

Harwin helps to organize the paper trail

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If Debbie Harwin was playing a game of rock-paper-scissors, paper would always win.

That's because despite our supposed growth as a paperless society, Harwin, a professional organizer from Larchmont, said a look at many kitchens, hallways and home offices shows that we are still anything but. Amassing, stacking and losing papers is alive and well in Lower Hudson Valley homes, and Harwin, who runs I Need My Space, says that just stunts progress.

Harwin says that for many people the first step in reducing paper clutter is realizing that in this electronic age, many papers — magazine articles, for instance — no longer need to be saved. Their information can be accessed online.

And managing papers that do need to be kept does not need to be messy, she says. Maintaining visible files — complete with an "action" file for papers that need attending — is key.

Before becoming a professional organizer and founding her company in 1992, Harwin was an attorney. But she said

she's been ultra-organized her entire life.

That's why she says that just throwing out papers is not always the solution; organizing them so they can be tapped for references is.

"If there is not a system in place, if there is not a place for that particular piece of paper to go, it's just going to sit in that pile," Harwin said, "and chances are it's going to get lost in that black hole."

Papers cease to be problems when they are read, dealt with and filed away, Harwin said.

Instead, stacks of untackled material — unread articles, unpaid bills, unanswered invitations — weigh heavily on us, making us less productive. They eat up space in the brain as well as on the kitchen counter.

Best advice: Create an area in your home for all of your "action" papers. "This area becomes 'Command Central' and should be located in the kitchen or a home office. A remote room on the third floor doesn't work," she said. Set up file folders in a vertical step file for the following: Bills to Pay, To Do-Kids, To Do-Personal, Upcoming Events/Trips, etc.

"When you open the mail every day, put papers in the



Matthew Brown/The Journal News

Debbie Harwin, a Larchmont resident, is the owner of I Need My Space,

appropriate file immediately. These action files must be

come part of your everyday life," she says. "Know what's in them and do it!"

Need Help? I Need My

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