



Sara Brickner

Weed My Lips

Cannabis TV takes pot shots at the establishment.

by Sara Brickner

Dan Koozer, producer of Eugene's Cannabis TV, sees himself as a "freedom fighter." He's a friendly guy who wears a U.S. Army jacket and a "Pee for Enjoyment, not for Employment" pin. Koozer supports himself by doing odd jobs and working as caretaker for a property in Fall Creek. But on Wednesday nights at 7, he comes to the Community Television (CTV) building behind Sheldon High School to tape Cannabis TV, along with an eclectic crew of supporters from various locations around Oregon.

The program airs at 8:30 pm Wednesdays and Thursdays on cable channel 29, and again Sunday midnight and Monday noon. The format is a basic newscast, except that these anchors, "Dank Bagman," who wears a grocery bag on his head, and "Annie Pots," a woman who crowns her long blonde hair with a wreath of fake cannabis leaves, aren't talking about the war on Iraq. They're talking about the war on pot, as a red and white "No War on Pot" sign push-pinned to the white lattice backdrop clearly states.

For someone who has never heard of the show, it is easy to assume that Cannabis TV is about smoking marijuana. Instead, the show's content relies heavily on legal and economic

issues regarding cannabis, medical marijuana, and hemp. Volunteers, who come as often as they can make it, produce the show. Anyone who wants to host the show can do so, either for fun or to fill holes when they are short-handed. The hosts, along with their guests (if there are any), read cannabis- and hemp-related news articles, share recipes, poetry, cannabis-related anecdotes, medical marijuana success stories, and sometimes, tales of drug busts.

Koozer, also known for his organizing work with the sort-of annual Oregon Hempfest, started working at Cannabis TV by helping behind the scenes.

"I started by coming and helping on the camera for the first time or two," said Koozer. Then the other hosts asked him if he wanted to be on the show. At the time, however, his wife worked at a daycare center, and he feared his participation might jeopardize her job.

"They said, 'Why don't you put a bag on your head?'" Koozer said. At first it was a joke, but then Koozer reconsidered. Using a brown paper grocery bag with two holes cut out for eyes, Koozer took his first name and the first letter of his last to create his alter-ego, "Dank Bagman." Now Koozer is a weekly

presence on-screen, and his bag, which is decorated with George W. Bush's grinning head, torso, and a tag on the top that reads, "Weed My Lips," has become the show's unofficial trademark.

However, the bag is also a reminder of the stigma attached to marijuana activism. "I can show how things are, that I'm in the land of the free and I have to put a bag over my head," Koozer said.

Larry Dobberstein, who works at the Community Television station, is not affiliated with Cannabis TV, although he is supportive of the show.

"People are passionate about the issue of the drug laws, but even the producer wears a bag over his head because he doesn't want his wife's business jeopardized," said Dobberstein. "This is the taboo that's laid on the country."

Though small, Cannabis TV is an attempt to help break down some of the myths surrounding cannabis and hemp. Although the Cannabis TV volunteers come from different locations and backgrounds, they share one binding quality — a wholehearted belief in the benefits of cannabis, hemp and marijuana. "We all have the same philosophy, more or less," said Koozer.

In addition to producing Cannabis TV, Koozer is one of the main organizers of the Emerald Empire Hempfest and participates in local marijuana activism. He's not the only one. Many of the Cannabis TV crew members work with marijuana activist groups as well, including the Medical Cannabis Resource Center, or the "Mercy Center," which promotes medical marijuana and works for marijuana-related legal reform in the Pacific Northwest.

So far, the show hasn't received any major public backlash. The show has yet to air footage of the crew or anyone else smoking cannabis, although Edie Ortega, a Cannabis TV regular, recalls an incident in which someone tried to strip on camera. "We had one gentleman who stripped, and he held a pamphlet ..." she said, gesturing at her crotch.

Koozer can only recall receiving one specific complaint, perhaps because the program does not receive government funding and is only available to cable subscribers. While

obscurity, political candidate endorsements, and sales of products are all prohibited, Larry Dobberstein thinks the rules are quite liberal.

"We're not really under the FCC, so we're able to put on a lot of shows that the mainstream cannot," he said. "If it was up to us, anything people gave us, we'd air."

"Annie Pots" started working on Cannabis TV after a previous host moved to Hawaii.

"I happened to be flipping around and saw Dank, sitting by himself with a bag on his head, trying to fill the whole show," she said. So, she called him and asked if they needed help. "I said, 'Man, you guys need some enthusiasm, you need a new host', and he said, 'Well, come on down!'"

Aivia Monitto, a Merry Hempsters employee who has done activist work in the past, but is not currently involved with any organization, appeared on episode 118.

"I feel like marijuana prohibition goes against our constitutional rights as citizens," she said. "It's a matter of constitutional and human rights."

John Gaurdino, the regular director of the show, is involved mainly because of issues pertaining to medical marijuana.

"We've had many guests who have convinced me that it's better than the other opiate-based drugs they've been prescribed, and they don't work as well as marijuana has proved to work for them," Gaurdino said.

Perry Stripling, another host, agrees. "It's really a quality of life issue for these people," he said on the show. Annie Pots' reasoning is also related to medical marijuana. "I'm tired of seeing my friends getting sick and having to get cards," she said.

Although the show probably won't win any production awards, the crew figures Cannabis TV will be successful if it helps educate the public about hemp, medical marijuana or cannabis.

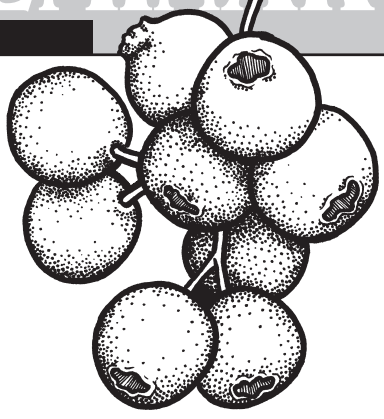
"It's just an issue we believe in," Koozer said. "I just started out trying to help get it legalized, and I wasn't looking for a life's work, but it's been nine years and that looks like what it's turning into."

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