



DOROTHY COHN NANCY WEINGARDEN

Doubling up

Roommates learn sharing can ease the budget bite

By SHIRLEE IDEN

"If today's cost of living is getting you down, the way out may be to live rent free every other month.

A Southfield firm, Home-Mate Specialists, has come up with a service to do just that.

Run by Nancy Weingarden and Dorothy Cohn, Home-Mate Specialists finds roommates for people wanting to share expenses to save costs or share a home for other considerations.

"When two people split rent and utilities, it's as though they were getting every other month's expenses free," said Ms. Cohn.

With the current social climate of many divorces and postponed marriages, many singles are finding this a useful service.

Both Ms. Weingarden and Ms. Cohn are divorcees with children. They have gone through dislocation and the sudden trauma of the mortgage bill and other financial readjustments.

"I've known many people who had problems and had to take in roomers just to meet expenses," Ms. Weingarden said. "I worked for a service that helped people find someone to share housing, but it wasn't exactly like our service."

ABOUT A year ago, the two women decided to begin their company. They took several months to research similar firms in other cities and opened their office in May.

They also attended a course in how to operate a small business at Oakland Community College. Both found answers to many questions during class sessions.

"Since we opened, it's been like a snowball, just fantastic," Ms. Cohn said. "People simply find that sharing living quarters is the one single way they can meet their budgets."

Clients include newly divorced persons of both sexes who have to set up a new homestead or field the expenses alone, persons age 18 to 90 and many professional people.

"Often a divorced man will prefer to move in with someone who already has a place in order to ease rent payments and the expense of furniture," Ms. Cohn said.

Other singles may not want to skimp on vacations or recreational equipment and prefer to bunk in with someone.

"There's just a multitude of people who need this help," Ms. Weingarden said.

"One client offered free rent so that someone would be there to take his show dog out for walks. Sometimes a handicapped person wants companionship more than the extra funds.

"We've had people seeking personal care in return for reduced rent."

OFFEN, when rent goes up or an apartment mate moves out, a person tends to take in a friend to share living expenses.

"That can be a mistake," Ms. Weingarden said. "If it doesn't work out or the friend doesn't pay his share of the rent, it's difficult to kick out a friend."

"It's better to make the arrangement a business transaction. Then if it doesn't work out, you can terminate living together without losing a friend." Advertising in the newspaper is also not the best way to find a living partner, explained Ms. Cohn.

"People tend to rush into something, not check references or employment carefully enough and end up with an undesirable," she said.

"Also even if your ad specifies female or male only, clients tell us they get many crank and obscene phone calls from newspaper advertising."

The two women said they screen their clients very carefully.

"No one is referred out until we conduct a personal interview, check their references and verify employment," Ms. Cohn said.

"We need to know whether someone's straight or gay, the range of rent they can pay, and whether they smoke or drink. If there's something we think doesn't check out, we won't accept the money or the application."

HOME-MATE Specialists charges \$40 for their complete fee. This entitles the client to one year of service. If the person needs to or an arrangement doesn't work out, the fee is re-paid and a new roommate found.

The fee may go up after the first of the year.

"We specialize in getting the people together," Ms. Cohn said. "We ask if they have a preference as to age, sex or race, but we'll pair up anyone we think will be compatible."

Some men prefer to room with a female because a male might expect him to party, Ms. Weingarden explained.

"And we've had females who wanted a male homemate because when she lived with a woman, her clothes were also being borrowed."

Others may not want to room with another woman who may steal her dates. Often the two get requests for rent free for mature women.

"The homeowners just want someone in the home at night more than additional income," Ms. Weingarden said.

An important aspect of their business is helping major corporations to find housing for transferred or in-training employees. This includes temporary placement.

MS. COHN has three children Barry 14, Eddie 12 and Carrie 8. She previously worked for an importer and then in sales.

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