

Marijuana Advocates Defend Oregon Law

continued ▲ from Front

the plants require.

In what Martinez called "the highlight of these peoples' month," several hundred cardholders lined up around the block for pieces of rare species of hemp noted for special effects. They also gathered around a table with a large sign saying, "It's NORML to write to your elected officials," which encouraged letters against the initiative petition filed by associates of Kevin Mannix, the Republican lawmaker who lost a race for governor in 2002.

Mannix calls his proposed repeal a "crime-fighting" measure that would still allow for synthetic marijuana to be used as medicine, but Martinez sees the Oregon Medical Marijuana Act as a huge success.

"The beauty of the OMMA is that it's self-supporting," says Martinez, citing the over \$900,000 in revenue that the program's fees generated for state human-resource departments. "If the Mannix bill passed, taxpayers would have to pay for the artificial drugs made by big pharma."

Going back to the same arguments that passed the act in the first place, Martinez tells the heart-warming story of a glaucoma-plagued elderly woman who found her only comfort in the pressure-reducing



Two of the most powerful medical-marijuana activists in the country, Oregon NORML directors Madeline Martinez and Linda Mason, prepare meeting tables for patients with state-approved medical-marijuana cards.

PHOTOS BY RAYMOND RENDLEMAN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

effects of marijuana.

At least one grandmotherly type by the name of "Betty" attended the meeting, but she declined to give her last name, saying that she feared community ostracization. Most of the attendees were middle-aged and white.

Martinez, whose ancestry is a mix of Mexican, Navajo and Apache, fears the stereotyping of Oregon's nearly 15,000 medical-marijuana beneficiaries and actively seeks to diversify the membership. She points out the relative homogeneity of Oregon at large, saying, "Our program has become diverse, because diversity draws diversity, and having a brown person at the helm really draws people in."

One of the program's many Af-

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— Madeline Martinez, executive director of Oregon NORML

rican Americans, Linda Mason, has quickly advanced in the organization. She contends that the most important thing she brings to the group is her first-hand experience with the lack of discrimination protection for cardholding employees.

"I had some dirty urine and got fired from my job even though I had a card, so I became an activist ever since," Mason says. "The days of sitting back and not doing any-

thing are over."

A powerful pair of advocates, they agree that they have a good chance of protecting and refining the medical-marijuana law.

"We write letters and tell our cardholders what's going on and who to contact," Martinez says. "We found when we started we can't really affect that much change in a year, but we have the momentum of six years behind us."

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