

THE HEMP WORSHIPER

CLACKAMAS STUDENT STARTS BUSINESS WITH HEMP

BY MATT ROWNING



Ben Christensen proudly stands with marijuana plants. Photo contributed by Ben Christensen.

The Clackamas Print: Tell us about yourself! What's the story behind Oregon Hemp Works?

Ben Christensen: I started my company about six years ago. I ended up getting in a car wreck at a certain point and got a medical marijuana card. I had a buddy growing marijuana. I thought it was pretty cool that he worked with the plant, but I didn't think there were enough voices on hemp. I decided I wanted to work with hemp.

Also, I happened to like 'Fight Club' quite a bit at the time, so I decided to make soap. I spent the next year researching Oregon and hemp and cannabis in general.

TCP: You were living in Oregon at the time?

BC: Yes, I am born and raised here.

TCP: What successes have you had so far? Is the ball finally starting to roll with the legalization of recreational marijuana?

BC: I've seen a dramatic increase in the acceptance of hemp with the legalization. There's so many people fighting for medical and recreational, but in comparison there's quite a few less for hemp.

As of last year there are nine hemp farms in Oregon.

TCP: Do you have any difficulty acquiring industrial hemp for your products with only nine farms in state?

BC: No, I source it from Canada, they're kind of the world leader on hemp oil and hemp seed product. '97 I think they started doing a pilot hemp program. It's a huge industry. The United States buys 90 percent of what they produce, so a significant amount. The federal government was actually sued over that. The US government had said 'no hemp in this country,' but there was a suit filed claiming hemp was a food product. Now we have hemp food items and oil. So that's what I use in my soap is food grade, organic hemp oil.

TCP: You've mentioned the product is organic, why did you choose to make it that way?

BC: It's not certified organic, so what I can say on my label is it's made with organic hemp oil. It's made with organic olive oil, organic coconut oil. I can only put that on the label.

TCP: What's the future for you and for Oregon Hemp Works?

BC: As for the future, it kind of started out as a hobby thing, I didn't know what I was doing. Now I've started to go to school for renewable energy, I started at Clackamas four years ago. My renewable energy degree will only help me to improve and build in sustainability into my company. So, I can understand it's not just about having a Prius company car and compact fluorescent lights, it's a matter of putting solar panels up. It's not just recycling but actually managing our waste.

Right now the soap's packaging is hemp paper with hemp twine. It's biodegrad-

able. Moving forward, I'm transferring to OIT next term for business.

TCP: What would you say if I accused you of being a forward minded entrepreneur?

BC: I wouldn't use that terminology for myself, but I wouldn't disagree with it. I think it was Adam Corolla who said 'you're not an entrepreneur until you make \$100,000 a year.' I just try to be humble about it, because it's not about me or my company, it's a matter of the planet.

This is the most sustainable resource we have, and you can't really talk about renewable energy and saving the planet unless hemp is in the conversation as well. It is the most nutritionally complete food source on the planet; it's a carbon negative building material. I took classes in 2015 on how to build with hempcrete. I went to Bellingham over the summer and took a three day course on building a tiny house with hemp materials.

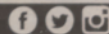
Hempcrete is chopped up hemp stock with lime and water. It creates a carbon negative building material that absorbs carbon over time, it essentially petrifies and sucks carbon dioxide out of the air. It makes a building that will last hundreds of years. Then, when you want to change something, you can smash it down and make it into a new hempcrete batch. It's amazing stuff.

It's a victim of its own success. People hear this and say I would have heard of it if it could do all those things. That's exactly why you haven't heard of it.

Correction: In issue 11 of The Clackamas Print, Cassandra Garcia-Torres' name was misspelled. We apologize for the error.

ON THE COVER: Macro photo of marijuana by Andrew Koczian. Design by Brandon Chorum.

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