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Don't Let Touchstone See the Gravestone

For eight years, Becky Bilyeu has run Touchstone Coffee House at 7631 N.E. Glisan St. as a community space.

"People have had birthday parties here. One woman held her retirement party from the U.S. Coast Guard. One lesbian couple met at Sacred Grounds and got married at Touchstone, and another couple had their wedding reception at Touchstone. Many life-changing events involving the community have happened at Touchstone," says Bilyeu.

According to Bilyeu, she is being forced to close shop because the landlords are not renewing her lease. "Touchstone was never about making money. I did not operate it for financial gain but out of service to the community and to give myself and my employees jobs. Because I was not able to sell the business and pass it on, I am left with no livelihood after our lease is up April 30, and I am being left with a considerable amount of debt from the business," she says.

Bilyeu has one hope left for keeping Touchstone's legacy alive. Much the way she was mentored by Holly Mulcahey of It's My Pleasure, Bilyeu has mentored Tiffany Richardson, whom she hopes can find a new space and carry on the Touchstone torch.

"I want to be very clear that I did not choose to close Touchstone.... I would never choose this. I always imagined it would be passed on to someone else and they would just continue to grow it," Bilyeu says.

Richardson has worked at Touchstone for almost two years and, according to Bilyeu, has the drive and energy to carry on.

"I want to sell it to her as cheaply as possible and pass the name on to her," says Bilyeu. "If Tiffany is not able to secure a location for a new Touchstone and the ability to purchase my equipment and inventory, I will need to liquidate the entirety of Touchstone as we all know it to pay off what bills I can."

Touchstone has participated in numerous fund-raisers for charities such as Sisters of the Road, Cascade AIDS Project and the Sexual Minority Youth Resource Center and has supported the Portland Lesbian Choir, the Lesbian Community

Project, In Other Words, Metropolitan Community Church of Portland and Bridgeport Community Church. After years of supporting the community, Bilyeu asks for community support in the four months Touchstone remains.

"I encourage everyone in the community to come out and support Touchstone during its final months," Bilyeu says.

business watch



Becky Bilyeu (right) and Tiffany Richardson glow from a supportive community that is Touchstone Coffee House's eight-year legacy.

Follow the Adventure Lawyer

Attorney William Knuths is the Clark Kent of the legal profession. A quick spin in the phone booth and he is a contract guide for Alyson Adventures, a Florida-based gay-owned tour operator that designs trips primarily for the sexual minorities community.

Knuths, a native Oregonian, had been a guide for student exchange programs for many years, and once the travel bug bit him, he said, nothing has stopped it. "While dating a Parisian, I was taking biking trips with a GLBTQ company in France. Alyson asked if I'd like to work with them, and now I take chunks of time off from my law practice to do this," said Knuths.

He is particularly excited about next summer's trip to the Galapagos Islands. "Some trips are popular year round, but this is more of a trip of a lifetime. After a year off, we're bringing Galapagos back with a bang by opening it up to gays and



William Knuths (standing) scouts the rapids with his group of rafters during Alyson's July 2006 Splash trip in the Grand Canyon.