

Couple answers call to open coffee shop with Christian flavor

By **RICH FREDMAN**
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Jeff and Teena Stewart now understand the Starbucks mantra — It's more than just coffee.

"Why would people cough up \$4 for a cup of coffee when they could make it themselves for just a few cents in their own home?" Teena asks.

After friends gave the Stewarts a gift card to you-know-where, they realized the bottom line wasn't just to get to the bottom of a mug.

"It wasn't just about the coffee," Teena said. "The place was filled with enticing aromas that made you want to hang out and relax. We saw people chatting, working on homework or computers, reading. It was really about a comfortable environment and small group community."

Jeff Stewart, associate pastor at Northgate Christian Fellowship Church in Benicia, and his wife pondered the epiphany and decided that ministry may have a place in a coffee joint — Jesus and java, or thirst Corinthi-

ans, if you will.

The idea started two years ago and "continued to brew until we came to the decision that we really should stop talking about it and act on what we felt called to do," Teena said. The Stewarts made a radical decision "after much prayer and soul searching," Teena said.

Leap of faith

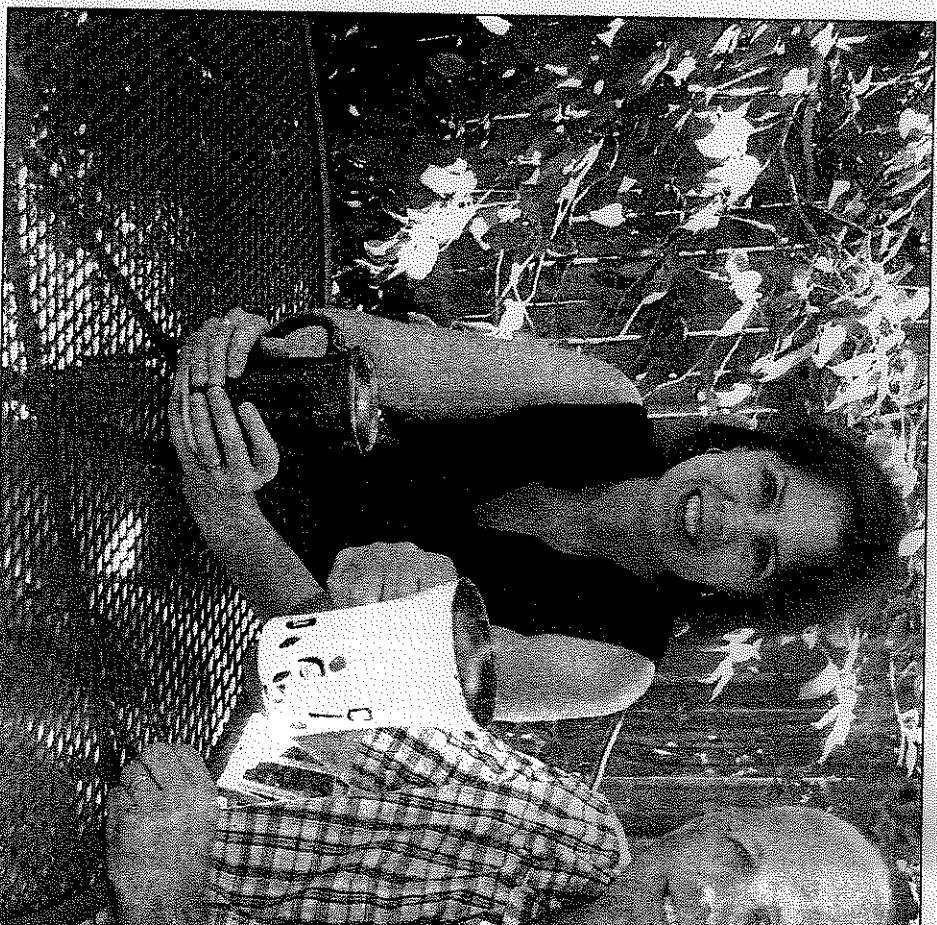
They're selling their Benicia home and using the money to start a coffee shop ministry in North Carolina.

With the drop in housing, they expect to have enough money for the business start-up and are raising funds for living expenses, insurance, cost of moving and more to survive on until the shop gets on its feet.

November is the target date for departure.

Though Teen actually prefers tea and caramel apple cider, Jeff is an avid coffee consumer.

"We envision a shop where delicious coffee and a warm inviting environment are the main draw and where people



TEENA AND JEFF STEWART will leave everything behind in Benicia to start

can linger, learn, and latch on to Christian principles," said Teena, the church's administrative assistant.

The Stewarts will be on hand to provide customers with prayer support, and small group options, including recovery groups.

They also plan to offer guest musicians and "spiritual formation" classes to help people face life's

challenges.

Teena, a recent author ("Successful Small Groups: From Concept to Practice") and accomplished magazine writer, said she and her husband are toying with "Java Journey" as the name of their shop.

"But it could change," she said, noting that "a lot of people think we are buying a shop but the

actual shop doesn't yet. We are planning to start from scratch.

Calling Benicia a "derful little town," said the cost of starting its toll, "I'm willing to uproot one adult child and another in and start anew. And if it does not work out, we're not even thinking about that."