

# NYC breeds pack rats

Small apartments, shopping options lead to hoarding

BY GRAHAM WOOD  
graham.wood@am-ny.com

In a Brooklyn apartment recently, Adrian Walter-Ginzburg found every closet stuffed with thousands of garbage bags, a dozen suitcases filled with unworn clothing, some from long-defunct Alexander's, and piles of old junk mail and paper, including an unfilled 1970 Census form.



Langley Collyer

The closets were so packed that “you couldn't even fit a pin in there,” said Walter-Ginzburg of

Caring Transitions of New York, a company that assists with downsizing and clearing out homes.

It may sound like an episode of A&E's “Hoarders,” but scenes like the one at a Holocaust survivor's home are becoming all too familiar to psychologists and apartment-clearing specialists, who say New York is the ultimate hoarding breeding ground.

“I believe reports on hoarding are way underreported” in the city, said Marcie Cooper of Seniorbridge, a Manhattan-based service that assists people with varying mental disorders.

Numbers are elusive, but a Johns Hopkins study estimated that 0.4 percent of the country, mostly the elderly, engages in hoarding. But that's much higher in the city, Cooper said. Hoarding is often associated with obsessive-compulsive



Adrian Walter-Ginzburg spent hours clearing out this Washington Heights apartment, but the owner retrieved all the trash from a nearby dumpster and brought it back home.

(ADRIAN WALTER-GINZBURG)

**Disposophobia:** Term coined by Ron Alford of Disaster Masters, which helps hoarders. “Everyone is a disposophobic,” Alford said. “Everyone has something that, no matter what, they won't part with it.”

(GRAHAM WOOD)

disorder — and that's the No. 1 diagnosis among Seniorbridge's patients, she said.

Seniorbridge estimates that as many as 61,500 city residents are hoarders based on national trends. One reason is small apartments.

“Things just build up very quickly,” she said, especially with the city's boundless shopping options.

Leah Lagos-Walker, a therapist with Springfield

Psychological Associates in Springfield, N.J., suggested that the city's fast-paced lifestyle contributes.

“Hoarders tend to be people that are private,” Lagos-Walker said.

And with everyone living so close together in cramped spaces, a hoarder gets little privacy, she said. “Their belongings represent their place in the world.”

Easily the most famous Gotham hoarders were the Collyer brothers, who packed their Harlem townhouse with decades of junk and met a gruesome demise in 1947. Homer Collyer, confined to a wheelchair, starved to death after his brother, Langley, was killed when a booby trap fell on him.

## HOW TO DEAL WITH A HOARDER

1. Never just throw a hoarder's belongings away. It's not just junk to them. Experts advise suggesting to hoarders that they donate their belongings, so they don't feel items of value are being tossed.
2. Don't throw the trash away in a place where the hoarder can access it — because they'll retrieve it.
3. Start discarding items that provoke the least anxiety to a hoarder. Find out how the hoarder prioritizes his or her items and work from the bottom up.

(GRAHAM WOOD)



## Cuomo backs AG hopeful

Gubernatorial hopeful Andrew Cuomo endorsed fellow Democrat Eric Schneiderman, a Manhattan state senator, to replace him as attorney general.

Schneiderman is running even in some polls with Republican opponent Dan Donovan, the Staten Island district attorney.

Being attorney general, Cuomo said at a news conference, “takes brains and it takes guts, and Eric Schneiderman has both.”

Cuomo had reportedly been reluctant to support Schneiderman, believing someone from outside the state Legislature was best positioned to tackle corruption in Albany.



Schneiderman

(NEWSDAY)

## Grant to help find bombs

New York City will receive an \$18.5 million federal grant to detect and deter the detonation of “dirty bombs” made with nuclear or radioactive materials, officials announced yesterday.

“As we've repeatedly seen, New York City is the number-one target for terrorists,” and has experienced 11 bombing attempts since 9/11, said U.S. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.).

(SHEILA)

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