

culture

The Biggest Glory Holes

Welcome to Fat Cobra Video and Arcade

by Rebecca Ragain

Even in this advertising-saturated world, Fat Cobra's tagline is still an attention-getter. "We've got the biggest glory holes in town," says Pat Lanagan, owner of the adult video store and arcade.

Both Fat Cobra locations, in North and Northwest Portland, boast four private booths and six "buddy booths." Though the arcade is dimly lit, the low wattage is just to enhance the mood, because unlike other infamous video arcades, Fat Cobra has nothing to hide.

"The booths are immaculately clean," says Lanagan.

General manager Sushuma Thornburgh adds, "We get compliments every day about the cleanliness of the store."

In addition to good, clean glory holes, Lanagan claims Fat Cobra has the most extensive collection of gay and lesbian videos in Portland, as well as a wide selection of films for heterosexuals.

Thornburgh orders the gay video inventory for both stores. He fills a lot of special orders and always tries to stay on top of the new releases. When asked what kinds of films are most in demand, Thornburgh notes that bareback videos rent as well or better than the rest.

"We as gay men can't do it. Is it so bad to watch

what we can't do?" comments Lanagan. "That's true for what most people rent. It's a fantasy, like the other 99 percent of [what people watch]. They aren't going to be doing it in their daily lives."

Lanagan is quick to add that Fat Cobra "absolutely supports" HIV prevention and has free condoms available in the stores.

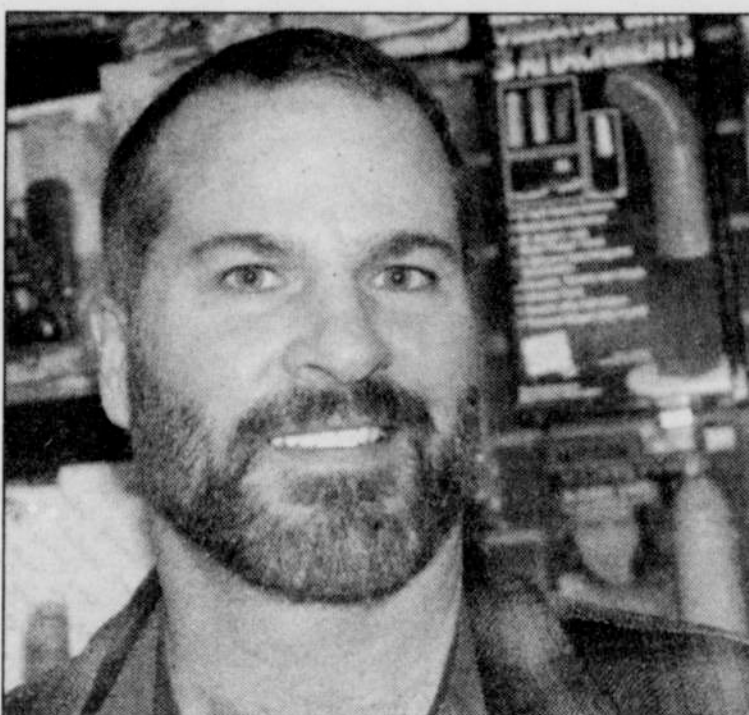
Ever since Lanagan opened the first Fat Cobra store in North Portland last year, he says the support he has received from the gay community has been "unbelievable." He estimates that 50 percent of visitors to the North Portland store are queer-identified, accounting for 75 percent of sales.

"The gay community has been very supportive. It blows me away," says Lanagan.

In September he opened a second store on St. Helens Road, just past industrial Northwest Portland.

The new location, smaller than the original, is housed in a nondescript building, which was a teriyaki house in its former life. In fact, one can still faintly read the words "sub and sandwich" on the outside of the tinted windows.

Inside the Northwest store, Lanagan has aimed for a welcoming atmosphere. A plasma screen behind the counter previews one of the videos from the racks, while upbeat music—mostly disco or



Pat Lanagan runs the "Nordstrom of the porn industry."

dance—plays in the background.

"We tried to incorporate natural light and fun colors," adds Lanagan, pointing to the electric blue floor tiles. "Our goal is sexy ambiance."

When Thornburgh originally started coming to Fat Cobra as a customer, he found the experience to be very different from his visits to other adult video stores.

"There was good music playing, and it was very clean, with good lighting," he recalls. "I was greeted in a friendly manner...I don't always feel that welcome in other stores of this type."

Lanagan recognizes that customer service and salesmanship skills are essential to the business, so every employee is trained how to interact with customers.

When someone walks into Fat Cobra, they get a friendly greeting from the person behind the counter. If the customer comfortably replies, "Oh, I'm

great, how are you?" then the employee can feel free to volunteer product suggestions or offer other assistance.

"Other customers will be like this," says Lanagan, demonstrating by hunching his shoulders, ducking his head and shuffling behind a shelf. "We try to gauge our message to the customer."

Lanagan wants visitors to have a fun, positive experience in the store, to shop at their leisure and to "find something to suit their fancy," whatever that might be.

"It's fascinating. It's impossible to guess what someone is going to buy," he says. "People's sexuality is such a unique and individual thing."

To fit this range of interests, in addition to videos, Fat Cobra also stocks a selection of high-quality sex toys, ranging from My First Butterfly Vibe—which Lanagan says is "perfect for dinner at the in-laws"—to gallon containers of Elbow Grease.

"We try to have a nice variety. We steer away from low-end items, in both video and toy selection," says Lanagan.

Take the cock rings, for instance. Artfully arranged on black fabric in a closed glass case, the selection includes stainless steel rings sporting Celtic-style engravings, right next to blown glass creations as attractive as any other kind of glass adornment.

Lanagan summarizes, "We consider ourselves to be the Nordstrom of the porn industry." 10

FAT COBRA VIDEO AND ARCADE is located at 5940 N. Interstate Ave. and 5501 N.W. St. Helens Road.

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