

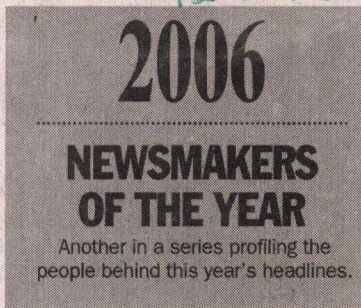
ANDREA TISCHLER: FORMER INN OWNER FIGHTS FOR MARIJUANA

By SHANNA McCORD
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — When city voters passed Measure K in November, Santa Cruz went on the map as a national leader in the effort to legalize marijuana.

Measure K forces Santa Cruz police officers to make adult marijuana crimes their lowest priority. The measure, primarily organized by Andrea Tischler, won easily with more than 60 percent voter approval.

But Measure K is not just about Santa Cruz. Its design is part of a nationwide strategy to convince state and federal governments that marijuana should be a legal drug — taxed and regulated like alcohol



and tobacco.

"This really is an interim measure on the way to full legalization of marijuana for personal use," said Tischler, a longtime leader in many local marijuana causes.

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Dan Coyro/Sentinel file

Andrea Tischler celebrates on Election Day as returns indicate a victory for Measure K.

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"It's happening city by city. We're moving in that direction of legalizing marijuana in the state," she said.

The federal government, however, has not wavered on its stance that marijuana is an illegal drug.

Since California voters approved Proposition 215 in 1996 to allow sick people to use marijuana to ease pain and suffering, the medical marijuana cause has faced numerous lawsuits and investigations by federal authorities.

Measure K faces potential legal problems as police are sworn to uphold state laws, which say marijuana is an illegal drug when used recreationally. Any effort to legalize the drug is expected to be hard-fought in court.

Tischler, who recently closed the medical marijuana bed and breakfast she and her partner had run for six years on Laurel Street and moved to Hawaii, stumbled into the marijuana movement in the 1960s, a decade synonymous with liberal attitudes.

She was 22 and teaching social

studies at a Chicago high school in 1965 when some colleagues offered Tischler her first joint.

"I said, 'Geez, this isn't bad.' I didn't have a hangover the next morning like I did with alcohol," she said.

From that first experience, Tischler has been fighting for the right to smoke pot legally.

"It's the same as someone coming home from work and having a couple of martinis," she said.

After stints in Guam and San Francisco, Tischler moved to Davenport in 1988 and quickly became involved in local marijuana issues.

In 1994, Tischler convinced administrators at Pacific Elementary School in Davenport, which her son attended, to drop the DARE program because she believed nurses should be teaching the effects of drugs, not police officers.

Marijuana issues are Tischler's cause celebre. She believes the drug is no worse for the human body than alcohol and tobacco.

"Marijuana makes people peaceful in their hearts and in their minds," she said.

Due to the work of Tischler and others who share her passion for pot, ordinances similar to Measure K have been passed in cities such as Oakland, Seattle, Santa Monica, Santa Barbara and San Francisco. More are on the way, she said.

The ordinances to make marijuana crimes a low priority for police seem to be picking up momentum across the county.

Mike Corral, who founded the Wo/Men's Medical Marijuana cop in 1993 with his wife, Valerie, believes legalized marijuana would allow police to focus on more serious crimes and generate more revenue for the government in the form

Inside Measure K

■ Adult marijuana crimes on private property are the lowest law enforcement priority.

■ Santa Cruz police are not allowed to participate in countywide marijuana busts.

■ Santa Cruz police are not allowed to testify in marijuana cases.

■ Citizens oversight committee, appointed by the City Council, will monitor police reports related to marijuana crimes.

■ Santa Cruz cannot accept federal funds designated for fighting marijuana crimes.

of new taxes. Government regulation of pot also would produce a safer, higher quality product, Corral said.

"I see general legalization as a win-win situation all around," he said. "There is a bigger wave building in America around general legalization."

Local police have said Measure K could hinder law enforcement efforts because marijuana is involved in many crimes in Santa Cruz.

The marijuana measure was put on the Santa Cruz ballot after at least 3,400 registered city voters signed their name to a petition earlier this year in support of easing up on pot smokers.

The local measure was funded almost entirely by Peter B. Lewis, a billionaire insurance tycoon in Cleveland who has spent millions of dollars to support marijuana causes nationwide.

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