

PENDLETON



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

High Desert Cannabis is the third marijuana retailer to open its doors in Pendleton.

# High Desert Cannabis is city's third marijuana dispensary

By ANTONIO SIERRA  
East Oregonian

Although Pendleton's first two recreational marijuana dispensaries opted for more sedate decor, High Desert Cannabis is far from inconspicuous.

Located near one of the busiest intersections in town, the 341 S.W. 20th St. cannabis store is painted with a bright green that matches the color scheme of the medical crosses adorned across the business' sign.

High Desert Cannabis isn't hiding the fact that it's a dispensary and one of its owners is also adamant that the new business has no association with the former owner of a medical marijuana dispensary near Hermiston.

Once customers go inside the store, most of the green is concentrated in the products behind the glass at the small and tidy sales floor.

Manager Chris Hasenbank said sales have gone as expected since High Desert Cannabis opened its doors July 7. He said last weekend's Pendleton Whisky Music Fest brought an uptick in business and they're preparing for more customers in town for Pendleton Bike Week.

According to co-owner Michael Ekblad and his father William Reuter, Pendleton's growing tourism industry was one reason High Desert Cannabis was established in the Round-Up City.

Getting in on the ground-floor of the burgeoning recreational pot industry was another.

"What a great opportunity for someone who is motivated and wants to pursue

a business that has a great potential to succeed," Reuter said.

High Desert Cannabis' ownership group shares some connections with convicted felon Michael Parker, the former owner of the Columbia Basin Compassion Center medical marijuana dispensary, although both sides are adamant that Parker is not involved with the business.

An ardent proponent of medical marijuana, Parker ran a dispensary until a Umatilla County moratorium shut it down in 2014.

Ekblad's business partner with High Desert Cannabis is Parker's daughter, Aimee Parker. Also, Ekblad listed the same unincorporated Hermiston home address on his zoning application that Parker listed as his home address for the Columbia Basin Compassion Center in 2011 and 2012, according to the Oregon Secretary of State business registry.

Reuter said he owns the Hermiston property and rented it out to Parker several years ago and now uses it to provide housing for his son.

For his part, Parker also denied being involved in High Desert Cannabis.

Despite reaching out to the *East Oregonian* to apprise the newspaper of the store's opening, he said he's not involved in his daughter's business and waved away the address connection.

"A lot of people live there," he said.

Parker has a long rap sheet, having been convicted of several felonies and misdemeanors, including second degree disorderly conduct, second degree burglary and

first degree criminal mischief.

Reuter said Parker's history was a factor in Aimee Parker and Ekblad's decision to strike it out on their own.

"That's why the kids didn't want him involved in any way, shape or form," Reuter said. "They didn't want that following them."

Pendleton Police Chief Stuart Roberts said it isn't uncommon to see marijuana business owners or associates with criminal records.

Roberts said he looks at these applicants under a limited scope, focusing on whether they've been convicted of a drug-related crime in the last three years.

Given that scope, Roberts said he meets with each marijuana business owner and goes over the police's role in enforcing the rules and laws.

Although he didn't comment specifically on Parker's connections to High Desert Cannabis, Roberts said marijuana businesses are prohibited from using someone with a clean record to act as the official owner while someone with a more extensive criminal record runs it unofficially.

Roberts said this practice is called "hidden ownership," and while it's previously been used for businesses that sell alcohol, it would apply to marijuana businesses, too.

Although difficult to prove, if a marijuana business failed to disclose someone who was involved in ownership with a relevant criminal record, it could lead the OLCC to suspend the business' license.

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# Umatilla County approves new tax district to fund OSU extension

## Board also sets non-ag burn ban

By PHIL WRIGHT  
East Oregonian

The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners gave its approval Wednesday for a plan to form a new taxing district to fund the Oregon State University Extension Service.

OSU Extension wants to form a district covering Morrow and Umatilla counties to fund its work, including two research centers, at a rate of 33 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value. Morrow County commissioners must also to give their approval, and the 17 city councils in the two counties have to give their support. The process will also include public hearings before going to the voters.

Mary Corp is helping lead the charge for the district. She is the OSU Extension regional administrator and director of the Columbia Basin Agriculture Research Center near Pendleton. She told Umatilla County commissioners 25 of Oregon's 36 counties have extension districts, and forming this one has community support.

She said a citizen advisory committee recommended the two-county district to ensure consistent funding. Corp and other extension leaders also provided the board with a letter stating a recent phone survey found 50 percent were in favor of the taxing district, 31 percent were against and 19 percent were not sure. The survey also had an error rate of plus or minus 5 percent.

County commissioners voted 3-0 to initiate the

formation of the new service district.

The board also approved a \$10,000 economic development grant to mental health provider Lifeways Inc. for its new 16-bed psychiatric facility, which is under construction in Hermiston. Lifeways director Rick George said the plan is to open the center in November, barring construction delays, and Lifeways expects "about 45 jobs out of this for the community."

Lifeways' grant application noted the \$6.7 million center would create 30 new jobs at an annual salary of \$45,000 each.

The board also backed a four-year, county-wide preventative maintenance plan which has a total estimated cost of \$807,760. It includes tree trimming, sidewalk repairs and replacing the flooring in the sheriff's office. Commissioner George Murdock said the there was nothing "glitzy" on the list of projects, but this will help keep more than a dozen county properties in the trim and avoid costly repairs later.

And six local teenage boys received a commendation from the board for their bravery and swift action.

Ben Combs, Austin Kendall, Tovia Niel, Quinton Orr, Khai Robertson and Colton Schock work in the United States Youth Conservation Corps. On July 6 they were helping set up a greenhouse for the Ukiah School District when they saw a fire at a nearby home.

The crew found the porch was aflame and extinguished the blaze with minimal damage to the home. The babysitter and young girl inside the house

were unharmed.

And commissioners also banned open, non-agricultural burning within the unincorporated areas of the county. The temporary ban went into effect Wednesday at noon and usually stays in effect until the late fall.

The ban only applies to areas under the jurisdiction of the county's smoke management regulations, according to a written statement from Gina Miller, the head of the county's code enforcement program. The ban does not apply to state or federal government lands, the Umatilla Indian Reservation or rural fire districts.

The ban covers burn barrels, yard and garden debris piles, small scale residential burning and more. The county still allows agricultural burning but could impose more restrictions depending on weather conditions.

Burn bans are common this time of year due to dry conditions, wildfires affecting air quality and regulations to reduce haze for community events, including the Umatilla County Fair, Milton-Free-water's Muddy-Frogwater Festival, and the Pendleton Round-Up.

For more information about the non-ag burn ban or to report illegal burning, call the Umatilla County Planning Department at 541-278-6252 or Umatilla County dispatch center at 541-966-3651 after 5 p.m. and weekends. And for more information about the county's smoke management ordinance, call the planning department.

Contact Phil Wright at [pwright@eastoregonian.com](mailto:pwright@eastoregonian.com) or 541-966-0833.

### SUBMIT COMMUNITY NEWS

Submit information to: [community@eastoregonian.com](mailto:community@eastoregonian.com) or drop off to the attention of Tammy Malgesini at 333 E. Main St., Hermiston or Renee Struthers at 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton. Call 541-564-4539 or 541-966-0818 with questions.

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# Wallowa County joins Lostine Corridor lawsuit

By STEVE TOOL  
EO Media Group

Wallowa County Board of Commissioners has voted to file as an intervenor in the lawsuit filed by environmental groups Oregon Wild and Hells Canyon Preservation Council to stop the Lostine Corridor Safety Project.

The project is an attempt by the U.S. Forest Service to remove hazardous trees and allow some logging while also performing prescribed fire treatment along the 11-mile corridor, which the Forest Service contends is at high to extreme risk for wildfire.

The suit alleges that the Forest Service project violates the law on several counts: The Forest Service violated the National Environmental Policy Act by categorically excluding the project from environmental analysis and not using a collaborative process to develop the project, which they contend is mandated under the categorical exclusion.

Western Resources Legal Center will file the petition on the county's behalf and represent the county if the petition is successful. Intervenor status will allow the county to participate in the lawsuit process without permission of the litigants. Commissioner Todd Nash said following the July 3 vote that the commissioners

**"That corridor needs something done, and this is a pretty good cross-section of folks who worked on it."**

— Susan Roberts, Wallowa County Commissioner

are grateful for the legal center's efforts on the county's behalf.

Nash also said the lawsuit made him question the legitimacy of the two environmental groups as collaborators.

"These two groups do not deserve a seat at the table when it comes to real solutions for our forests and community well-being," he said.

Commissioner Susan Roberts said the initial suit left the county with little choice but to petition the court. The county has done it in other matters, such as wolf delisting.

"The Lostine Corridor Project is an issue of the same import to the folks and visitors in Wallowa County," Roberts said. "That corridor needs something done, and this is a pretty good cross-section of folks who worked on it ... We really need to do something in that corridor to preserve human life and animal — and the scenery itself."

Roberts added that the commissioners are there to serve and protect the people they represent, and the petition is one way they can do that.

"We would be derelict if

we did not do it," Roberts said.

She said that during the 2005 Community Wildfire Protection Plan, the Lostine Corridor was at the top of the list to receive fire treatment.

"I would guess that we have thousands of people that go up that corridor every year, and their safety, and the safety of the people who live in the corridor is important," she said. "Here we are in 2017 updating the plan and nothing has been done in all these years. It's in worse shape."

In Roberts' opinion, the two environmental groups that filed the lawsuit seem to care less about the community than their own opinions. She said if the groups wanted no one to live in or go up the canyon, they should just say so.

"I don't believe they are true conservationists, nor do I believe they're environmentalists or collaborators — they're obstructionists," she said.

Roberts believes the county will gain the intervenor status it seeks.

"This is in Wallowa County. If we don't have status, then no one does," she said.