

"We're together 24/7, and we love it."

Some people strive to keep their professional life separate from their personal life. But for Carl Smith and Telesforo Archuleta, owners of Starky's restaurant and bar in Southeast Portland, that dividing line is gray at best.

Smith, 53, and Archuleta, 51, will be life partners for 29 years in March. For the past 16 years, they also have been business partners.

The two are together constantly, either at home in Alameda or at work in Starky's. And they would have it no other way.

How do they do it?

"Diligence, hard work and—" Smith begins.

"And love," Archuleta adds, punctuating the thought by leaning over to give Smith a quick kiss.

The couple met in 1972 while working at a hotel in Colorado Springs, Colo. Within a year, they had settled into their first and only relationship, sharing their lives and mutual interest in hotel/restaurant management.

Since then, Archuleta and Smith have gained significant experience managing restaurants and taverns in Portland. Yet one of their goals always had been to find a space of their own, one that was a size they could afford to operate with only minimal staff.

After scouting locations throughout Portland, Smith and Archuleta decided to acquire an existing establishment. They bought Starky's with a third partner in 1984 and became the sole owners a few years later.

Ironically, they didn't even intend to make the place a "gay bar."

But as Starky's was opening, the nearby gay establishment JR's was in the process of closing,

SAUCY SYNERGY

Restaurant owners dish about being partners—
at work and at home by Timothy Krause

and its clientele wanted a new home. "All of a sudden, we were known as a gay restaurant," Smith says.

The Starky's location at the corner of 29th Avenue and Stark Street works to its advantage. The friendly and comfortable environs that attracted JR's customers continue to draw a healthy mix of clientele from both the surrounding neighborhood and the city at large—straight as well as gay.

At first, the three original partners and one bartender ran the business. Now, the Starky's staff numbers 12, in addition to Archuleta and Smith. Three years ago, the two men also bought the land and the building—a major advantage for them as business owners.

"We were able to make improvements that a landlord wouldn't let us make," Smith explains. "We made the patio permanent, and we tore up the asphalt in front to put in landscaping."

Other changes not so apparent to patrons include new air conditioning, kitchen floor and roof. The only significant physical drawback to the facility, they say, is the lack of space that can be closed off for private parties, which are limited to the summer patio.

"We don't really change, we evolve," Smith remarks. "Things are always in a state of transition. Things change, colors change, but I don't think we change the overall tenor of the place."

Beyond the typical ups and downs of running

any business, one of the greatest challenges for Smith and Archuleta has been to maintain an inclusive atmosphere while politely discouraging the stereotypes associated with a queer bar. (Customers looking for a dark corner in which to make out would do better to head to the clubs downtown.)

"The customer isn't always right; the customer just may not be in the right place. People come here to sit down, chat and have a pleasant evening. We don't even have poker, and we're still in business. Can you believe it?" Smith says, laughing. "No pool tables, no pinball, no poker."

But Starky's endures in good health, as does the bond between its two amiable owners. The couple say they do try to draw that line between their professional and personal lives and admit it doesn't always work. But being together all of the time is just how this pair like it, and the key to their success is rooted in this synergy.

For instance, the two opened a second restaurant on the west side six years ago. The arrangement didn't last long, though, because

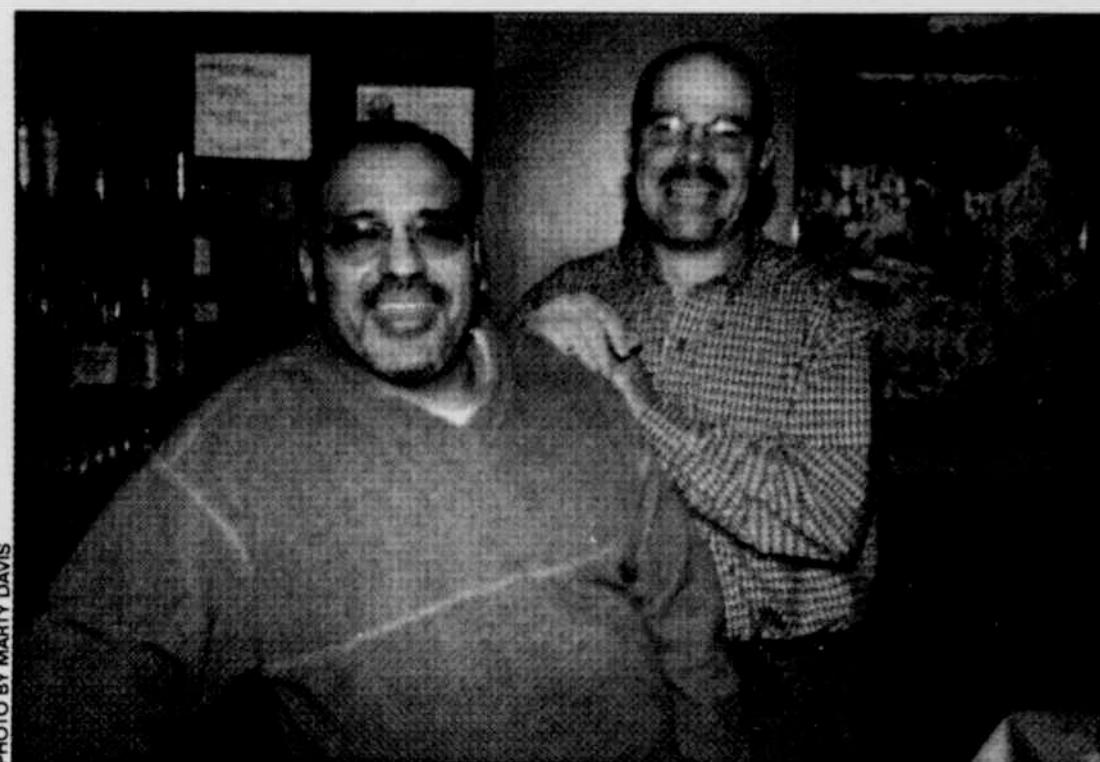
they found they were spending more time talking on the phone than face to face. "Business was fine, but Carl and I didn't want to be separated like that," Archuleta notes.

Smith adds: "I don't know what the magic solutions or formulas are, and I don't think they probably exist. I have a feeling that for any other two people it would be a different thing that works for them than what works for us."

What apparently does work for this committed twosome, however, is their singular sense of partnership. **JN**

STARKY'S, located at 2913 S.E. Stark St., can be reached at 503-230-7980 or on the Internet at www.starkys.com.

TIMOTHY KRAUSE lives in Portland and is managing editor of a national trade journal for the recycling industry.



Telesforo Archuleta (left) and Carl Smith

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