

AT HOME

Real Estate

They'll even put gas in your car

Name the task, and concierge services will take care of it for you

BY MICHELLE MYERS | CONTRIBUTOR

Think concierge services are only for guests at ritzy hotels or tenants in Park Avenue condos? Quite the contrary.

There are a couple of companies on the North Fork whose services include such menial tasks as taking your clothes to the dry cleaners, filling your car with gas or accepting delivery of an urgent package.

"It's all part of being a full-service house-minder," said Alan Kahn, owner of North Fork Caretaker in Cutchogue.

Mr. Kahn started his business about a year ago after moving to the East End full-time.

"I had been coming out here for 30 years and bought a house about eight years ago," he said. "All that time as a weekender made me realize this was a service that would be really useful to second-home owners."

Of course, caretaking services are not new in areas with a lot of second homes, but what is innovative is the range of jobs caretakers will take on. In the case of Mr. Kahn's company, two hours of concierge services are included in a standard monthly house-minding contract.

Mr. Kahn's monthly service also includes a house check once a week. "The real part of the service is the protection of the house itself," he said. "Especially in winter. If the temperature goes below 20 degrees, I'm at your house."

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David Knoernschild

Peconic, he, too, offers a monthly contract that includes a weekly site visit to check both inside and outside the house.

"I'll check things like propane and oil levels, windows and doors. It's really peace of mind for weekenders," he said.

Mr. Knoernschild also points out that many city dwellers who acquire second homes often have no idea how things work in their homes — simply because their city apartments usually have a live-in superintendant to call upon.

"I have a new client who told me he wasn't sure how things are done out here in terms of diagnosing problems and calling in the right people to handle them," he said. "That's where I come in handy because I can act as a go-between with homeowners and vendors."

The peace of mind that caretaking can provide is particularly valuable in winter when second homeowners either close up their homes or come out on an irregular basis.

"We've had some severe weather so far this winter and one of my clients was complaining about a



JAY WEBSTER PHOTOS

Alan Kahn, owner of North Fork Caretaker, inspects a central air conditioning unit at a home in Cutchogue, one of the more common tasks his concierge business sees to for second-home owners.



Peconic Home Management owner David Knoernschild checks a client's alarm system.

leak, but he wasn't ever out here at a time when he could pinpoint the source," Mr. Knoernschild said. "I made an extra visit during the nor'easter and was able to locate the approximate area of the leak."

In addition, the Internet allows him to send pictures of problems to clients and get instant feedback.

Neither Mr. Knoernschild nor Mr. Kahn will take

on the repair of a leaky roof, however.

"I can't do plumbing or electrical work even though I have some experience, because I'm not licensed, but I can put the client in touch with people who can," said Mr. Kahn.

Mr. Knoernschild also lacks professional licenses, though he said he knows the people who have them.

"Most homeowners have service contracts with certain vendors and that makes it easy to set up repair appointments," he added.

The concierge services offered by both companies really run the gamut. "I'll take on virtually anything I'm permitted to do by law," said Mr. Kahn. "One very common request I've had is to FedEx a forgotten Blackberry, but I've also delivered Christmas trees and made sure the boat was ready for the summer."

Mr. Knoernschild says he's fielded requests for everything from having cars waxed to filling the refrigerator with groceries to coordinating paperwork for the building department to expedite the construction of a client's swimming pool.

On a final note, Mr. Kahn says that while concierge requests can be fun — the oddest mission he's had so far was to travel to Oyster Bay to check out an exotic car for a client — the real point of a home minding service is to provide protection for homeowners.

"It's a cost versus value calculation," he said. "Many people might consider scaling back in this economy and if you're lucky, nothing will happen. Yes, there's insurance, but the deductibles are huge and the hassle of repairing some disaster that could have been avoided makes having someone minding your house good value for money."

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