

Lover's Package: romance, profits, growth

By Cydney Gillis
Journal Business Reporter

AUBURN — While department stores bite their nails this holiday season, Auburn-based retailer Peekay Inc. has been counting the profits.

Peekay is the corporate name of a 26-store retail chain of lingerie and bedroom toys known by two names — Lover's Package and A Touch of Romance.

Peekay, which was founded in 1980 by two women — Phyllis Heppenstall and her daughter, Kris Butt — operates 18 Lover's Package stores in Western Washington and another eight Touch of Romance stores in Southern California, six of which the partners acquired two

years ago.

According to Charlie Jewell, Peekay's director of business development, the stores

have grown over the years from the 1,600- to 1,800-square-foot range to 3,000 to 4,000 square feet. Two Internet sites also sell adult paraphernalia and greeting cards — with traffic being driven by a network of affiliate Web sites.

Though Jewell would not reveal specific figures, he described Peekay as a multimillion-dollar operation that has seen sales increase 60 percent in

retail
Scene



the past two years.

Jewell credited the success to a woman's touch. Instead of the stark look that some lovers' shops have, Heppenstall and Butt make sure their stores are stylish and comfortable for their target audience: women.

"The store sells romance as opposed to a hard-core store that sells porn," Jewell said.

"They're extremely well appointed, colorful and tastefully decorated," he said of Lover's Package stores, noting that the staff — primarily women — are professional in their sales of items such as bath products, lingerie, lotions, vibrators and videos.

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"The concept is to put women at ease, to give them a safe, comfortable place to shop," Jewell said. "A lot of corporate resources go into (putting) the stores in high-traffic areas that are well lit with plenty of parking."

That includes locations in Federal Way, Kent, Kirkland, Renton and Puyallup. Overall, the operation — which includes a 16,000-square-foot corporate headquarters and warehouse in Auburn — employs 180.

Though no new locations are planned for now, Jewell noted sales haven't been hurt by a poor economy. In fact, it's been a boon for Peekay,

he said.

"When people cut back on entertainment," Jewell explained, "they look for less expensive ways to enjoy themselves. Our stores appear to benefit from that."