We work for people who want to spend free time with their families."

Keller thought business might slow down with the economy but people are still calling, she said. "We can get so much done in an hour."

At this time of year, local private concierges focused on de-stressing people during the holidays by gift shopping, wrapping presents, handling Christmas cards and decorations for individuals and small businesses.

The key word for the concierge is efficiency. "When I know what my regular clients need, I can get down an aisle in a minute," Paxton said. "I've got it down to a science. Clients pay by the hour or in blocks of time. "They need to know I'm doing the most efficient thing. I don't wait in line at the post office. I know when to go."

"I live for the details," Paxton said. But, at home, she keeps her own life as simple as possible. "I have one decoration. I turn it over and it turns into a piece of wood."

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### Find a concierge

Concierge and errand companies provide assistance with grocery shopping, household or office errands, house decorating, holiday card creation and mailing, gift wrapping, party planning, home management, office work and other tasks on a to-do list.

Coastside Concierge

Karissa Paxton, owner.

359-6399, [www.CoastsideConcierge.com](http://www.CoastsideConcierge.com).

Attend Two Concierge

Jordan Keller & Mona Robertson, owners,

359-8566 [www.attendtwo.com](http://www.attendtwo.com)

International Concierge and Errand Association

919-453-2850, [www.ICEAWeb.org](http://www.ICEAWeb.org)

National Concierge Association

612-317-2932, [www.nationalconciergeassociation.com](http://www.nationalconciergeassociation.com)

### How Do You Know When You Need a

#### Personal Concierge?

n Your well-intended holiday greeting cards are now New Year's cards.

n You stand in interminable store lines to buy gifts when you'd rather be home with family.

n Your company is planning a year-end party and you're in charge.

n The Christmas tree and lights from last year are still in the living room.

n You're hosting a holiday dinner, and you don't enjoy cooking or have cooking skills.

n Your dry cleaner is your storage annex.

n Your out-of-home schedule (work, volunteering, commuting, and the gym) is 60 hours per week.

n Your tax preparation came from a disorganized shoebox.

n You neglected a birthday of someone who is important to you.

n Household projects and chores are overwhelming.

n Eating out is a staple because there is no food in the refrigerator.

n The inspection sticker on your car is expired and the service light has been on for months.

n You simply wish there was someone to help you.

While prices vary depending on the errand, services start at about \$35 per hour and climb. Concierges usually provide packages for blocks of hours at varying prices as well.

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