

## Cleaning ladies

*No longer a luxury of the rich*

By Don Keown

Of the LJ Living staff

Housecleaners are still in great demand, but today it's the busy rather than the rich who are most likely to do the hiring.

So says Brenda Mamich who operates Brenda's Cleaning Service in San Rafael.

She says that while today's hard economic realities have thinned the ranks of the affluent who can afford a housecleaner as a luxury, they have inflated the number of families in which both husband and wife have jobs full time, making a housecleaner for them a virtual necessity.

Ms. Mamich says that there is no shortage of workers willing to fill the need. But now, she adds, they are less likely to be independents, and more likely to be affiliated with a service like her own.

"I enjoy order and organization," says Brenda Mamich, explaining her satisfaction in housecleaning as an occupation.

When you clean a house, Ms. Mamich says, you turn disorder into order. She adds: "That's a principle you can carry over into all of life. You just get more done by operating from an organized home base."

Ms. Mamich no longer cleans houses herself. She has run her agency for the past three and a half years, and applies the same principles of good organization to her business.

Brenda's Cleaning Service is one of 33 cleaning and janitorial services based in Marin. Of these, nine work exclusively in residences. Others work in both homes and commercial buildings.

Brenda Mamich says she got into the cleaning service agency business after her own clientele as a cleaner outgrew her ability to keep up. "I had a waiting list that got out of hand," she says. "I began referring callers to other cleaners, and still I couldn't keep up. So I opened the agency."

She explains that housecleaning and janitorial services differ in that the former use the householder's appliances and tools while the latter furnish their own equipment. Janitorial services also tend to do somewhat heavier work.

Cleaners and janitors with an agency affiliation might work as employees, or as contractors. Brenda's Cleaning Service uses the contractor arrangement.

At present, Brenda's lists seven

teens into the 40s, who serve agency customers. Ms. Mamich expects to double that staff by the end of 1981.

Most of the cleaners have other occupations. Some are students, some housewives, some artists, some part-time sales people.

In its three and a half years, Ms. Mamich says, her agency has provided service to more than 600 Marin households.

She believes that a contributing factor in the high demand for housecleaners is our changed living pattern, with two or more generations of a family rarely living together beyond childhood.

"It used to be that grandmother and grandfather would take care of the house if the father and mother were both working on the outside," she says. "Or grown children remained in the home and pitched in with the work. Now the house is often empty during the day — unless a cleaner is employed to come in and do the work."

Ms. Mamich says women from her agency do everything "except climb ladders to wash exterior windows." A job may involve scrubbing and waxing floors, changing linens, dusting, cleaning the oven and refrigerator, vacuuming the carpets, scrubbing bathroom fixtures, getting the fingerprints off glass or washing dishes.

"When we get done," says Ms. Mamich, "everything that is supposed to shine should shine. And the rooms should look like those of a well-kept hotel, awaiting guests."

Generally, she says, the Brenda's cleaners arrange a once-a-week schedule with their clients, although some clean every-other-week.

"Our cleaners charge \$7.50 an hour," she says, adding that her own survey has shown that \$10 an hour is the average for cleaning services in this area. Janitorial fees can run considerably higher.

Of the \$7.50, \$2.50 goes to Brenda's Cleaning Service. But the cleaning service's share goes down 50 cents every four months to a minimum of \$1.50.

Housecleaning can be surprisingly remunerative, says Barbara Colton of San Rafael, one of Brenda's contractors. She says that when a divorce in her 40s left her in need of "an instant job," she had a choice between secretarial work, which she had done before, and housecleaning. "I found I could make more by cleaning," she adds.

She says she makes enough to employ window-washers at her own home.

Ms. Mamich says she makes enough to employ window-washers at her own home.

da's Cleaning Service agree on one thing: In their earlier years, none liked doing housework. "No young girl ever does," says Ms. Colton.

Their reactions now to housecleaning as an occupation range from tolerance to enthusiastic endorsement.

Says Ms. Colton: "It has many advantages. When I leave the job now, I know the work is done. When I left an office job, I felt I wasn't really finished. It was sort of an endless flow."

"Besides," she adds, "I don't sit still at a desk very well."

She also enjoys the contact with people in their homes.

Brenda Mamich says her service makes a special effort to match housecleaners to householders. If there is compatibility, the householder can be assured of the continuing services of the same cleaner. If not, another cleaner will be referred.

Ms. Colton says that only a rare householder treats the housecleaner as a servant today. "Actually, you feel more like a household manager," she says. "A lot of the occupants of the homes just take off and leave you in charge. I get to regard my clients as my very best friends."

There are, Ms. Colton acknowledges, disadvantages. "It's never pleasant to have your hands down other people's toilets. And it can be hard physical work. I don't have to jog like some of my friends. I get plenty of exercise."

Diane Mastro of San Anselmo says she had previously done cleaning work in a motel "and I didn't like it." Housecleaning, she says, is much more pleasant, "and not terribly hard work."

Ms. Mastro was formerly a dancer in New York, and she works now part-time in a dance studio.

She says the people she meets as a housecleaner are "terrific." Some of them have become personal friends.

The two youngest cleaners contracting with Brenda's are Suzie Loomis, 18, and Cindy Vasquez, 19.

"Housecleaning," says Cindy, "is not something I would like to do the rest of my life. But right now, it's filling a need. It's a paycheck. And I rather enjoy it. Certainly it beats working behind the counter at a bakery, which I once did."

She hopes eventually to become a social worker.

Suzie Loomis says one thing she enjoys about housecleaning is that "you are pretty much your own boss. Rarely do you have some one

looking over your shoulder."

She, too, has aspirations — a degree in landscape management. Like Cindy, she expects housecleaning to help finance her schooling.

day, working five or six days a week. "The work is there," agrees Brenda Mamich, "enough for everyone."

Ms. Mamich and the women who

"Sure," says Ms. Mamich, "you are serving the public. But so is the lawyer, the doctor, the dentist...."

Adds Barbara Colton: "When we've done a good job, our clients