Legal marijuana industry had banner year in 2018

By GILLIAN FLACCUS
Associated Press

AP Photo/Richard Vogel, File

In this Oct. 20, 2018, file photo, marijuana clone plants are displayed for sale by Interstate 5 Farms at the cannabis-themed Kushstock Festival at Adelanto, Calif.

PORTLAND — The last year was a 12-month champagne toast for the legal marijuana industry as the global market exploded and cannabis pushed its way further into the financial and cultural mainstream.

Liberal California became the largest legal U.S. marketplace, while conservative Utah and Oklahoma embraced medical marijuana. Canada ushered in broad legalization, and Mexico's Supreme Court set the stage for that country to follow.

U.S. drug regulators approved the first marijuana-based pharmaceutical to treat kids with a form of epilepsy, and billions of investment dollars poured into cannabis companies. Even main street brands like Coca-Cola said they are considering joining the party.

"I have been working on this for decades, and this was the year that the movement crested," said U.S. Rep. Earl Blumenauer, an Oregon Democrat working to overturn the federal ban on pot. "It's clear that this is all coming to a head."

With buzz building across the globe, the momentum will continue into 2019.

Luxembourg is poised to become the first European country to legalize recreational marijuana, and South Africa is moving in that direction. Thailand legalized medicinal use of marijuana on Tuesday, and other Southeastern Asian countries may follow South Korea's lead in legalizing cannabidiol, or CBD. It's a non-psychoactive compound found in marijuana and hemp plants and used for treatment of certain medical problems.

"It's not just the U.S. now. It's spreading," said Ben Curren, CEO of Green Bits, a San Jose, California, company that develops software for marijuana retailers and businesses.

Curren's firm is one of many that blossomed as the industry grew. He started the company in 2014 with two friends. Now, he has 85 employees, and the company's software processes $2.5 billion in sales transactions a year for more than 1,000 U.S. retail stores and dispensaries.

Green Bits raised $17 million in April, pulling in money from investment firms including Snoop Dogg's Casa Verde Capital. Curren hopes to expand internationally by 2020.

"A lot of the problem is keeping up with growth," he said.

Legal marijuana was a $10.4 billion industry in the U.S. in 2018 with a quarter-million jobs devoted just to the handling of marijuana plants, said Beau Whitney, vice president and senior economist at New Frontier Data, a leading cannabis market research and data analysis firm. There are many other jobs that don't involve direct work with the plants but they are harder to quantify, Whitney said.

Investors poured $10 billion into cannabis in North America in 2018, twice what was invested in the last three years combined, he said, and the combined North American market is expected to reach more than $16 billion in 2019.

"Investors are getting much savvier when it comes to this space because even just a couple of years ago, you'd throw money at it and hope that something would stick," he said. "But now investors are much more discerning."

Increasingly, U.S. lawmakers see that success and want it for their states.

Nearly two-thirds of U.S. states now have legalized some form of medical marijuana.

Voters in November made Michigan the 10th state — and first in the Midwest — to legalize recreational marijuana. Governors in New York and New Jersey are pushing for a similar law in their states next year, and momentum for broad legalization is building in Pennsylvania and Illinois.

"Let's legalize the adult use of recreational marijuana once and for all," New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said last week.

With all its success, the U.S. marijuana industry continues to be undercut by a robust black market and federal law that treats marijuana as a controlled substance like heroin. Financial institutions are skittish about cannabis businesses, even in U.S. states where they are legal, and investors until recently have been reluctant to put their money behind pot.

Marijuana businesses can't deduct their business expenses on their federal taxes and face huge challenges getting insurance and finding real estate for their brick-and-mortar operations.

"Until you have complete federal legalization, you're going to be living with that structure," said Marc Press, a New Jersey attorney who advises cannabis businesses.

At the start of the year, the industry was chilled when then-U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions rescinded a policy shielding state-licensed medical marijuana operators from federal drug prosecutions. Ultimately the move had minimal impact because federal prosecutors showed little interest in going after legal operators.

Sessions, a staunch marijuana opponent, later lost his job while President Donald Trump said he was inclined to support an effort by U.S. Sen. Cory Gardner, a Colorado Republican, to relax the federal prohibition.

Blumenauer's "blueprint" to legalize marijuana also calls for the federal government to provide medical marijuana for veterans, more equitable taxation for marijuana businesses and rolling back federal prohibitions on marijuana research, among other things.

"We have elected the most pro-cannabis Congress in history and more important, some of the people who were roadblocks to our work ... are gone," Blumenauer said. "If we're able to jump-start it in the House, I think there will be support in the Senate, particularly if we deal with things that are important, like veterans' access and banking."

Local offices closed by partial federal shutdown

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

The partial government shutdown has had some impact on local offices. But it's hard to find out exactly how, because those offices are closed and spokespeople are not available by phone, or even by email.

President Donald Trump has refused to sign a bill authorizing government funding for non-essential services until his demand for money to build a wall along the southern border is met. Democrats, who take control of the House on Jan. 3, are refusing to give him what he wants, and it's not known how long the shutdown may last.

Until then, many government employees have either been furloughed or are working without pay until the funding bill is signed.

While some locally based federal services, like the U.S. Postal Service and the federal courts, remain in regular operation, other local offices, like the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Forest Service, are closed during the shutdown.

Services provided locally by the USDA include housing loans, rural energy programs, and rural business development grants. The Forest Service, under the USDA's umbrella, manages and maintains forests and grasslands, and also provide services like wildland firefighting and forest research. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, managed by the U.S. Department of the Interior, manages national wildlife refuges in the area including Umatilla, Cold Springs and McKay Creek.

Public information officers from the USDA, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Forest Service had recorded voicemails stating that they were on furlough, or were closed due to the shutdown. The USDA statewide PIO said she would not have access to email, either, during the time of the shutdown.

Eric Watrud, the new supervisor of the Umatilla National Forest, said most of the staff was on furlough. He declined to comment further on what specific positions have been affected, and said the national office was handling all inquiries. The national office also had a recorded voicemail saying that due to the shutdown, they could not answer media requests.

OES chorale warms up for spring concert

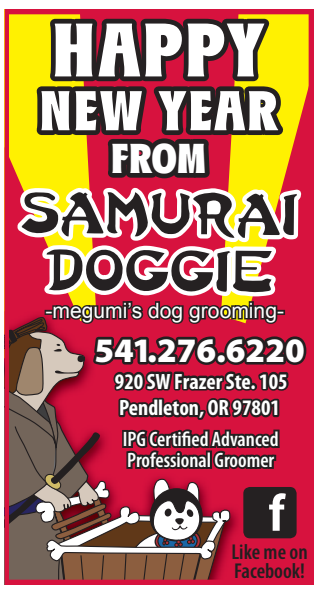
PENDLETON — The Oregon East Symphony Chorale is already looking forward to its spring performance.

Led by assistant chorale conductor Steve Muller, rehearsals begin Jan. 7. They will be held Mondays from 7-8:30 p.m. at the Pendleton High School music department, 1800 N.W. Carden Ave. All local singers are invited to participate. There are no auditions or participation fee.

In collaboration with the Oregon East Symphony under the direction of Beau Benson, the Friday, March 15 concert includes a selection of opera choruses.

The chorale will perform "Triumphal March" from "Aida," "Va, Pensiero" from "Nabucco" and "Anvil Chorus" from "Il Trovatore," all by by Giuseppe Verdi; "Huntsman's Chorus" from "Der Freischütz" by Carl Maria von Weber; and the Act 1 finale of Gilbert and Sullivan's "H.M.S. Pinafore." Local retired opera singer and composer Quade Winter has provided revisions and English translations for some of the selections.

For more information or to make arrangements to obtain the chorale music prior to the rehearsals, contact the symphony office at 541-276-0320 or info@oregoneastsymphony.org.



BRIEFLY

Good Shepherd collects coats for count

HERMISTON — The education department at Good Shepherd Health Care System is seeking new or clean and gently used winter coats.

During the annual "Point in Time Count," people involved with the effort will do more than tally how many people they come in contact with. The annual counts are conducted to help policymakers and program administrators track progress toward the goal of ending homelessness.

As winter sets in, the temperatures are becoming more frigid. In order to distribute coats to those in need, they need to be dropped off by Monday, Jan. 28 in the education department at Good Shepherd, 610 N.W. 11th St., Hersmiton. For more information, call 541-667-3509.

ESD encourages recognizing teachers

PENDLETON — Students, parents, school staff and community members are invited to recognize the hard work of educators who may be worthy of receiving an award.

Nominations are now open for the Regional Teacher of the Year award. Each education service district in Oregon will select a regional teacher, who will receive a cash prize of $500. One of the regional winners will be named the 2020 Oregon Teacher of the Year in September 2019. Anyone can nominate a teacher from any Oregon school district.

"It's great to have people nominate teachers they know and admire, so we have a bigger pool of applicants from which to choose our recipient," said Michele Madril, director of communication at InterMountain Education Service District.

To nominate someone, visit www.oregonteacheroftheyear.org. For more information, contact Jenni Knaus, program coordinator, at jenni.knaus@state.or.us.

eomedia group
eomediagroup.com
The most valuable and respected source of local news, advertising and information for our communities.
eomediagroup.com

WILDHORSE RESORT & CASINO
12/28 -1/2
Cineplex Show Times
$5 Classic Movie
1/1/19 • 12pm
THE CHASE (NR)
THE MULE (R)
2:00* 4:30 7:10 9:40
AQUAMAN (PG13)
3:40* 6:50
3D 12:30* 10:00
BUMBLEBEE (PG13)
11:00* 1:30* 4:00 6:40 9:30
MARY POPPINS RETURNS (PG)
1:20* 4:10 7:00 9:50
SPIDER-MAN:
INTO THE SPIDER-VERSE (PG)
11:20* 1:50* 4:20 6:50 9:20
MORTAL ENGINES (PG13)
11:10*
* Matinee Pricing
wildhorseresort.com • 541-966-1850
Pendleton, OR I-84 - Exit 216

WILDHORSE RESORT & CASINO
1/2/2019
Cineplex Show Times
$5 Classic Movie
Today • 12pm
THE CHASE (NR)
THE MULE (R)
2:00* 4:30 7:10 9:40
AQUAMAN (PG13)
3:40* 6:50
3D 12:30* 10:00
BUMBLEBEE (PG13)
11:00* 1:30* 4:00 6:40 9:30
MARY POPPINS RETURNS (PG)
1:20* 4:10 7:00 9:50
SPIDER-MAN:
INTO THE SPIDER-VERSE (PG)
4:20 6:50 9:20
MORTAL ENGINES (PG13)
11:10*
* Matinee Pricing
wildhorseresort.com • 541-966-1850
Pendleton, OR I-84 - Exit 216

Agape House Presents another fun
Murder Mystery Dinner Theatre
Murder at
DEADWOOD SALOON
New Years Eve
Monday, December 31st • 6-9 PM
Altrusa Room at Agape House
500 Harper Road - Hermiston, OR
$35 PER PERSON
• BBQ Pork Loin or Beef Tri-Tip
• Red Potato Salad or Broccoli Salad
• Baked Beans • Rolls • Dessert
Western Attire Welcome but not required!
Limited Seating • Catered by Simply Catering
AGAPE HOUSE
Call Dave at
541.567.8774 or 541.571.7293
for more Info and Tickets

Mom & Baby Support Group

We meet every Friday 9AM -11AM
at St Anthony Hospital
in Conference Rooms 3 & 4
This support group is Free and
specifically geared toward
Moms and Caregivers.
We provide Free snacks, support,
breastfeeding help and baby weigh ins.
CHI St. Anthony Hospital
Imagine better health.
St. Anthony Clinic
3001 St. Anthony Way
Pendleton, Oregon
www.sahpendleton.org