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Michigan farm expert opens Marijuana U.

By [Andrea Billups](#)

5:45 a.m., Wednesday, November 11, 2009

SOUTHFIELD, Mich. | Nearly a year after voters in this economically disadvantaged state overwhelmingly passed a ballot initiative approving the consumption of medicinal marijuana, a new trade school has opened its doors to educate aspiring growers.



Med Grow Cannabis College, located in the Detroit suburb of Southfield, is set to graduate its first class of students later this month. Its co-founder and president, Nick Tennant, the 24-year-old son of a General Motors Corp. employee, said he sees a significant opportunity to teach standards and safety in an industry that can eventually improve the state's sagging business climate.

"This is profitable and poised for tremendous growth," Mr. Tennant said.

Although some might jokingly call him the dope dean, Mr. Tennant is serious, even as his appearance is blond, hip and wholesome.

"A lot of people think you can pick up a book, put some seeds in the soil, shine some lights and you'll have a crop," he said of the information needed to grow pot well. "But there are so many variables, and it's like a trade to grow it -- with skills like a master plumber or electrician."

So far, there doesn't seem to be any opposition to this trade school.

In a spacious facility featuring a lab, a classroom and growing rooms, students take a six-week night course that covers botany, horticulture, business, law, history -- even cooking with a trained chef who teaches how pot can be included with such dishes as sushi -- all in an effort to cultivate quality medical-grade marijuana.

Roger McDaniel, a disabled carpenter and former semitrailer mechanic, and his wife, Valeri, from Taylor, Mich., are taking the classes. They said the education is far more in-depth than they ever imagined.

Mr. McDaniel, 53, who was injured in a motorcycle accident, said marijuana has helped ease his symptoms in a more natural way than prescription medications. He and his wife enjoy gardening and said the course work is an extension of their interests as well as a way to improve their quality of life.

"Instead of living on all these pills, the Vicodins and Lortabs that tear up your insides, this gives you the pain relief and you are not damaging your body with all these chemicals," Mr. McDaniel said of his medical marijuana use.

Most surprising about the classes? "The whole walk of folks we've come across there," Mrs. McDaniel said. "It's just a real mesh of people - from young folks to people our age."

Perry Belcher, who lives near Flint, Mich., teaches the History of Cannabis class at Med Grow and said he's interested in providing facts -- not talking politics -- even as the issue has divided the nation.

"As a patient, I can testify to the results of this," he said. "I want to make sure that they get the best knowledge."

Mr. Belcher added that marijuana has been used medicinally since 6000 B.C. and by many cultures around the world. But he said only in the 20th century did it become a prohibition issue and was demonized as harmful. Now, he said, with more states enacting medical marijuana laws, the culture around its importance medically is changing.

"The first part of my class is called the pros and cons," he said. "I let people make the decision on their own on whether they feel this is right or not."

Mr. Tennant, a native of Center Line, Mich., came up with the idea for Med Grow in April with the intention to launch a school where aspiring growers could learn the right way to cultivate clean, high-quality pot. By May, he and partner Nathan Johnston, who serves as the school's director of horticulture, had a business plan to go along with their entrepreneurial drive.

After advertising in area publications and through social networking sites, the first class of 30 students began on Sept. 14 in an office that was transformed into a classroom, where students could train on high-tech equipment. Courses are held on weeknights from 6 to 10 p.m., and the cost of the class is \$475.

Among the members of Med Grow's first class are two reverends, including one minister who works in an AIDS ministry and wanted to learn more about how marijuana can ease symptoms of that disease.

Mr. Tennant said interest is high as more patients and caregivers embrace the new Michigan law, which was passed 63 percent to 37 percent by statewide ballot initiative in November 2008 and is being watched by advocates in other Midwestern states. It allows patients who have received a doctor's permission to legally possess 2.5 ounces of medical marijuana and to keep 12 marijuana plants for their personal use. It also allows residents to apply to be caregivers who can grow and distribute marijuana for up to five people who have state permits to use it.

Through Oct. 1, more than 6,500 Michigan residents have received state-issued permits to grow and use marijuana to help alleviate symptoms of certain medical problems, according to the Michigan Department of Community Health. Spokesman James McCurtis Jr. said his agency is receiving 59 applications for permits per day and that number is rising.

Med Grow is not the nation's first marijuana growing school. California's Oaksterdam University was founded in 2007 and has campuses in Oakland, Los Angeles and North Bay, where students are taught growing techniques as well as the business of the marijuana industry.

Greg Francisco, executive director of the Michigan Medical Marijuana Association, said that he, too, is involved with teaching courses as part of a traveling seminar series from the North American Cultivator College. He travels across the state to teach seminars with a credentialed faculty much the same as those at Med Grow.

"Teaching is really important," Mr. Francisco said. "People really want to know how they can grow this

medicine and help patients."

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