

Legal pot brings business our way

My lunch companion's face darkened when I told him about the two pages of marijuana advertising that would appear in this week's issue of *Coast Weekend*.

"I don't like it," he said.

"What?" I asked.

Oregon's legalization of marijuana, he said.

I reminded my friend that our editorial page opposed the marijuana ballot initiative. But Oregon voters agreed to it, and here it is. Our company is treating marijuana dispensaries like other legal businesses and will accept advertising for the products they offer.

The legalization of marijuana is a major cultural shift. It is also the creation of an economic sector that will use resources such as energy and water, and pay property and income taxes.

Oregon is entering the marijuana game on the heels of Colorado and Washington. Across the river from Astoria, in Pacific County, there are major grow operations in Raymond. Seeing those massive facilities, Matt Winters, publisher of the *Chinook Observer*, called that part of his county "the Saudi Arabia of pot."

Winters noted that the Port of Willapa Harbor — site of the new grow operation — was on the edge of insolvency. Now the Port is looking for every scrap of land it can find. Marijuana has become a turnaround for the Port. The surrounding communities of Raymond and South Bend are in the midst of an economic rebound that was unimaginable during the long timber-industry downturn.

Here on the south side of the Columbia River, there is an expectation that marijuana will contribute \$10.7 million to Oregon's tax coffers.

To the surprise of many, marijuana is now legitimate. It is sold in storefronts.

Economists will surely track the path of the new marijuana sector. If economic history is any guide, there will be a period of shakeout, in which some distributors drop out and there is consolidation.

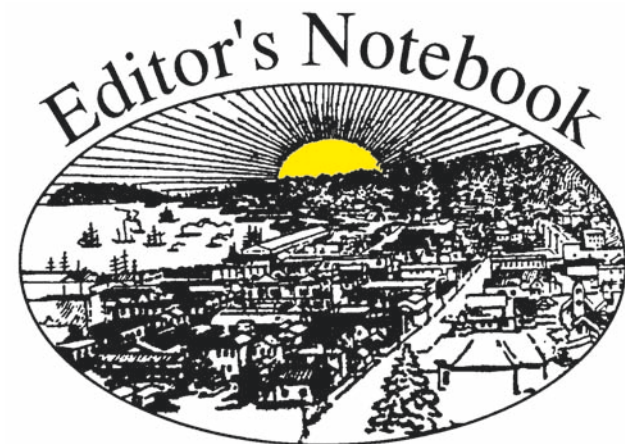
Many marijuana entrepreneurs have gone into business with the expectation of a big payoff. While privately held, these businesses are the equivalent of an initial public offering, in which investors hope to ride a company's value as it climbs. Sometimes the prospect of a big payout comes true, sometimes not.



Steve Forrester



Lauren Silberman, 29, hangs marijuana after harvesting at Michael Monarch's southern Oregon marijuana grow, Oct. 13.



Like it or not, marijuana is a big new factor in our region's and state's economy.

Also taking shape is law enforcement's role. Even though it is legal to purchase and possess marijuana, driving under the influence of cannabis is not. If you drive Oregon's major highways, you'll notice a new billboard whose message is: Doobie equals DUII.

One of the abiding questions about marijuana legalization is whether it will diminish the presence of the Mexican cartel that has dominated illegal sales. That was a hope expressed by the pot initiative's supporters.



Beth Nakamura/The Oregonian

On a recent morning, the plants at Michael Monarch's grow, about 100 in all, towered under breathtaking vistas of the Cascade and Siskiyou mountains. Plastic netting helped suspend flower-laden branches, keeping them from drooping too low.

When our culture shifts, it can be difficult for many who feel ignored, outraged or left behind. There is an element of that as some Oregonians wake up to the fact that marijuana legalization is becoming a real, physical aspect in many of our cities and towns.

The new pot laws are not equivalent with same-sex marriage, but a similar phenomenon may be observed in Americans who resist the reality of the Supreme Court's decision that opened the way for gays to marry.

Writing in Tuesday's *Washington Post*, Michael Gerson urges fundamentalist Christians to recognize that the world is not coming to an end.

—S.A.F.

Open forum

Money better spent

The letter in support of building a \$1.8 billion methanol production plant near Clatskanie cited three reasons in favor ("Yes to methanol," *The Daily Astorian*, Oct. 23). The first was jobs: An estimated 200 permanent family-wage jobs would be created.

That sounds good until you realize how few 200 jobs is compared to the huge sum invested. Imagine if instead of building one huge, stinky, loud, toxic chemical plant, owned by foreign investors, in the middle of a wonderful lower Columbia River community, the \$1.8 billion was divided up into one thousand \$1.8 million loans to qualifying local businesses wanting to expand or start up. If each of those 1,000 businesses added just one new employee, that equates to 1,000 jobs, five times the number this toxic monstrosity would create.

The second argument praises the smaller amount of carbon dioxide produced by the methanolization process. But carbon dioxide put into the atmosphere by humans is causing our planet to heat up and oceans to acidify; weather patterns and ocean currents are changing — more frequent floods, droughts, and heat-waves are evident and costly. Even if we curtail our carbon dioxide emissions today, the atmospheric concentration would not return to pre-industrial levels for hundreds of years. Our local economy and the global environment will both benefit if we stop investing in or building carbon-ex-

traction based businesses, regardless of the rosy descriptions used to pitch them.

The third argument — that there are strong environmental review and regulations to protect the Columbia region — ignores the reality of the process so fully revealed by the past 10 years of legal maneuverings by Oregon LNG for their project in Warrenton, and the unmitigated support for it by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). Hundreds of residents' opinions were tossed aside in favor of big international money.

Rather than sinking \$1.8 billion in one carbon dioxide-based energy/chemical project, the community can better protect property values, job security, diversity of employment choices, and a clean environment by encouraging new start-ups and the expansion of many existing small businesses.

CHRISTOPHER FARRAR
Astoria

Good job, Gearhart

Real estate promoters can now set higher prices and win bigger commissions for selling homes in Gearhart and Seaside that can be rented out on a short-term (weekend, more or less) basis. As the new absentee homeowner makes his investment "pay for itself," he could care less about the peace and safety of the neighborhood now enduring incessant noise and traffic congestion.

This has been something new for

Gearhart, where family groups and their friends have usually taken turns occupying vacation houses owned communally by their own relatives. Those groups, identified with a particular family, normally act responsibly and with consideration for the permanent residents in their midst.

Mutual respect between Gearhart's permanent and seasonal residents is part of the character of the community, and has long been associated with the quality of life we enjoy in Gearhart. The growing number of new absentee rentals has shattered that venerable tradition.

The Gearhart Comprehensive Plan foresaw the problem a generation ago: it clearly states, under "Residential Development Policies," that "The city will recognize the importance of the city's residential neighborhoods and the need to protect them from the negative impacts of the transient rental of property, and to discourage increased levels of traffic and similar disruptions."

Immediately following that policy is a statement of "Commercial Development Policies" to "limit commercial activity," "prevent the city from becoming a tourist destination," and limit commercial development to what "supports the needs of the residents of Gearhart," ending with a declaration that "The city shall not designate additional property for commercial development."

Can anyone deny that short-term rental is commercial activity? Doesn't the property owner derive income from

that activity? And, if a businessperson can now suddenly make the specious claim that providing a historic setting for weddings is a form of short-term rental, then surely the real short-term rentals must be seen as business activity, and subject to city regulation and limitation.

Unfortunately, the ordinances implementing those Comprehensive Plan policies have not yet been enacted. Better late than never, the city council is now busy with such an ordinance, drafting it with careful comparison to ordinances successfully enacted by other cities.

Three cheers for the Gearhart City Council, and three cheers for Mayor Dianne Widdop for appointing Paulina Cockrum, a seasoned and effective planner, to the City Council to replace the much-missed John Duncan. This was a significant appointment that went unreported in *The Daily Astorian*. With Ms. Cockrum's help, the city will soon have the legal means to rescue Gearhart's ancient tradition.

BILL BERG
KENT SMITH
Gearhart

Not concerned

The Astoria City Council this week was presented with a legitimate development project for affordable housing. A small project in size, but four units to help alleviate the current lack of housing situation Astoria is gripped by.

It required the city to sell an un-buildable lot. The protests were high. Neighbors angry, wanting to buy the lot for their gardens or green space. Meanwhile, there's up to a year-long wait for a two bedroom apartment here in town. Vacation Rentals by Owner (VRBO) and Airbnbs are taking over where year-round tenants need housing.

My question to the city is this: A citywide study on affordable housing this evening was approved, with the broad strokes of "check how many empty houses you can find." The council voted to also "do a study on Airbnb" while they're at it.

Everyone on the council expressed their concern during that discussion, "yes, we must do something ... we're at a crisis here," and yet when a developer stood in front of council with a plan, funding and an outline mapped out, the council choose instead to vote not to sell the city property to a developer, but maybe wait for a couple of years for the city to count up all those empty houses.

The city doesn't want to encourage development of affordable housing, they want to study affordable housing. Councilor Cindy Price said it best towards the end, that she'd like to see the city sell this lot for more money, and have someone build a really nice house on it.

My answer: That would cost \$300,000 to build. Which is not affordable housing.

DIANA KIRK
Portland



THE
DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873

STEPHEN A. FORRESTER, Editor & Publisher • LAURA SELLERS, Managing Editor
BETTY SMITH, Advertising Manager • CARL EARL, Systems Manager
JOHN D. BRUIJN, Production Manager • DEBRA BLOOM, Business Manager
HEATHER RAMSDALL, Circulation Manager