

POT PETITION

Creswell's One Gro seeks to repeal the town's pot ban and create a local monopoly

In a small café just off I-5 that proprietors hope to convert into a weed dispensary, a marijuana company's leaders met with a few citizens of Creswell last week in an attempt to change hearts and minds — and a city ordinance — about the pot industry.

One Gro is a marijuana company started by Mike Arnold, the Eugene-based lawyer who briefly defended the Bundys after their Malheur occupation last year and who recently left his law practice to become a “gentleman hobbyist farmer” growing and selling pot outside of Creswell.

Arnold and his CEO, Dan Isaacson, hope that One Gro will soon have its flagship dispensary in Creswell — population 5,292. The twist, however, is that Creswell citizens voted 1,280-1,152 in November to ban weed dispensaries in town.

The company started up in February and recently filed an initiative petition to reverse the ban. “The reason we wrote the law the way we did is so we could be the only dispensary in town,” Isaacson says. “It won't be like Eugene, where it's stacked one on top of another.”

Dave Stram, Creswell's mayor, says, “My official position is that the citizens made a decision eight months ago that they did not want marijuana in this city.” The city is situated in the midst of choice farmland and located right next to I-5 and near an airport.

Stram adds, “Creswell is a prime spot for this industry. I certainly can't fault them for wanting to be here. My issue is why do they want to be here when we already voted no.”

Isaacson often calls Creswell “our Cupertino,” after the California headquarters of Apple. Arnold and his team want to set up shop in Creswell as a national weed operation, selling products like a weed inhaler for medical usage.

“We're not looking to build a dispensary or to build a cannabis company, we're looking to build a cannabis empire,” Isaacson says. “We bring traditional business into pot and sell it in a way to not market it to potheads.”

Isaacson suggests that with a 3 percent tax on their shop, the city could raise \$160,000 in annual revenue. “We have to have law enforcement, which means we're shy about 100 grand,” he says.

Arnold proposed that the 3 percent tax the city might take from his business venture could go towards hiring more sheriff's deputies, who currently don't patrol in the early morning hours. “Anyone drive around here at 2 or 3 in the morning? This place is sketchy,” he said.

Stram says he has run the numbers for what marijuana taxes could bring to Creswell, and he thinks it'll be more a trickle of revenue than a stream. Similarly sized Veneta made \$30,000 in revenue off \$1 million in marijuana sales, so even generously doubling that profit to \$2 million leaves Creswell with \$60,000 in taxes.

“That doesn't cover police officers,” Stram says. “I doubt that a recreational dispensary in Creswell would bring many jobs here, and when I go down to the shop, none of them live in Creswell.”

The tax wouldn't be implemented until after the 2018 election, when voters would, at least in theory, vote to tax marijuana sales. If the petition passes in an election this fall, that tax would automatically go on the 2018 ballot, but it would leave One Gro operating tax-free for a year.

Isaacson says the company is committed to donating 3 percent of its profits to a local nonprofit to show goodwill in the community. “There's an outsider aspect to it, like why are you in our community? I thought we [should] write the rule in such a way that it gave them the opportunity to know that we're stewards to the community.”

Some in the community have raised concerns that an election is quite expensive. Arnold responds that the city could pass the legislation if it feels “the will of the people has been met.” He adds, “But they won't do that because most politicians are cowards.”

Arnold says of the petition, “What we're doing is coming into town voluntarily, begging to give 3 percent of our gross proceeds to Creswell.”

Stram says the City Council decided that the marijuana issue

was so important it needed to be in the hands of the people, so the council would leave it to the voters. “Creswellians are not happy with their presence or them pushing their will upon the city,” he says of One Gro, though he added that some likely are excited for the opportunity to vote again.

The Friday, July 21, meeting at the NakD Bean café was unusual, as political meetings go. About 10 members of the One Gro team attended, outnumbering members of the public.

“Creswell under this current administration gets to be known as the city brought to you by not one but two dollar stores. Something to be proud of,” Arnold said sarcastically, referencing the town's lack of grocery options. Creswell in fact only has one dollar store, the other having closed.

One Gro, according to company representatives, will provide a more upstanding dispensary experience for new users. On current dispensaries, Arnold says, “The ones that didn't feel dirty and creepy were all about weed culture.” He adds, “What I envision is a marijuana dispensary just like any other commercial outlet you would see.”

A few Creswell citizens who attended the meeting were in favor of the petition, and most had signed it. Letxi Fordson said, “I'm all in favor of it. It'll bring an economy into the city.” Becky Hess added, “I've got to go to Cottage Grove to get mine, may as well have the taxes go here.”

The petition needs 512 signatures to get on the ballot. It was filed at Creswell City Hall on Monday afternoon with 647 signatures.

“I'll be curious to see what happens in our little town in the next four months and how worked up people could get over this,”

Mayor Stram says. ■



**MIKE ARNOLD,
EUGENE-BASED
LAWYER
& ONE GRO
FOUNDER**



• The West Coast **affordable housing shortage** is raising rents and home sale prices to record levels, which is good news for property owners and investors, but is distinctly bad news for low-income and even moderate-income households looking to rent or buy in Lane County. We noticed Onward Oregon, the progressive advocacy group, is getting into the housing debate with its support of Oregon HB 2007A that would, among other things, allow the development of “smaller, discrete housing options of accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and duplexes in single-family zoned neighborhoods.” Eugene's current and antiquated building code, with a few exceptions, allows duplexes only on very large corner lots. We don't know if this bill will become statewide law, but the city of Eugene has the power to go ahead with such updates to its building codes.

• We've been tracking the **two cohousing projects** in Eugene and both are still giving tours, recruiting members and developing plans. The newest project is Eugene Downtown Cohousing on a vacant lot on Lincoln Street between Broadway and 10th Avenue. A meeting for people interested in this adult, urban-style community will be at 1 pm Sunday, July 30. Call 541-344-5751 or email ljseymour@gmail.com for the location. The more rural Oakleigh Meadow project along the Willamette River has been delayed by appeals, but organizer Will Dixon says the Eugene Planning Commission “re-re-re-approved” the project in June and “now it's onward and upward.” Call 541-514-1176 or email wcd@willardcdixon.com.

• Community Lending Works is now offering **down payment assistance** for eligible homebuyers in Lane and Benton counties. The nonprofit is in partnership with Neighborhood Economic Development Corporation (NEDCO) and Willamette Neighborhood Housing Services. The Project Reinvest Down Payment Assistance program offers \$10,500 in assistance. Applicants must meet qualifications and attend workshops and consultations. See nedcocdc.org/dpa/.

• **Arriving By Bike** at 2705 Willamette Street has been busy this summer, sponsoring bike valet parking at Art in the Vineyard and participating in a free bike repair clinic at BRING July 15. The business was also involved in the Filmed By Bike Film Festival and will be showing bikes at Kesey Square July 30 for the Eugene Sunday Streets event, according to owner Paul Moore. See our story online for more on Sunday Streets.

• **HIV Alliance** has moved into its new facilities at 1195A City View Street. The nonprofit had help from Essex General Construction, Brothers Plumbing, Reynolds Electric, Rubenstein's Contract Carpet, Hartness Drywall, Wildish Construction, Forrest Paint, Oldfield's Appliance and the Long Tom Watershed Council.

• **Obie Hospitality** is the new division of Obie Companies headed by former Eugene mayor Brian Obie, owner of Fifth Street Public Market and the adjacent upscale Inn at the 5th. Obie recently opened another upscale hotel in Boise and says, “We plan to continue to build very special boutique hotels in a variety of Western U.S. communities.”