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New Mixed Bar Opens

Who better to open a new bar for a mixed queer crowd than a lesbian and gay power duo? Joanne Stahl, a Portland dweller for more than 20 years, and her longtime friend David Lewis, who is new to town, plan to open Bent Bar at 633 S.E. Powell Blvd. in mid-March.

"We've been friends for a million years," said Lewis. "[Joanne] is the one who talked me into coming to Portland, and we've both been in the industry, so we thought let's do something together!"

Bent Bar, a freestanding establishment with a big parking lot and an enclosed patio, sits at the foot of the Ross Island Bridge. The owners said they like the location because it provides another alternative business for gays to go to on the east side of the river.

They also expressed a desire to make the bar as open and friendly to everyone as possible. "A lot of places you go you're not welcome if you're a guy or a gal," said Lewis. While they might eventually hold a ladies night during the week, Lewis and Stahl said they hope people will come in, check the place out and feel comfortable—whatever they are.

The strip bar turned intimate nightclub will not only offer affordable options for lunch and dinner, but video poker will be available and DJs will spin dance music on the weekends. The crowd-pleaser, however, is sure to be the dance pole, which the owners retained and plan to use in contests.

"We want people to leave their attitudes at home and enjoy a space without it," Lewis said. He and Stahl imagine that people will stop by for cocktails with their friends and that the neighborhood bar will come to feel like Cheers.

For more information call 503-230-BENT.

Neighborhood Cafe Sees Change

Connie and Joanne Perkins opened the doors of Utopia Café on Southeast Belmont Street and 33rd Avenue 12 years ago.

Joanne described a very different neighborhood than the one that is there now. "The Belmont Dairy was just an empty building. I think the homeless were using it to live in. That was '94. There

really wasn't much on that street going on."

The street that is now home to more than a dozen restaurants in only a few blocks was, at the time, only spotted with Utopia Café and It's a Beautiful Pizza. Utopia began as a dessert and coffeehouse and later added the breakfast menu, which has earned it the reputation of having the best breakfast in Portland last year by 105.1 FM The Buzz, and a reputation in almost every Portland restaurant guide.

With a guiding principle of treating their employees and customers well, the Perkinses built a thriving business in an area where there wasn't much. Their presence helped form a neighborhood and won them many good friends in the community.

The lives these women have touched exceed the borders of the Northwest. When Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, they donated 10 percent of their profits for an entire month to a school affected by the disaster. They donated directly to the school to ensure that the money was received by the people they wanted to help. As a result, they were not only the largest donor to that school but also inspired other Portlanders to make donations.

Jan. 15 was the last day they owned Utopia. "We'd done all we could do there. It was time to do something different," remarked Joanne.

The Perkinses held posts working beside their

employees, building relationships with their staff. Connie added: "We made sure everyone [still] had jobs. That was important to us."

For now, they are enjoying not having to work, agreeing they miss the clientele but not the hours and promising that they will let their old customers know if they decide to return to the restaurant business.

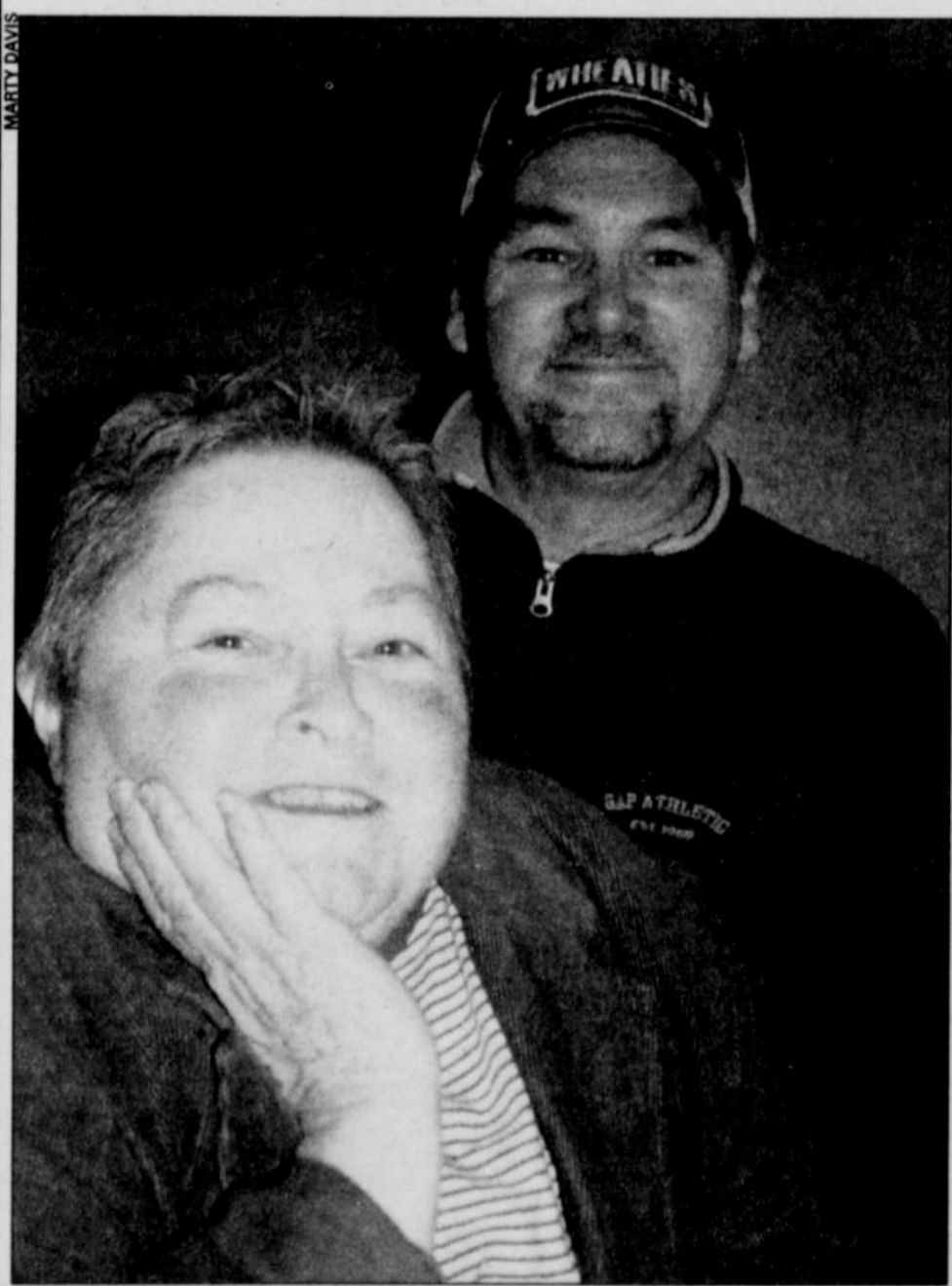
Merger Brings Transformation

Aaron Yeagle and Rob Patton, the two men behind the Internet marketing and design company Transmutation Sciences, are turning Web sites into gold.

Transmutation prides itself on working with small businesses to educate them on building a Web presence.

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David Lewis and Joanne Stahl will greet you with smiles at Bent, Portland's newest gay bar.