

MEDICAL MARIJUANA

SC pot club closes suddenly

Health
Patients Collective was one of city's two dispensaries

By JASON HOPPIN

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SANTA CRUZ — The number of Santa Cruz medical marijuana dispensaries was halved last weekend when the Santa Cruz Patients Collective suddenly closed its doors.

No reasons were given for the closure, and owner Ken Sampson could not be reached to comment. Speculation on why it closed ran the gamut from Sampson simply tiring of running the business to the landlord growing concerned about a recent federal crackdown on the state's cannabis industry.

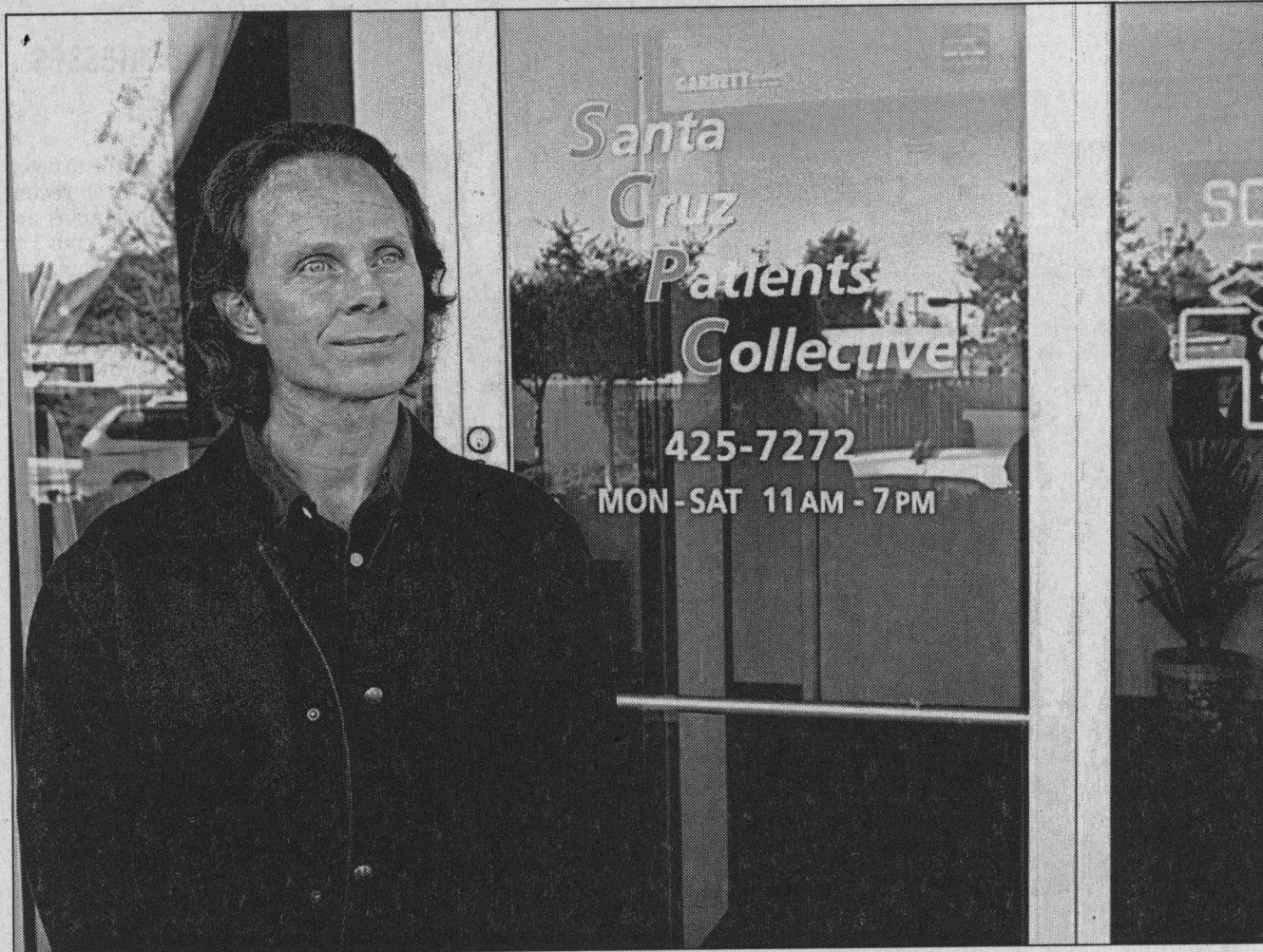
"His heart was in the right place," said Ben Rice, a local attorney who works with medical marijuana clubs. "He was one of the first guys to really insist on the quality of the medicine. He was very determined to make sure the patients were not getting an adulterated product."

If the crackdown, which has directly and indirectly claimed numerous dispensaries statewide, contributed to the collective's closure, it could be the second one to shut its doors after California's four U.S. attorneys joined forces to enforce federal prohibitions of the marijuana trade.

Earlier, Live Oak's Creme de Cana closed, partly due to legal uncertainties that emerged after the federal enforcement effort began. One of those uncertainties has to do with building owners where dispensaries are housed, with the federal government warning some landlords that they could lose their buildings.

Marijuana advocates also say dozens of Californians involved in providing medical marijuana are now facing federal charges.

At the Patients Collective, formerly located at 115 Limekiln St., a



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL FILE

Ken Sampson in front of his Santa Cruz Patients Collective in Harvey West business park. The collective closed this week.

POT

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lone remaining sign refers patients to Santa Cruz's only other permitted pot club. Numerous other clubs operate outside city limits.

"If their patients want to come over here, they're welcome," said Calvin Maynor, who works at the Greenway Compassionate Relief in Santa Cruz, located blocks

from the Patients Collective.

Open since 2006, the collective quickly won over skeptical neighbors in the Harvey West area.

"He turned all those people around," Rice said.

Santa Cruz planner Mike Ferry said the city has never received complaints about Sampson's operation. But how the city fills the now-vacant permit — potentially extremely valuable, even amid the federal crackdown — appears to be an open question.

Ferry, who has not been contacted by Sampson, said the business would have to stay dark for six months before a permit is reissued. But he did not know how the city would choose a second licensee if more than one potential operator stepped forward.

"That's an interesting question," Ferry said.

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