



A trusted source in navigating transitions

Cindy Wobbe Estate Sales focuses on the ethics of estate liquidations

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Although she formalized her business in estate liquidation in the 2010s, Cindy Wobbe has been helping friends and neighbors with their estates for decades.

"I had been doing some estate liquidations before, when I had the restaurant, as a lot of my customers needed it," Wobbe said. "But I knew I was going to be phasing out of owning Mon Ami and I saw a real untapped need in the estate liquidation business. Back then, there wasn't anybody in town who did what I do, and I wanted to transition into that."

Thus she formed Cindy Wobbe Estate Sales and opened a storefront at 498 Highway 101. With just a small team, she began helping transition people through the sale of their houses and belongings, often helping them move into their next homes.

"Particularly in the first few years that I started doing estate liquidations full time, a lot of my customers were people who I had known for many years through my restaurant, and I considered them part of my extended family. I just wanted to be the one to help them through those transitions," she said.

Often, estate liquidation is a needed service after death or illness. Sometimes it's to downsize, and sometimes it's because people are moving away or into assisted living.

"Those are really difficult transitions to make at times in your life when you are probably the most vulnerable," Wobbe noted. "I wanted to be the one in my community who helps people at those periods of time."

She found that the integrity and trust she maintained with her treasured clientele were essential to her business and interactions across the board.

"It's an industry that really requires the highest level of ethics. There are multiple opportunities to take advantage of people — and people do. I just wanted to be the one who provided that service in my community, and for people I know."

In its years of service, Cindy Wobbe Estate Sales has added staff members and a moving team. When they take a contract, they work with people to pack their personal items and then they get going on the sale. They also clean the home and provide services as needed.

Wobbe opened her first business in 1981. Since then, she has learned important lessons and adapted to changing times. This became evident this past February and March, when Oregon enacted safety mandates to pro-

tect the population from the novel coronavirus COVID-19.

"We had to completely recalibrate how to do business," Wobbe said. "When we knew we were going into a lockdown situation, we kind of shut everything down and took a real hard look at how we could continue to provide service within the safety parameters that were being given to us."

One of those methods was through online sales. Unlike many other people who had to learn brand-new techniques to market products and services online, Wobbe is familiar with several platforms, including having a large social media base. Another of her businesses, Toby and Max Jewelry, is primarily online.

"We recalibrated Cindy Wobbe Estate Sales and have gone strictly to online sales," she said. "Our processes, in terms of processing an estate, are pretty much the same, but the marketing and the actual physical liquidation of the contents of the home looks a little different now."

The estate company now operates through two main models. The first is a weekly Wednesday online estate sale, which people can access through www.facebook.com/cindywobbeestatesales and by signing up for the newsletter at cindywobbeestates.com.

"Those are typically pretty large whole house sales or a combination of two or three smaller homes," Wobbe said.

The second is a newer project called Top Picks.

"Generally, this is our top 10 items every day," she said. "That's a way for us also to take on smaller estates that previously, before COVID, we couldn't do."

According to Wobbe, having a whole crew move into home and do the physical work can be expensive. By using the virtual sales models, projects can get done quickly and efficiently under COVID-19 safety regulations.

"It was one of the blessings, if you want to call it that, on the outset of recalibrating to our COVID model that we are able to help more people who have smaller valuation estates."

2020 has also allowed Cindy Wobbe Estate Sales to highlight the crew's work on staging homes.

"We incorporated a whole menu of services. We'll take a home and prep it for placing on the real estate market, and that includes staging a home to sell it," Wobbe said.

Cindy Wobbe

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It's a skill she has honed over 35 years.

"Staging is very different than decorating. Staging is showcasing a home's high points and creating a story for a potential buyer. And we are very successful at that."

When homeowners or real estate agents ask for these services, the homes for sale are often unfurnished and have odd layouts. Wobbe's teams enter the home, utilize existing features, and supplement what is there with furnishings from the warehouse.

"We stage it from top to bottom and shoot photographs and prepare those for online listings for realtors involved," she said. "Then, when the house sells, we'll clean it out and make sure it's move-in ready."

Wobbe noted that in the staging business, like the estate sale business, she can't take every job that comes to her team. Staging, however, is crucial in some circumstances.

"When you have a great room concept in a home, you can't always envision how to define those spaces," she said. "When you have a designated living room, dining room, etc., it seems you know where the table goes. But not everybody can picture what life will look like and where can things go in a vacant house. So staging paints that picture for you."

"And a vacant home lacks warmth," she added. "Sometimes a home needs a personality."

Wobbe quoted statistics which show the importance of staging in helping a home sell faster and for more money. She gave the example of a home in the area that had been on the market for around six years.

"One of the realtors we work with got the listing and asked us to come in and work our magic on it. And we did — and it sold in six days. Staging is what made the difference," Wobbe said. "We worked from the outside in. We took care of the front of the house (the curb appeal), we repainted and changed the dynamic of the home entirely. It made the difference."

The estate liquidation business has continued to give Wobbe and her team the opportunity to meet people and support them through life's transitions.

"It's a fascinating occupation," she said. "We have liquidated the estates of some people of significant notoriety."

In the last several years, the team has handled vehicles that were valued at \$25 million or more, worked with expensive pieces of fine art and dealt with moon rocks and other artifacts from the Apollo space mission, that were then returned to NASA.

"Certainly one of the most interesting estates I've worked on, and continue to work on, is the estate of Wilbur and Joyce Ternyik. And the artifacts, particularly the Native American pieces, are a once in a lifetime estate opportunity for me," Wobbe said.

The Ternyiks were prominent citizens in Florence, especially regarding the environment and local government. Wobbe has a special website dedicated to their collection at theternyikestate.com.

"There's no way I could have ever gone to college and gotten an education to prepare me for the work that we do. It's really a continuous process of learning," Wobbe said.

One lesson that has become very clear since she moved to Florence in the 1990s is the need for comprehensive support for the area's food insecure population.

"In my work in the estate liquidation business, we come across a lot of needs in our community that are not met through other organizations or social services. It's provided me with a window and access into that realm, and we're able to meet those needs through The Good Deed Project."

Wobbe's public support of organizations like Florence Food Share began in 2001 with the Pounding, an event in its 20th year. From there, she began the community-funded 501c3 nonprofit The Good Deed Project. Through private donors, the project gathers money to support people's needs, from proper nutrition for seniors and shut ins through the Soup Brigade to helping a student pay for needed orthodontics.

"One of the things that I didn't realize when I started in this business was the emotional toll it takes," Wobbe said. "I think that it takes a certain level of empathy and an emotional commitment to do this kind of work."

This spirit is exemplified in her team, who are active participants in events around town, and all her businesses, which keep community service part of the culture.

"You address suffering by raising awareness and asking people to lean in and step up. That's how

you address these situations. ... My crew here really steps up and volunteers a great deal on their own time to do those things," she said.

It is something Wobbe is thankful for, and part of her ongoing tradition of giving thanks every day in November.

"My gratitude lists are a public posting each day of something I'm grateful for," she said. "I've been doing it for about eight years publicly. I love watching other people tag on and follow suit. And I mostly do it for me; gratitude is also part of my personal culture."

The past couple years have been difficult, as construction of the Florence ReVision Streetscaping Project took place on Highway 101 in front of her storefront, followed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Has it been difficult to find things to be thankful for?

"It is more challenging for me to discipline myself to do it because I am very taxed both physically and emotionally right now," Wobbe said. "But actually finding things to be grateful for? No. I'm really clear on what I'm grateful for."

In addition, 2020 has so far been more about digging deeper.

"My posts are not are not very superficial this year. In some ways, the material is easier to come up with because the superficial has sifted away," she noted. "We know what's really important right now — our relationships and our time with people."

As the year begins to close out, people can look forward to seeing Cindy Wobbe Estate Sales' iconic window displays, arranged by the staff for the holidays.

"We're sort of known for the front window Christmas displays. ... We've done some pretty spectacular ones — last year we did Christmas in Manhattan and the year before we did a beautiful Christmas in the woods."

"I love those windows. They give me such an opportunity to showcase what we have."

While the storefront is operating under COVID-19 hours, which can be confirmed on both Facebook and the website, it is still open to the public.

"What's in the showroom is what I call the 'curated collection,'" Wobbe said. "We have things ranging from pop art to antiques, and Native American and Civil War memorabilia. There are specialty items, finer jewelry and just cool stuff. ... I say often, 'My shop is the kind of shop I like to shop at.'"

For more information about Cindy Wobbe Estate Sales and its services, go to www.facebook.com/cindywobbeestatesales and cindywobbeestates.com.

