

Just Out recently cruised downtown to take a closer look at the gay-operated Balloons on Broadway.

The owners of this fantastic little shop are Oregon native Ron Pitt and New Zealander Gary Hopping, who have been in business, and in love, with each other for more than a decade. They met about 15 years ago when Pitt was working for the New York field office of an Australian-based tour operator.

They returned to Portland as a couple and later started Balloons on Broadway "just for fun" in June 1991. Close proximity to downtown hotels and shops has proven successful and exciting for these two.

Hopping discovered and brought back to Portland an overwhelming variety of colorful goods with an outrageous twist. Shoppers would have a hard time finding a selection like this anywhere else.

Among the items for sale are "Billy Bob" teeth, aromatherapy candles and those East Coast "Centaur" CDs (the ones with the outrageous covers!) that are so popular and hard to get. Shoppers will find gifts, cards, wacky party gags, "cool or imaginative balloon bouquets" and classic balloon decor for any event.

Pitt and Hopping not only decorate store openings and weddings but offer "Anatomically Correct" Pasta, Colt Calendars and "tastefully risqué" gifts—including glow-in-the-dark rubbers—in the "Condom Capers" section of the store. Balloons on Broadway showcases the Northwest's widest variety of medically approved condoms and personal

FRESH AIR

A blow-by-blow account of Balloons on Broadway

lubricants. A great staff and up-to-date educational material are available to assist shoppers, all in a comfortable and informal environment.

Expansion recently became necessary to relieve Pitt and Hopping from overcrowding at their 531 S.W. Broadway location, so they opened a production shop Aug. 1 in the Tiffany Center at 1418 S.W. Morrison St. Here, customers also can find a selection of cards and candles to brighten someone's day.

Many of the colored balloons at grand openings are the work of Pitt, Hopping and their team. They especially are proud to share the story about a manager of a Portland business who decided some excitement was necessary in his research and development department.

So, they filled the whole office with balloons during the night. The surprised employees walked into a roomful of color the next morning, which must've broken up the monotony and brought a lot of smiles to their faces.

Pitt and Hopping aren't in this just for the money, though. Many people have seen the brightly colored decorations they have put together for special gay community events, parades, openings and parties like the beautiful rainbow donated to Pride Northwest and the bouncing, swaying balloons at Peacock in the Park. According to Pitt, their decision to support an event is based primarily on the devotion, hard work and enthusiasm invested by the organizers.



Owners Gary Hopping and Ron Pitt are keeping Balloons on Broadway afloat

Peacock in the Park is special to them because they both knew Lady Elaine Peacock and Misty Waters personally. They respected the enthusiasm and commitment both of them devoted to the community.

They continue to support gay events in Portland and hold many of the hard-working organizers in high regard. They give special mention to Poison Waters (aka Kevin Cook), Kimberlee Van Patten, Misha Rockafeller, Maria and Norm Costa.

"Susie Shepherd is the most incredibly dedicated contributor to the gay community I've ever known," Pitt said. "Her parents founded (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) back in the early '70s, and whenever she or her mother approach us about anything, it's done without question or a second thought."

A long list of celebrities have graced Bal-

loons on Broadway. One of the most recent visitors was Bruce Willis, who is in town filming his latest movie, *Bandits*.

Pitt and Hopping obviously work hard and have fun doing it. They have discovered the joy of creativity and seem to know how to make it rub off on anyone they come in contact with. They are making a difference to the gay community by doing what they do best.

Balloons on Broadway takes phone orders, and retail delivery is available daily throughout the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan area. The Internet site www.balloonsonbroadway.com is under way and will be finished soon. **J**

Business news with a queer bent should be reported to justout@justout.com.



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