

FEATURE STORIES

# 'Lawyer mom'

*Mother-daughter law partnership a North Portland success*

By Anna Walters

The only thing missing from the law offices of Theresa Kohlhoff and Elizabeth Welch is a just-baked apple pie cooling on a window sill. Pictures of "the kids" hang on the walls along with framed degrees. A garden with stepping stones and decorative corn stalks welcomes clients. And if a familiar number shows up on the caller ID, Kohlhoff may greet the caller with a booming, "Well, hello, Flo!"

"Mom has a theory that most people are looking for a mom," said Elizabeth Welch. The pair may be ferocious in the court room, but in the office they offer their clients a bit more motherly understanding along with legal counsel.

"Clients interview us as much as we interview them," Theresa Kohlhoff said. "A downtown sort of professional is not going to be happy here."

Kohlhoff and Welch opened their law practice last June after Kohlhoff's husband, a lawyer and tennis advocate, bought the building in St. Johns. Welch, a North Portland resident for the past seven years, was struck by the lack of "professional presence on Lombard."

"There seemed to be a lot of dentists, but not a lot of practices being embedded in the community, like you would see on Belmont Street. My stepdad bought this building and I had passed the bar, and all it came together at once," she said.

The location is a good one to pick up personal injury (PI) cases, which are Welch's

specialty. She estimates that 99 percent of the work she does revolves around PI.

Welch has a home-field advantage when defending clients involved in North Portland car accidents.

"You need to know how to drive on the North Portland neighborhood streets," she said. "These streets were made for Model T's."

Kohlhoff, who has been a lawyer for over 25 years, handles other cases that come to Kohlhoff and Welch, including wills, probate and real estate. Kohlhoff and Welch also balance one another in other ways.

"She can be incredibly obtuse when she's talking to a client," Welch said of her mother. "Then they'll look at me like, 'Please, translate.'"

Welch's skill may be attributed to a childhood understanding of her mother's method.

"In terms of communicating to the client, in one way she's my mother. When we [my siblings and I] were little and mom would call [we would joke] would it be mom or would it be lawyer mom? Lawyer mom would always leave her number on the message," Welch said.

Every three months, Kohlhoff and Welch have a free legal advice day, where members of the community can come in and discuss their legal trouble with the lawyers free of charge.

"It works well. It's a nice way for people who can wait — they can come in and dump their questions and not worry about how much it



■ Mother and daughter team Theresa Kohlhoff (l) and Elizabeth Welch. PHOTO BY LISA ARNOLD

will cost," Kohlhoff said. The next free legal advice day is planned for November.

Kohlhoff said she credits the success of her practice to splitting everything 50/50. She thinks the mother-daughter dynamic works.

"It's been over a year, and it's gotten easier and easier," Kohlhoff said. "You figure out what the other person really needs. Partnerships are often difficult, and I'm not finding this particularly difficult."

*Kohlhoff and Welch, 5828 N Lombard St., (503) 286-7178. Available by appointment. www.northportlandattorney.com.*

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## PERSONAL TELCO

*'Geeks' sling the web free for the masses*

By Vanessa Nix

Portland is a DIY town, and our Internet is no exception. Sure, this was one of the first metropolitan cities to offer free wi-fi through MetroFi's ad-supported wireless Internet "bubble" that hovers all over Portland. But even before city government and corporation types like Microsoft and MetroFi stepped in to bring wi-fi to the people, a grassroots DIY organization was setting up nodes all over Portland.

The nonprofit Personal Telco Project was started in 2000 by a bunch of self-described "geeks" to fulfill their dream of empowering people through free Internet and technology education. Seven years later, the city is sprinkled with more than 100 active nodes in public parks and coffee shops, 56 of which are in North and Northeast Portland.

"It was started during a period when wireless equipment was becoming more common and inexpensive, when a bunch of geeks were being laid off due to the dot-com bubble bursting, and when the broadband carriers were dragging their feet deploying in the Portland area and placing what those geeks considered onerous restrictions on their terms of service," says Russell Senior, secretary of Personal Telco's board.

Personal Telco's original vision was to build neighborhood-wide wireless networks, then interconnect the networks using directional antennas until they could provide a way to connect any two people in the city together without touching a phone or cable-TV wire. Unfortunately, that vision was yet not possible.

"To achieve that goal required masses of involved people, which we didn't have. In the interim and as a way of getting masses of people involved, we started setting up hot spots in coffee shops, bookstores, bars and residences with a connection to the Internet that gave away free access to the general public," says Senior.

Bryant Anderson, owner of Anna Bannanas on North Lombard, uses Personal Telco in both his St. Johns and Northwest locations. "I chose them because they come and set everything up for you. It's an easy way to go if you're not super computer-literate," says Anderson.

Senior explained that business owners still have to contact an Internet service provider (ISP) and procure Internet connectivity through a DSL or broadband. After the broadband connection is set up, Personal Telco works with the business to help them obtain the necessary wireless hub equipment (which business owners pay for) and then sets it up for them to share their Internet connection with the public for free.

So why does North and Northeast Portland have more nodes than anyone else? In 2005, Personal Telco received a grant from the Meyer Memorial Trust to build an outdoor neighborhood-wide network in the Boise neighborhood of North Portland along North Mississippi Avenue, where the majority of North Portland nodes exist. "It [the Boise neighborhood network] connects multiple roofs together, providing connections back to a central DSL connection. We are actively looking for opportunities to interconnect our nodes. Downtown, we have recently connected one of our rooftop nodes to a residential building a few blocks away," says Senior.

Personal Telco welcomes new members (both businesses and individuals) to their project regardless of their technological knowledge and will provide help and training for those who wish to do it themselves and set up a node in their neighborhood. "Because we are an educational nonprofit, we don't really have any competitors ... I guess our biggest competitor is fear, the fear of sharing one's Internet connection. And the cure for fear is education, and we can provide that to whoever wants it," says Senior.

## STREETSCAPE

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dealing with waste water. The plan could include designs for new sidewalks, street furniture like bus shelters, street lighting and benches, landscaping, bike lanes, alley access and crosswalks on the stretch of Mississippi Avenue in the Boise neighborhood from North Fremont to North Skidmore.

The next step is for the city to secure funding for the project. City staff said they might look to the Interstate Urban Renewal District for funding or to federal grants available through the Metro Regional Government. It would take 2-3 years for funds to become available. The city will seek anywhere from \$125,000 to \$250,000.

The planning process can vary in length. The recently completed SE Hawthorne streetscape spent nine years in planning while North Killingsworth took approximately 12 months. Once the plan is in place the city can seek more funding to build the actual improvements.

In the meantime, Newell claims she is organizing a group of local property owners in an effort to ask the City Council to exempt the street from the 12-foot sidewalk rule.

Adams, who occupies a seat on the council, said he personally would not support such a request.

In the near term, the BNA will be launching a transportation safety project this fall that might include crosswalks and other safety issues.

For her part, Coleman feels positive about the outcome of the streetscape debate. She says everyone she's talked to was looking forward to the upcoming "visioning" process.

"What I'm hearing from residents and business owners is that they are really looking forward to becoming part of the conversation."