

Broadview Heights Business Spotlight March 2017: Transitional Design



The brainchild of a local entrepreneur who was looking to assist the ever aging population with downsizing, this month's feature business, Transitional Design, has not only grown but spun off a whole host of sister businesses in its stead - a true study in business growth! Broadview Heights's Economic Development Director talked with Transitional Design owner Nancy Sheeler about the story behind the business and how it's grown.



Nancy Sheeler of Transitional Design

Q: How did Transitional Design get started?

A: Transitional Design, the parent company, started back in 2008, and has since grown into 3 other companies (more on that later). I had retired from IBM and wanted to do something that I felt would be helpful to people. I took some classes from SCORE (<https://www.score.org>), which is a governmental program of retired executives who volunteer their time to help those who want to start small businesses. I thought to myself, "how do people downsize from big houses and move into a smaller footprint or retirement community when they have so many belongings or they may not have family to help them?" and really the business started from there.

Q: And when you were looking for a way to help people, what was it that drove you towards the downsizing idea?

A: I would do some interior decorating as a hobby and would see people who had accumulated so many things, I would often wonder what people would do when it came time to downsize. I've been through it with my parents and my friend's parents, and it's overwhelming! If they've lived in their house 40 or 50 years they have accumulated tons of stuff! I wasn't planning on starting any other businesses selling anything – that came later, but, as part of my SCORE research I wanted to see if anyone else was providing this type of downsizing service. I checked on the Internet and saw some people around the country who were proud members of NASMM, which I now know is the National Association of Senior Move Managers. I got in touch with that organization and fell in love with them – they are a really great, ethical organization. I was required to seek certification in order to become a member and through that process I learned a ton. I went to a conference of theirs and thereafter really

got involved with them. And that's how I got started marrying my love for interior design with a passion for helping seniors who had this need!

Q: How did you establish the business in a realm where it was the first of its kind in its own field?

A: I started the business out of my home on a small scale, with three friends who all knew each other. I was in sales at IBM long ago and was not shy at selling my idea, but, this concept was so new that it really took me almost a year before I got my first real customer. We went into the home and helped



A Downsizing and Senior Move Manager Truck at Transitional Designs

organize the belongings, clean it and helped the owners put together an Estate Sale. We had to build a reputation for being helpful and trustworthy, to be allowed into people's homes and be worth their time and expense they were paying us. The business continued to grow and then we realized we could also sell the items that we were helping to organize and in turn help our customers even more directly by taking the goods off their hands.

Q: Is that how you grew into your second business, Transitional Treasures, which is the re-sale store you have in Broadview Heights?

A: Yes but there was one job in particular that pushed us over the edge. I had an amazing customer's home I worked on, out of Brecksville, John Paul Miller – look him up on the Internet. Mr. Miller passed away and he was the only person in the world who could make granular gold jewelry, which is an old Egyptian art form. As members of the National Association of Professional Organizers we were sought out by the family to organize the items in the home and clean it. Mind you, there was a gold making studio in the home, so we had to do the work very methodically and carefully, because we also had to carefully vacuum the gold shavings that were in the home and have them specially extracted from the device – I could go on and on about this one job it was so interesting! In the end, we were able to help the family sell items at the home by organizing an Estate Sale. After that, I realized that aspect of the job in and of itself could be its own business, and that is when both Transitional Treasures and Transitional Designs Online Auctions started.

Q: Why did you choose Broadview Heights for your business?

A: I'd like to say it was intentional, but it wasn't! At the point we started our own store and auctions we needed a physical space. I was driving around looking for places and called a realtor about a property in Brunswick, but the realtor re-directed me to this property (601 Towpath Trail Broadview Hts.). The space we are in has really worked for us, because as our business keeps growing we have

been able to keep adding on additional space and renting out the units alongside us. I really love Broadview Heights though – I feel, as a business, like I am really supported here.

Q: So your business organically grew into all of these different sectors. What are all of the entities and what do they all do?

A: Transitional Design, started first. It is the Service Division, which specializes in downsizing or cleaning out a property after someone passes away. We will remove all of the items and do a one-time cleaning with a team of people, if a person wants a house to go up for sale. We can also organize donations. Finally, that division also specializes in some interior decorating and/or home staging. Transitional Design Online Auctions runs online auctions from both our location in Broadview Heights or from a customer's home or business when moving everything is not feasible. It's a great way to move products and get exposure on rare items, or items that we cannot sell out of a store. One time we sold a boat for someone through the Online Auction and that worked perfectly.

Transitional Treasures is our resale store. Its open six days a week – Monday, Friday and Saturday from 10 to 4 and Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 10 to 7. Items up for auction are also available to be viewed at the store by customers shopping it in.

Our last division is intended to promote a green lifestyle and keep things out of a landfill – Transitional Redesign, which repurposes furniture. Sometimes when we are helping clear out a house, we will find a really well-made piece of furniture that has some gouges or nicks in it. We have a team of specialists who can repair the furniture and resell it, to give it life again.



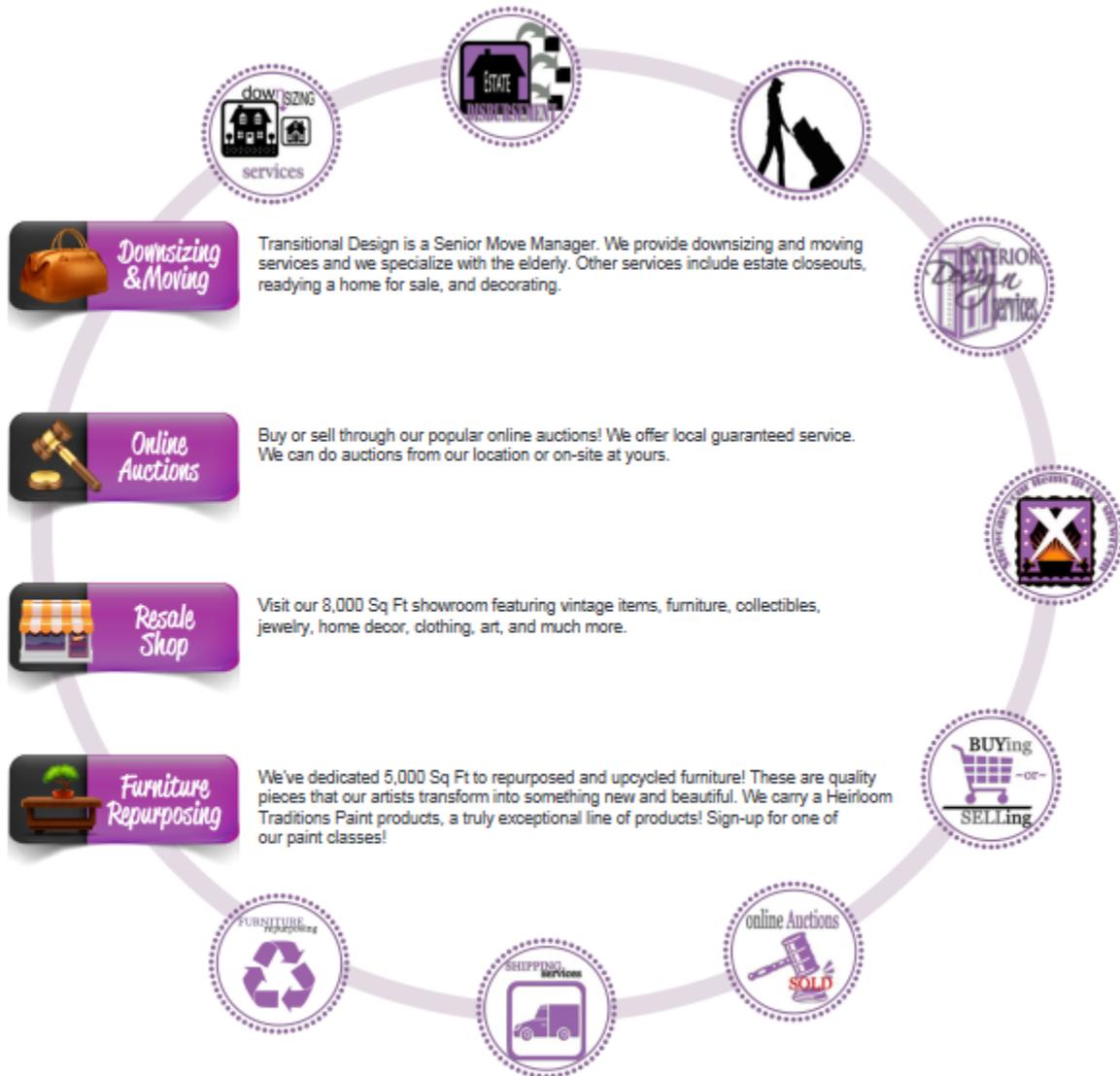
An item that was sold thru Transitional Design Online Auctions

Q: What's the one thing that your business is known for over your competitors?

A: Everybody has to keep their inventory fresh. Most consignment stores have to get rid of items after a few months if it isn't moved off the shelf. For us, if it doesn't sell in the store we are able to put it on an online auction, and move the item that way. However, being flexible, we are also able to put items straight on the auction site, dependent upon our knowledge of what the best route to sell the product is.

Q: Tell me about your biggest achievement as business owners and what it meant for your business.

A: What really drives me is that this is a feel good job. I know it sounds corny, but we bring peace of mind to people and we enjoy doing that.



The connectivity between the multiple Transitional Design brands companies

Our movers specialize in working with the elderly, we have a settling-in service, and we will do whatever it takes to bring our customers satisfaction. We also work with Hoarders; I'm a member of the Institute for Challenging Disorganization. I am so proud that what I do really affects people in the most personal and positive way. We just worked with a resident in Strongsville on a very serious hoarding situation, where we were hired by the family who needed specialized help. It was very gratifying to help in that situation.

Also, we help our customers financially. They don't get into hiring us thinking that way but once we are able to sell some of their items, the return enables them to pay off some bills and they end up relieved; they are then able to physically and emotionally let go of a certain state they were in and move on with their lives.



A furniture painting class at Transitional Redesign

A lot of people don't move when they need to because they don't know what to do with their stuff. They become elderly, they are not physically capable of being on their own anymore but they have items that they don't know what to do with and a home they don't know what to do with, so they get stuck and don't make that transition. Plus, their things are worth money and they don't know what to do with them. That's where we come in – we are able to help make that transition for them and get them to that next stage. It's actually a freeing process.

Q: Does someone have a contract with you to provide all of these services, or is it a flat rate?

A: Almost all of our services (except for hoarding, because that is more dangerous work) are \$99.00 per hour for two people. We are licensed, insured and bonded. Also, at this point, we have a very efficient process for how to do this work. However, we structure each job separately. If customers have adult kids who want to be involved in the organization of items. Sometimes our customers don't have any family. Sometimes customers want to help but it's too much for them to do, and in those cases we work side by side with them. We tailor it to the customer's needs and wants.



Nancy Sheeler speaking with WKYC at The Great Big Home & Garden Show about Transitional Design's services

Generally, we have a 50/50 commission split, but, on higher end items we negotiate with the family because obviously if it's an item like an antique car, we do not intend to keep 50% of a very large profit.

Each clean-out varies on the situation. Our clean-outs also include a full clean-up of the house afterwards, so the house can sell. However, by the time you pay for the services and obtain the

profits from the sale, it can be a wash or it can actually turn a profit for the family. But it always helps them transition on.

Q: What's the biggest risk you've ever taken as business owners?

A: I weathered the storm through a very long and arduous start-up phase. Until recently we were not turning a real profit. I spent a long time funding my business out of my own retirement, and increasing overhead costs to keep the business growing. I did all of those things because I believed in the business, but it was a long road with lots of prayers to get to this point!

Q: How did you get through that start-up phase? Did you rely on any mentor or source?

A: I think there's been a lot of divine intervention! I really have muddled my way through and had to learn lots of all of the different business components on my own. I made a lot of mistakes along the way that I learned from. I also have been surrounded by a lot of the right people along the way who seemed to show up just when I needed them! All of us were figuring out how to do things in our different divisions on our own. For example, employees who started the Online Auction segment had to figure out how to do online auctions and become proficient at it.

Q: Do you give employees autonomy over different divisions and is that part of your organizational culture?

A: Yes and yes. We have all learned these jobs together, but I have to trust the people who are working for me to do what I hired them to do. It's important for my employees to feel like they can make a difference in their workplace and with the customers they are helping.

Q: What is the best piece of advice you would share with executives of other small businesses?

A: Don't give up on your dreams, even in hard times. Ban together with other small businesses to use common resources and build relationships. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

Q: Do you have a favorite place or thing about Broadview Heights?

A: Yes – I love Oggi's Ristorante! It's my favorite – I stumbled across it many years ago and have been going ever since. The food is just phenomenal. I think, if this food was in New York, you'd have to make reservations months in advance because the food is that good. It's all hand-made and very fresh. It's the best kept secret in Broadview Heights!

Q: What does 2017 look like for Transitional Design?

A: I am really focused on growing the business and on putting processes in place to manage the business accordingly. I have a lot of creative employees who are passionate about Broadview Heights and working on new projects, so stay tuned!

You can find Transitional Design at:

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