

## ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Friday August 20, 2010

# Organizer, resident featured on show 'Hoarding'

by Monica Orosz  
Daily Mail staff



*Courtesy photo*

Andy Hemsworth, left, Patty Karnes, Miranda Hemsworth, Rita McGhee and Mark McGhee helped a Charleston-area woman and her son dig out from their home, which was piled inside with years of accumulated stuff. The process was taped by the TLC Network show "Hoarding: Buried Alive." Rita McGhee, a Charleston professional organizer, was contacted by the show to participate.



**CHARLESTON -- A Charleston professional organizer and her team of helpers will be featured on an episode of the TLC Network show "Hoarding: Buried Alive," that airs starting Sunday night.**

**The show is taped in documentary style and goes inside the homes of extreme hoarders. It attempts to show the psychology**

**behind the hoarding compulsion and tapes the process of a local organizer working with the hoarder to clean up the home.**

**Rita McGhee helped a Charleston-area woman named Deborah in an episode called "Prison of Garbage."**

**"Ever since Deborah killed her drug-addicted boyfriend in self-defense, she and her son have lived amid growing piles of trash and unused possessions," TLC says of this episode on its website.**

**The show has several ways that people can nominate themselves or a family member to be considered for an episode - Deborah requested help. The show does not reveal last names, and participants agree to protect that privacy.**

**McGhee, who owns a business called Sort My Space and is a member of the National Association of Professional Organizers, was contacted by the show at the end of May.**

**She said she readily agreed - though only because she has seen this particular show and believes it works with clients in the proper way, respecting the issues that created their hoarding problems in the first place.**

**McGhee said 30 percent to 40 percent of her clients have hoarding issues, though it may be with just one room in the home. And though she and her team removed an estimated 85 bags of garbage alone from Deborah's home, she said it was not the worst she has ever seen.**

**A casual passerby wouldn't notice anything outwardly unusual about Deborah's home, McGhee said.**

**"She is very bubbly. You would never suspect it," McGhee added. "They are the most caring, loving family."**

**McGhee said hoarders' issues often begin with a trauma or tragedy, and that certainly was the case with Deborah.**

**For a time, hoarders are unable to clean or keep their homes orderly, and then it starts to get away from them. Then they feel**

**guilty and ashamed and stop having people over. If an appliance breaks, a hoarder may not get it repaired because he or she is ashamed to have a repairman in the home. Yet he or she also feels anxious about someone coming in and just taking everything from the home.**

**For this reason, McGhee believes her job is to go gently and to listen. In most instances, she begins with a long phone conversation.**

**But the show's taping schedule did not allow that. Her first meeting of Deborah was the first day of taping.**

**"She was in immediate need," McGhee said, adding some of Deborah's appliances were not working. Her home was hot because the air-conditioning vents were covered with items. It was difficult to walk through the home because things were piled everywhere.**

**McGhee and her helpers - a team that has worked with her before and her husband, Mark, who volunteered to help out - started by trying to make a path to all of the exits so the team could work safely.**

**"Within a few days of working - and there were some 12-hour days - we could walk through all parts of the house," she said. "It was a big change. Even the household pet had to adjust to that."**

**McGhee said she asked Deborah's permission to touch and to toss everything.**

**And while some episodes of the show feature hoarders who are reluctant to part with anything, McGhee said that wasn't the case with Deborah.**

**"With some certain prize possessions, it became a little harder, and I had to ask a lot of permission to touch those items," she said. "Nobody stormed off. Sometimes we needed to sit down for a while and just talk, not work."**

**McGhee said she especially enjoyed working with Deborah's college-age son.**

**"At first he kind of followed my lead, but after a while he was able to do things on his own," she said, and seemed to come out of his shell as the home was cleaned.**

**TLC had a crew there for just a few days, but McGhee continued to work with the family for three weeks, coming at least three days a week. At one point, she even took Deborah out to shop for new appliances.**

**She plans to follow up and continue to help Deborah to clean, organize and maintain her home, something she often does with clients for free long after her original work is completed.**

**"I think about my clients daily," McGhee said.**

**McGhee's business website is [www.sortmyspace.com](http://www.sortmyspace.com).**

**Contact writer Monica Orosz at [mon...@dailymail.com](mailto:mon...@dailymail.com) or 304-348-4830.**