

## northwest

### Not Your Run-of-the-Mall Jewelry Store

Beaverton has rapidly expanded in the past few years. A'kasha The Fifth Element, the newest gay-owned jewelry store to open in the once quiet suburb, is contributing to the town's transformation.

A'kasha's co-owner Steven Smith is a 2003 alumni of the Gemological Institute of America's graduate jeweler program in Carlsbad, Calif. Prior to relocating for graduate school, he was the co-owner of a small retail store in Oregon City. He entered the jewelry industry by starting a gemstone collection at age 10.



A'kasha co-owner Steven Smith is contributing to a suburban social consciousness.

In addition to custom creations, A'kasha is also one of five jewelry retailers to sell LifeGems. In the words of Smith, "LifeGems are the perfect way to remember a loved one or to build a living family tree." LifeGems are created from the carbon of people or pets. Customers may create a diamond with a lock of hair or the cremated ashes of a loved one. The biological debris is sent to a laboratory, and a diamond is created through a scientific process similar to the process found in nature. The price of a lasting memory is comparable to the price of a traditional diamond and may be created in a variety of colors and cuts.

According to Smith, "A'kasha is not your run-of-the-mall jewelry store." In addition to unique jewelry from local artisans, it offers metal smithing, casting and precious metal clay workshops.

A'kasha is an ideal venue for holiday shopping. It is also an official retailer of the Until There's a Cure jewelry line. A'kasha designates the proceeds of any

Until There's a Cure product as an unrestricted donation to Our House of Portland. Although many retailers offer Until There's a Cure products, A'kasha is the only vendor in the Portland area that has designated Our House as a beneficiary of the money.

A'kasha the Fifth Element is in Beaverton at 12602 S.W. Farmington Road. For more information call 503-643-5101 or visit [www.akasha.zoomshare.com](http://www.akasha.zoomshare.com).

## business watch

### Touchstone Takes Two

What qualifies serial outdoor hobbyist Karen Thompson to run her own business?

Her love for coffee, naturally.

Thompson, a 46-year-old Northwest native who resides in Ridgefield, Wash., was a dedicated patron of Touchstone Coffee House, a lesbian-owned establishment in Northeast Portland.

Before purchasing the business name and equipment in April from Becky Bilyeu, Thompson had several careers. She was a forester for the federal government, an aquatic ecologist, a hydrologist and an environmental planner.

The lesbian outdoorswoman also keeps herself busy with a variety of activities including cross-country skiing, kayaking, photographing nature, backpacking and playing guitar.

Yet there was one dream Thompson left unfulfilled until April—entrepreneur.

"I've always wanted a coffeehouse, but I'm totally new to owning my own business," said a slightly overwhelmed Thompson. "But I've been pulling shots at home since the '80s."

Thompson has a list of attributes she loved about Touchstone and hopes to preserve—namely its role in the community as a neighborhood gathering spot. She has invited several community groups with environmental roots to hold meetings at the coffeehouse.

"Touchstone is a way for me to reach back with the Portland queer community and other communities I'm interested in connecting with," she said.

Thompson also has a few of her own inventions she'd like to try out on the local clientele. She would like the spot to draw an evening crowd of tea drinkers and is offering loose leaf tea. She also plans to create a garden in the shop's large yard in the summer.

The new décor is based on her own affinity for earth tones.

But two details from Touchstone's past will remain unchanged—the presence of baristas Bilyeu and Tiffany Richardson. Both were original Touchstone mainstays who were hired to help ensure the success of Thompson's pursuit.

The location will also draw in the old shop's customers. At 445 N.E. 70th Ave., it's just six blocks from the original location.

A grand opening event is planned for Dec. 21, with promises of giveaways and live music.

For more information call 503-262-7613 or visit [www.touchstonecoffeehouse.com](http://www.touchstonecoffeehouse.com). 10

By JEDEDIAH CHAVEZ and JAYMEE R. CUTI



Touchstone Coffee alum Tiffany Richardson (left) and Karen Thompson, the shop's new owner, hope to entice a late-night crowd into the neighborhood joint.

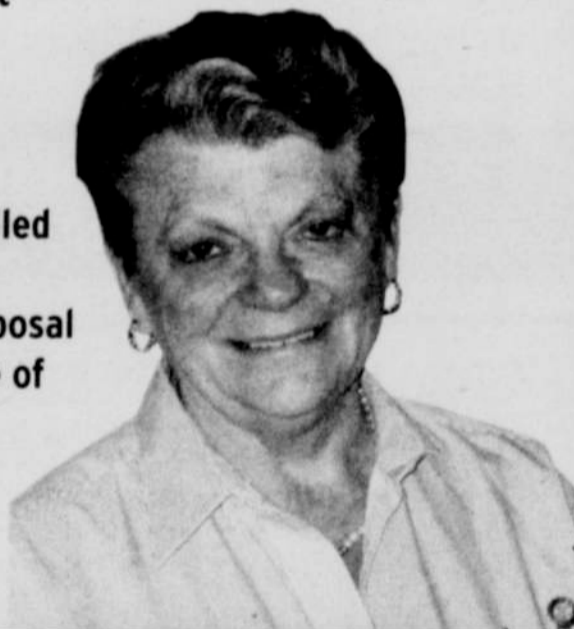
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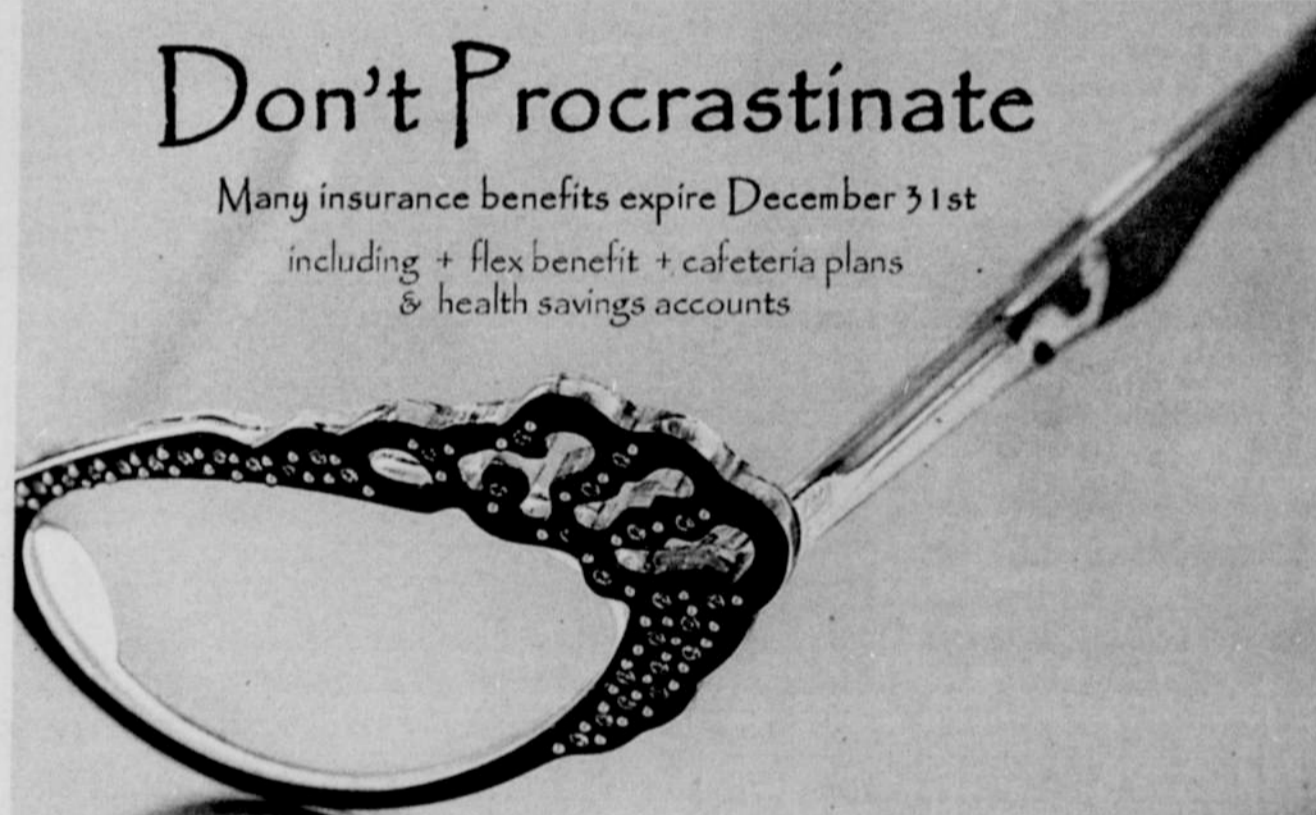


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