

Concierge sweats the small stuff for clients

The key to Tina Napier's job as a concierge: organization. Some of it is inborn. The rest is learned. "I've always been one to make lists, to check my lists," she said. "Without my appointment book, I would forget."

She's worked for Cincinnati-based Best Upon Request for nearly five years, trying to get clients' errands done so smoothly that they can forget about the tasks. She drops off and picks up dry cleaning, takes cars for oil changes and fills them up with gas, makes travel arrangements and buys gifts for special occasions.

She works from the company's main offices now, following a stint on-site at a hospital.

High-achievers such as executives and physicians aren't always organized when it comes to the little things, often because they're so busy with their jobs.

"There are those who call and say, 'I forgot it's my wife's birthday,' and I'll order flowers, that kind of thing," Napier said.

Sometimes having a concierge available solves only part of the problem.

"Some people will say, 'I've had this package in my car that needs to be sent, but I keep forgetting to bring it to you,'" she said. "We can go get it and get it sent out."

CLIENTS IN 14 STATES

When working on-site, she might get 20 to 30 requests a day, from people who need to buy stamps to the bigger requests. Her company has clients in 14 states, including several locally, such as Christ Hospital;

IN THE FIELD

By James Ritchie

What exactly does a concierge service do for its clients? Ritchie spends some time watching and learning. E-mail him at jritchie@bizjournals.com.



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Concierge Tina Napier is often asked to handle errands such as shopping for people.

law firm Katz, Teller, Brant & Hild; and the Mayerson Co., which manages the Scripps Center downtown.

One time she went to someone's car, got the client's son's forgotten backpack and took it to the boy's school. It contained the permission slip he needed in order to go on a field trip that day.

Another time she helped a doctor who

found himself overbooked – he needed to be home to get the electric turned on in his new house, but he also needed to perform a surgery. Napier went to the house; she left the operation to the doctor.

Napier had a background in the hospitality industry when she started as a concierge.

It doesn't hurt to be a bit restless, either. She loves being out and about in the middle of the day – it feels kind of like a day off from school.

"If I had to stay in an office, the days would probably get pretty long," Napier said. "This way, it seems like the time goes by so quickly."

YOU HAVE TO WANT TO HELP PEOPLE

Sara-ann Kasner, founding president of the National Concierge Association, said good concierges come from a variety of backgrounds, including hospitality, communications and sales. But the basic personality type doesn't differ much.

"Even when I was 5 or 6 years old, my family was asking me where they could get something. I was always looking for the deal, the inside scoop," she said. "And everybody that I've met in our organization is the exact kind of person I am. We are people who will walk into a crowd of strangers and make a friend immediately."

Napier said the hardest part is choosing the right service providers for her clients. If she picks out, say, a cleaning service or a repair shop that doesn't do a good job, then the experience reflects poorly on her company. Best Upon Request's clients – the corporations – pay for the concierge aspect,



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Oil changes and gas fill-ups are other common hassles that Napier manages.

but the clients' employees pay for the actual services themselves.

Fortunately, by now Napier knows pretty well whom to call for any situation. Nothing, however, can make it easy to buy a gift for someone you don't know, a task Napier faces from time to time. "You have to ask some questions and try to find out what their hobbies are," she said.