

# The Journal News

MONDAY, March 22, 2010

Breaking news 24/7 at LoHud.com

75 cents

## CLEANING'S DREAM TEAM

Local experts give practical advice on taming the mess in your house

Karen Croke

kcroke1@lohud.com

It's time to tackle that yearly ritual called spring cleaning. So what's stopping you? Maybe the job is too big, or maybe you're chronically disorganized. Or maybe the problem is messy kids who can never get with the program.

Instead of handing you a laundry list of chores — clean out your gutters, rinse the screens, toss those old magazines — we found three local professionals with some inside information. Each has salient advice to offer, from dealing with kid clutter and paper overload to what to do when the stress of everyday life makes keeping things neat and tidy an impossibility.

SEE CLEANING, 4B

Organizing professionals, clockwise from top, Janis Kowalski — seen with her daughter, Sabrina — Debbie Harwin and Linda Samuels offer spring cleaning tips.

File photo/The Journal News



### Navigate the paper trail

Debbie Harwin

I Need My Space, Larchmont

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

That's because despite our supposed growth as a paperless society, Harwin says 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, a professional organizer from Larchmont, 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 own company, I Need My Space, in 1992, Harwin was an attorney, but she says 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 as 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 says, "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 says. 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 says. 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 appropriate file immediately. These action files must become part of your everyday life," she says. "Know what's in them and do it!"

**Need Help?** I Need My Space, 914-833-2627, [www.ineedmyspace.com](http://www.ineedmyspace.com)