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At This School, It's Marijuana in Every Class

By [TAMAR LEWIN](#)

SOUTHFIELD, Mich. — At most colleges, [marijuana](#) is very much an extracurricular matter. But at [Med Grow Cannabis College](#), marijuana is the curriculum: the history, the horticulture and the legal how-to's of Michigan's new medical marijuana program.

“This state needs jobs, and we think medical marijuana can stimulate the state economy with hundreds of jobs and millions of dollars,” said Nick Tennant, the 24-year-old founder of the college, which is actually a burgeoning business (no baccalaureates here) operating from a few bare-bones rooms in a Detroit suburb.

The six-week, \$485 primer on medical marijuana is a cross between an agricultural extension class covering the growing cycle, nutrients and light requirements (“It's harvest time when half the trichomes have turned amber and half are white”) and a gathering of serious potheads, sharing stories of their best highs (“Smoke that and you are ... medicated!”).

The only required reading: “Marijuana Horticulture: The Indoor/Outdoor Medical Grower's Bible” by Jorge Cervantes.

Even though the business of growing medical marijuana is legal under Michigan's new [law](#), there is enough nervousness about the enterprise that most students at a recent class did not want their names or photographs used. An instructor also asked not to be identified.

“My wife works for the government,” one student said, “and I told my mother-in-law I was going to a small-business class.”

While California's medical marijuana program, the country's oldest, is now big business, with hundreds of dispensaries in Los Angeles alone, the Michigan program, which started in April, is more representative of [what is happening in other states](#) that have legalized medical marijuana.

Under the Michigan law, patients whose doctors certify their medical need for marijuana can grow up to 12 cannabis plants themselves or name a “caregiver” who will grow the plants and sell the product. Anyone over 21 with no felony drug convictions can be a caregiver for up to five patients. So far, the [Department of Community Health](#) has registered about 5,800 patients and 2,400 caregivers.

For Mr. Tennant, who is certified as both a caregiver and a patient — he said he has stomach problems and anxiety — Med Grow replaces the auto detailing business he started straight out of high school, only to see it founder when the economy contracted. Med Grow began offering its course in September, with new classes starting every month.

On a recent Tuesday, two teachers led a four-hour class, starting with Todd Alton, a botanist who provided no tasting samples as he talked the students through a list of cannabis recipes, including crockpot cannabutter, chocolate canna-ganache and greenies (the cannabis alternative to brownies).

The second instructor, who would not give his name, took the class through the growing cycle, the harvest and the curing techniques to increase marijuana's potency.

Mr. Tennant said he saw the school as the hub of a larger business that will sell supplies to its graduate medical marijuana growers, offer workshops and provide a network for both patient and caregiver referrals. Already, Med Grow is a gathering place for those interested in medical marijuana. The whiteboard in the reception room lists names and numbers of several patients looking for caregivers, and a caregiver looking for patients.

The students are a diverse group: white and black, some in their 20s, some much older, some employed, some not. Some keep their class attendance, and their growing plans, close to the chest.

"I've just told a couple of people I can trust," said Jeffery Butler, 27. "It's a business opportunity, but some people are still going to look at you funny. But I'm going to do it anyway."

Scott Austin, an unemployed 41-year-old student, said he and two partners were planning to go into medical marijuana together.

"I never smoked marijuana in my life," he said. "I heard about this at a business expo a couple of months ago."

Because the Michigan program is so new, gray areas in the law have not been tested, creating real concern for some students. For example, it is not legal to start growing marijuana before being officially named a caregiver to a certified patient, but patients who are sick, certified and ready to buy marijuana generally do not want to wait through the months of the growing cycle until a crop is ready. So for the time being, coordinating entry into the business feels to some like a kind of Catch-22.

Students say they are getting all kinds of extra help and ideas from going to class.

"I want to learn all the little tricks, everything I can," said Sue Maxwell, a student who drives each week from her home four hours north of Detroit. "It's a big investment, and I want to do it right."

Ms. Maxwell, who works at a bakery, is already a caregiver — in the old, nondrug sense of the word — to a few older people for whom she thinks medical marijuana might be a real boon.

"I fix their meals, and I help with housekeeping," Ms. Maxwell said. "I have an 85-year-old lady who has no appetite. I don't know if she'd have any interest in medical marijuana, but I bet it would help her."

Ms. Maxwell said her plan to grow marijuana was slow in hatching.

"We were talking at the bakery all summer," she said. "Just joking around, I said: 'I'm going to grow medical marijuana. I'm a gardener, I've always dreamed of having a greenhouse, I think it would be great.' And then I suddenly thought, hey, I really am going to grow medical marijuana."

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