

Dishing out holiday assists

Local duo give Christmas rookies a hand

By ERIKA HOBART
Staff Writer

Donning matching red sweaters, Heather Nelson and Kristi Bennitt show up at your door. They greet you with warm smiles, then take over your home for the holidays. Their subject this evening: Kirkland resident Kris Piersceniak. Entering his living room, the duo begin unpacking their numerous bags.

"Where do you want the tree?" Nelson asks Piersceniak.

He looks bewildered.

"I hadn't even thought about that," he says, gazing at an apartment space already filled with furniture. "I guess you can move stuff around."

The last few weeks have been hectic for Piersceniak. He's relocated from the main Microsoft campus into another office. He recently switched apartment buildings. He's hosting a holiday party for some friends and co-workers this weekend. And his family just made last-minute plans to fly up from California to visit. The whirlwind of changes overwhelmed Piersceniak, until he came across a Web site for Holiday Assistants, which promised to provide a "stress-free holiday



Kris Piersceniak watches as Kristi Bennitt of Holiday Assistants decorates a Christmas tree in Piersceniak's living room Dec. 18. Piersceniak's family was staying at his house for Christmas, so he called Bennitt and her partner Heather Nelson for help.

Katherine Ganter/Reporter Newspapers

solution."

"I usually panic and get things done at the last minute," Piersceniak admits. "If it wasn't for the last minute, nothing would ever get done. But I've

had so much other stuff going on this year... luckily, I found what sounded like a solution to all my problems."

Meet Nelson and Bennitt, the miracle workers behind

Holiday Assistants, a Kirkland-based business that provides services like holiday gift-buying and decorating for people with busy schedules. The goal is to make the holidays less

hectic and more enjoyable for everyone involved.

"There are some people who start thinking about the

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holidays as early as June,” Nelson explains. “Then there are others who don’t like thinking about it and put it off as long as they can. We thought that there had to be something we could do to make things easier.”

This is the first year the friends have operated Holiday Assistants, which provides service to the Eastside and Seattle areas. But business took off after Thanksgiving, and the duo took on five to seven clients a week from then until Christmas. Most common clients are men, working couples and large families. Nelson and Bennitt are able to meet most of their demands. Hunting down ornaments for a pink-color-themed Christmas tree and weaving through departments during the holiday rush are easy enough. The challenge comes from clients who provide little information about what they need for the holidays.

“The hardest thing we get, really, is when someone wants to get a gift for an extended family member,” Bennitt says. “But the only thing they know about their niece is that she’s a 12-year-old girl living in Minnesota. In those cases, we really have to dig for some other facts and get a little creative.”



Katherine Ganter/Reporter Newspapers
Heather Nelson, of Holiday Assistants, pauses as she decides where to place an ornament on a tree she’s decorating at a client’s home on Tuesday, Dec. 18.

Interested in getting a little help during the holidays? Call Holiday Assistants and go through a detailed consultation. Most of the clients who call asking for help with gifts are men, say Nelson and Bennitt. When conjuring up gift ideas, Nelson and Bennitt ask several questions about the recipient. They want to know what they do for a living, hobbies and age. Some of their most popular suggestions this year are spa treatments, tickets to Seahawks games and global positioning systems.

“Men tend to be more practical when it comes to gifts,” Nelson explains. “They see a

blender as something nice to have, whereas a woman probably doesn’t see that as something they want as a present. We also get people calling who just don’t have the time to go shopping. Getting gifts during the holiday rush can really consume your time and energy.”

Within an hour’s time, Nelson and Bennitt transform Piersceniak’s apartment into a holiday haven. A Christmas tree sits in the corner, a wreath over the mantle and several wrapped gifts for family and friends.

“I feel like I’m on the right track now,” Bennitt says with a sigh of relief. “I just haven’t figured out what to say about the gifts. I know what they are – but I’ve never seen them. This Christmas is going to be surprises all-around.”

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