

Divining for Dollars

Queers looking to get ahead are dipping into the multilevel marketing pool ▼ by Inga Sorensen • photos by Linda Kliever

Scott Stapley

Scott Stapley, 34, says he spent many years grappling with a slew of physical impairments—from fatigue to persistent joint pain to “serious crashing during meals” to a lack of mental clarity.

Much of that has changed now, says the gay Portland man, thanks to blue-green algae products produced by the Klamath Falls-based Cell Tech Inc., a multi-million-dollar company that harvests the algae from Upper Klamath Lake and sells it through a network of more than 300,000 distributors.

Enthusiasts tout Cell Tech’s goods, which come in

the form of tablets, caplets and drink mixes, as the ideal blend of protein-rich amino acids, vitamins and minerals, and say they’re easy for the body to absorb.

Stapley says a friend turned him on to Cell Tech about two years ago.

“I started taking the products just for personal use, which is what most members do,” he says. “I saw immediate results. I now take fewer naps. I have much more energy and less joint pain. It’s incredible.”

Around the same period, Stapley began to question his professional future. Sure, working full time as a counselor in a local hospital’s psychiatric unit had its rewards, but Stapley was concerned about the frustrating reality of salary caps.

Then there was the fact that his partner (*Just Out* graphic designer Rupert Kinnard) had recently become paralyzed in an auto accident.

In other words, financial security, as well as independence, were no small concerns for Stapley.

That’s when he stepped up his involvement in the world of multilevel marketing, also known as network marketing.

Stapley thought, “If this worked so well for me, maybe some of my friends and others can benefit, too. And why not make

some money in the process?”

As a member/distributor, Stapley may purchase Cell Tech products at a discount and consume them for personal use or sell the products to customers for a profit.

(According to Stapley, people become member/distributors upon signing up, and are required to purchase at minimum \$50 worth of Cell Tech goods per month.)

Cell Tech promotional materials read, in part, “You sponsor new distributors into your network organization and you earn commissions on all products they purchase, both what they use themselves and what they sell to others.”

Distributors earn commissions on the sales of “each new ‘level’ of people [in their] network.”

According to a 1995 *Oregonian* article, Cell Tech, which was founded in 1982 by Daryl and Marta Kollman, “wasn’t going anywhere until 1985, when it started multilevel marketing.”

The company then quickly grew into a mega-million-dollar enterprise, becoming one of the country’s top network marketers.

(The newspaper says Cell Tech received “national attention when Larry Flynt, the publisher of *Hustler* magazine, championed blue-green algae and made a failed effort to deliver some to Soviet leader Yuri Andropov to try and cure his cancer.”)

Mention multilevel marketing, and it likely conjures up visions of *Stepford Wives*-type figures relentlessly pushing consumeristic junk on anything that moves on planet Earth.

Stapley, however, says he doesn’t view it that way, at least when it comes to Cell Tech.

He says the company has a “global mission,” one aimed at making the world a better, healthier place. He likes the company’s claims that it provides a portion of its profits to good works worldwide.

And he’s had positive personal experiences with the products.

“The product is 100 percent pure food. Nothing synthetic, all of the products are screened. They’re like little nutritional power packs,” he says.

The Food and Drug Administration regulates blue-green algae as food, and companies such as Cell Tech are prohibited from mak-

Continued
on page
21

