

# Not Your Usual Boutique

By CAROL PERKINS

One elderly man mistook it for a cafe.

An enthusiastic gardener thought it was a place she could buy philodendrons.

Another person dropped in to buy a six pack of beer.

You can't blame them

From the outside, The Rubber Tree does look like a neighborhood grocery store, plant shop or deli.

But a glance inside is realization that the tiny 4426 Burke Ave. shop isn't specializing in corned beef sandwiches, African violets or beer.

The only six pack you can buy here is Fiesta sensi-color condoms.

The store's shelves are neatly stacked with a wide array of condoms, creams and jellies.

Four months ago, the Seattle chapter of Zero Population Growth decided to bring the sale of birth-control devices out from behind drug store counters and away from tavern restrooms.

Specializing in non-prescription contraceptives, The Rubber Tree possibly is the only boutique of its kind in the country, said Julia Forbes, manager.

"The first thing customers say is 'I didn't know there were so many kinds.'" said Ms. Forbes gesturing at row after row of exotic multi-colored cartons

Contraception sexuality and population-growth books, environmental posters, and bumper stickers, also are sold in the boutique. There is free literature available, too.

Most of the customers are men in their 20s and 30s but many women and all age groups come in to browse and buy.

Staff members see some

red faces a few leers, sneers and get crank telephone calls but haven't received any complaints from people uncomfortable with the shop idea.

"We're trying to get around that embarrassing moment many people, especially young kids, encounter when they want to buy a contraceptive," Ms. Forbes said.

Trained staff members answer questions about venereal disease, family planning and sexuality and refer customers to appropriate medical services and counselors for more specific assistance.

Because the shop is non-profit, prices are below those in retail outlets, according to Ms. Forbes.

Most items sell in the 65-cent to \$4-price range.

One especially popular item is the nickel condom.

"It's just our way of emphasizing that price shouldn't be a barrier for using contraceptives," she said, pointing to one of the most-often bought posters in the store.

"What the world needs is a good 3-cent contraceptive."



—P-I Photo by Grant Haller

## JULIA FORBES IS MANAGER OF A UNIQUE SEATTLE BOUTIQUE

Customers can shop for contraceptives or sexuality advice