



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian
Raja Afrika, an employee at Hi, holds a 1-gram package of Green Ribbon. Afrika is glad his customers no longer have to “do shady back-alley deals.”

Pot: Shops are seeing lots of customers daily

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The new dispensary on the block, Hi Astoria, opened Oct. 1 and had approximately one customer on that historic day, Will Violet, a budtender, said. But word-of-mouth is spreading, and the store — part of a fledgling franchise — is attracting between 45 and 75 recreational customers per day, he said.

“We’ve been pushing through and becoming more and more like a business,” he said.

Clark said he expects that “tourists next year will play a big part in (the local marijuana customer base), just because we got so many cruise ships coming in,” Clark said. “I mean, even on Oct. 1, we had 20 to 25 cruise ship people.”

Green rush

Because banks are federally insured, and both medical and recreational marijuana remain illegal at the federal level, marijuana-based businesses have had to get creative in handling their deposits.

“None of the banks want to touch it,” Kelly said. “There are a few credit unions open to the idea. A lot aren’t federally insured, so they can do it without getting that backlash from the feds.”

Some business owners said they rely on stowed-away safes, others on loopholes in the financial system.

“You have to exploit ev-



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian
Packages of Fire OG hang on the rack at Hi.

ery gap in the traditional way of doing business, within the legal limits, to get around the banking issue,” Nelson said.

Under the current tax code, the Internal Revenue Service doesn’t permit tax deductions or credits for businesses that traffic in controlled substances prohibited under federal law. So dispensaries find themselves working in a business environment that can be less than advantageous to their line of work.

“We’re not able to write off business expenses like a normal business,” Nelson said. “Once we can do business like a regular business, we’ll really have something.”

In January, Oregon dispensaries will be required to impose a 25 percent tax on all limited recreational marijuana products. In addition, the Oregon Liquor Control Commission will begin accepting applications to license retail and recreational marijuana shops while training a fleet of licensers and inspectors. Medical marijuana dispensaries can continue to sell to recreational users through the end of 2016.

“We’re still in the infancy stage of all of this, though, so I don’t know how the tax in January is going to affect this,” Nelson said.

Afrika likened Oregon’s

legalized marijuana economy to a kind of “gold rush,” with opportunities for growers, bakers, hemp-focused entrepreneurs and others to contribute to the budding industry.

“When I was a kid in the ’80s, I used to play this game called ‘Oregon Trail.’ Many quality childhood hours invested in this video game. And now that I live in Astoria, I feel like I fulfilled the dream of the Oregon Trail game,” Afrika said, adding that he’s glad his customers no longer have to “do shady back-alley deals” to score their drug of choice. “What a great age we live in.”

Business: They hope to make improvements to run-down warehouse

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Oei and West told the Planning Commission they are working with Pacific Power to upgrade the power needs for a growing operation and hope to make improvements to what was a run-down, vacant warehouse at Industry and Portway streets.

McLaren Innes, the commission’s vice president,

called the warehouse’s exterior “one of the saddest buildings,” and, like others on the commission, was pleased about the prospects for renovation.

“There are not many industries where you can be the first to jump into it, like a microbrewery or a microdistillery,” Oei said. “And I think we have a great opportunity to do something like that.”

Boat: Menu will include clam chowder and bread

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city property next to the Bowpicker on Duane Street. The council determined that the food cart could pose a conflict with nearby parking for the U.S. Coast Guard, while the owners of the Bowpicker, the famous fish and chips spot, were not exactly enthusiastic about a potential rival next door.

Over the summer and fall, the city also discouraged Estrada from pursuing a location near the Barbey Maritime Center.

“Just from a business development perspective, I think this is a great location for them,” Kevin Cronin, the city’s community development director, said of the Port property off Industry Street.

Estrada had identified the Port as an option, even treating Port commissioners to chowder samples at a meeting in June, while also negotiating with the city.

T’s Astoria Chowder could open in February or March, she said, pending a

rental agreement with the Port. The menu will feature clam chowder and bread and could expand to other items.

Estrada described the location near the Columbia River and the Astoria Bridge as a “very nice, picturesque place” for potential customers.

Food carts are popping up across Astoria as part of a burgeoning foodie culture that blends with the city’s reputation for craft beer.

But the city did not make it easy on Estrada, who was frustrated by the City Council’s earlier rejection. The entrepreneur needed Planning Commission approval for the Port property because a food cart is a conditional use on land zoned as general development shorelands.

“We wish her the best of luck,” Dave Pearson, the president of the Planning Commission, said after the commission’s unanimous vote. “It looks like a nice location with a lot of pedestrian foot traffic.”

“Sometimes it takes time to find the right location.”



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