

NORTHWESTnews

PIGS FLY

Northeast Portland store brings shoppers the unexpected

by Jaymee R. Cuti

Northeast Portland welcomed a new business last April Fool's Day, owned and run by life partners Mark Bergal and Johnathon Guerra.

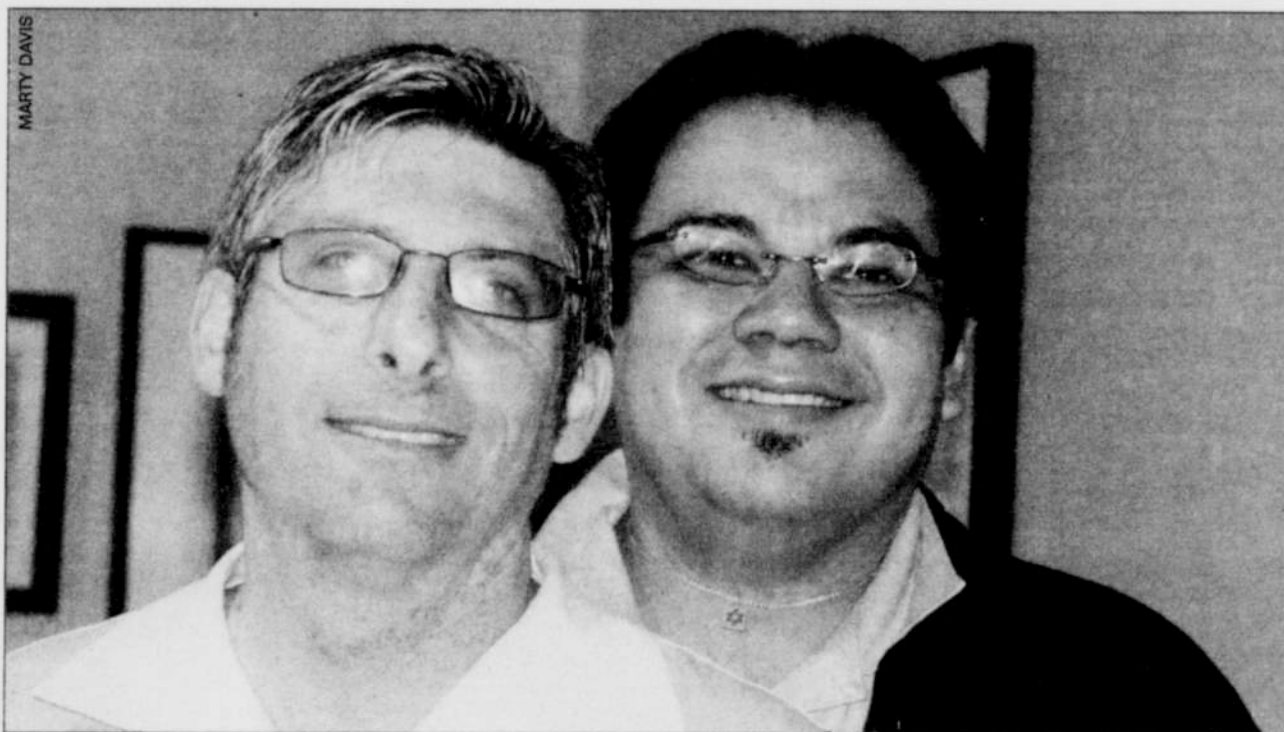
Perhaps once suited for a Southeast Hawthorne Boulevard location, When Pigs Fly is bringing playful gadgets to Northeast Portland's vivacious Fremont district.

This gift shop bears a museum quality with stimulus packed on every shelf. The owners describe their merchandise as gimmicky, modern and off-the-wall.

"Our store is for the individual that doesn't want to hassle with a shopping mall, that doesn't want to go into a high-pressure sales environment, that wants to have a fun time finding a gift in a fun environment," said Bergal.

He said the store fills a gap in queer consumerism by stocking Pride effects throughout the year.

The store is brimming with rainbow gear, from jewelry to sticky notes, lighters to disco balls, shot glasses to beach towels. They promise these products will remain on the shelves after summer celebrations are long gone.



Partners in business and life, Mark Bergal (left) and Johnathon Guerra own the colorful and eclectic gift shop When Pigs Fly.

"Just because pigs don't fly out there doesn't mean they don't in here," said Bergal, a former high school counselor.

Pigs are just one of a number of hard-to-find oddities stocked in the colorful store. Other eclectic items include steak throw rugs, bacon bandages, coconut purses, fish beer coolers, martini glasses with smooch marks, outer space TV trays and much more.

"We try to throw in a lot of things that get the senses juiced up," Bergal said. "Human beings, by nature, are creative and like to be tantalized. Even in shopping, we create an environment where people can express themselves in purchasing power."

Primarily the store's buyer, Bergal uncovered a hidden talent for arranging displays that mirrored his taste and decorating instinct.

"Whenever I decorated my office for students or my home for various holidays, I was buying a lot of these things as a consumer before I ever had the business," he said.

Bergal and Guerra, an accountant by trade, struggled to penetrate Portland's stubborn job market following a transplant from Southern California in 2004. After injecting their careers with a dose of creativity, When Pigs Fly was born.

Guerra, the business-minded one, specializes in the store's accounting and register handling.

The owners agree that When Pigs Fly is a treat to spend time in, and they make an effort to form a rapport with their customers.



"We couldn't find a place that carried Pride accessories, so we decided to keep a Pride section all year round," Bergal said.

But if taste requires queer gear of an understated variety, Bergal suggests clocks, vases and photo frames.

"By the nature of our population being very creative and fashionable and liking nice things, a lot of what we have here in the home décor area appeals to that population," he said.

In line with the store's mission to keep shopping fun, Bergal and Guerra don't mind a little legwork when

tracking down a special order. They recently located a customer-requested extra-large rainbow flag for home use.

"If somebody wants something, we do our best to find it for them," Bergal said.

Since moving to Portland a year ago, the couple have developed a sense of community and an obligation to give back. They have donated gift baskets and certificates to schools and charities, vowing to give more as they establish themselves as business owners.

"We're not in a position where we can donate money, but we can give products," said Bergal. "The longer we're here, the more we can give." ☐

WHEN PIGS FLY is located at 4605 N.E. Fremont St. #104. For more information call 503-282-PIGS, e-mail info@whenpigsflypdx.com or visit www.whenpigsflypdx.com.

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