Steps to closing an estate

K-State extension agent offers guidance on how to manage affairs following the loss of a loved one

By Lisa Moser, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Founding Father Benjamin Franklin once said, “Nothing in this world is certain except death and taxes.” While that quote often makes people smile, for many the death of a loved one can be a time of intense grief and a whole new situation to navigate.

K-State Research and Extension family and consumer science agent Renae Riedy, whose specialization is in family resource management and aging, offers guidance on what to do when someone dies. She and her colleagues have created a Checklist for After a Death that can be a resource for people in that situation.

“Our goal with this publication is to help people through this time of loss,” Riedy said.

In the first few days after someone passes, family members are often focused on making arrangements and notifying family and friends about the loss. If the deceased did any pre-planning, that can be a guide for the family.

Next, there will be someone named as the executor of the estate.

“If the deceased has done pre-planning, often the executor will be designated ahead of time, and in many cases that is a family member or a friend,” Riedy said. “If the person did not designate an executor, the state will appoint one.”

She explained that the job of the executor is to act in a fiduciary role, meaning they put the interests of the estate ahead of their own interests.

“In the weeks following the death, some of the responsibilities of the executor include securing the assets, contacting relevant agencies, ordering death certificates, collecting paperwork, paying bills, making sure creditors are aware of the death and working with the tax preparer to file a final tax return,” Riedy said. “Doing that final tax return can help prevent identity theft.”
Depending on the amount of assets and if an estate sale is going to be needed, Riedy said it can be helpful to consult with an attorney.

“The timeline for completing this process is highly variable depending on the complexity of the estate,” Riedy said.

She said the role of the executor brings with it a lot of responsibility at a time when most are also grieving so it is important to give that person grace.

Riedy said, “As the executor you have to make sure things are done right, so just ask for patience as you work through all the details.”

-30-

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