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Task masters

No time for decorating or oil changes? Outsource errands

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Dr. Kimberly Wright's Christmas tree stood in a living room for two weeks without any decorations. That changed last month, when Emily Lytle and Carolyn Schnuck drove to Naperville to festively spruce it up for Wright, who's on bed rest and pregnant with twins.

Earlier this month, they returned for two hours to untangle the strands of white lights, remove gold ornaments and red ribbons from the tree, and box up the holiday decorations.

Wright called Lytle and Schnuck "godsenders."

But they're more like personal assistants for hire. Lytle and Schnuck run Endeavor Concierge, where they fetch items and run errands booked through their Web site. Wright paid them \$93.94 for the Christmas decorating job.

"People don't have time. And we're trying to save you time," Schnuck said.

The growing concierge and errand service industry has doubled in size the last couple of years, according to the International Concierge and Errand Association, a non-profit trade association. Founded in 2001, the association counts more than 500 members in more than 20 countries.

Chicago-based Errand Solutions launched in 2000 and now has locations in 17 states servicing corporate clients including Northwestern and Children's Memorial Hospital. A World Class Concierge Service followed in 2003, and **Chicago Anytime Assistants formed in 2008.**

The outsourcing of errands has even spread overseas on sites like asksunday.com or getfriday.com, where virtual assistants in India book travel plans and manage calendars.

Like hotel concierges, Lytle and Schnuck aim to give clients VIP treatment and cater to their needs. But not every need can be met. For example, the duo had to turn down a request to wrap 50 presents the afternoon of Christmas Eve.

Jobs they're willing to do range from the glamorous (planning a cocktail party or personal shopping) to the mundane (housesitting or taking cars in for service).

Lytle, who used to manage a high-end clothing boutique's Web site, said she got the idea for Endeavor after once putting off getting her car's oil changed for 10,000 miles.

"I was working in a job where I never got home before 8 p.m. and never made it to Jiffy Lube because it was closed," Lytle said. "On the way home one day, I thought, 'There are probably so many people out there who don't want to spend their weekends getting oil changes.' "