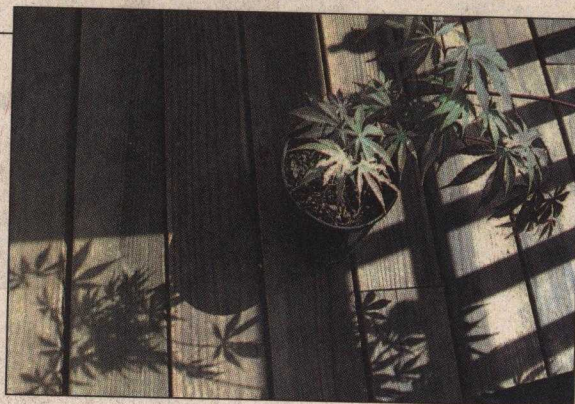


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HIGH-CLASS JOINT



New Santa Cruz inn opens for patrons who rely on medicinal marijuana — and some others



Drugs

BY JOHN WOOLFOLK
Mercury News Staff Writer

✓ **T**HEY'RE calling it the world's first "bed, bud and breakfast." Or you could call it hotel hemp — Santa Cruz's latest paean to pot.

Making its debut Thursday in a restored, 1860s Victorian with a cannabis-leaf mosaic on the front walk, the Compassion Flower Inn invites the ill to openly smoke medicinal marijuana while visiting the coast.

"They don't have to be in the closet," said co-owner Maria Mallek-Tischler. "They can be comfortable here."

Not sick? That's OK, too. The inn welcomes all travelers who appreciate the wacky weed's wonders, even if they don't smoke it. They can relax over parlor books on hemp and herbal healing, feast on hemp

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LEARN MORE

For more information on the inn, visit its Web site at www.compassionflowerinn.com



At top, a marijuana plant adorns the Compassion Flower Inn patio. Above, Anita Henri of Santa Cruz, who has liver cancer, smokes a medicinal marijuana cigarette. At left are Andrea Tischler, left, and her partner, Maria Mallek-Tischler, owners of the newly opened inn that drew patrons from as far away as Florida.

JOANNE HOYOUNG LEE — MERCURY NEWS

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JOANNE HOYOUNG LEE — MERCURY NEWS

This is the 1860s-era house in Santa Cruz that opened Thursday as the Compassion Flower Inn, for people who rely on medicinal marijuana.

Meeting need for weed

New inn opens for users of medicinal marijuana

■ HEMP HOTEL

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flower pancakes, wash with hemp soaps and shampoos, and dry off with hemp towels.

Arriving today will be guests from as far as Florida who booked all five rooms three months before the grand opening at prices running from \$125 to \$175 a night.

"Our phone's been ringing off the hook," Mallek-Tischler said.

It's hard to imagine a more sympathetic site for such an enterprise.

Just last week, the Santa Cruz City Council unanimously approved a law sanctioning medicinal marijuana clubs. The ordinance, modeled on a 1998 Oakland law, aims to bolster medicinal marijuana protections that California voters approved in 1996 under Proposition 215.

Santa Cruz's law, which takes effect May 11, came as a fortuitous coincidence for the Compassion Flower's owners, who'd begun work on their business three years ago.

"It seems like synchronicity of some kind," Mallek-Tischler said.

Even before the law, weed wasn't exactly unwelcome in Santa Cruz. The town is so liberal that some locals think the socialist councilman who wrote the marijuana law is conservative. County voters gave a resounding thumbs-up to medicinal marijuana four years before Proposition 215 passed.

Downtown storefronts give testimony to the city's tolerance for tokers. Just around the corner from the inn are shops stocked with T-shirts, tie-dyes and jewelry adorned with likenesses of cannabis leaves. Hemp clothes and all manner of pipes, bongs and hookahs line the shelves.

Down the street from the inn is Medi-Grow, a new business that provides medicinal marijuana-growing kits. And next month, Santa Cruz will host its third annual Hemp Expo, showcasing everything from paper to beer made from the cannabis plant.

"I couldn't get this kind of care or support or love anywhere else in the country," said James Greenbaum, a 45-year-old AIDS patient who came to Santa Cruz from Philadelphia to join a medicinal marijuana collective.

Greenbaum was among dozens of local patients and marijuana activists who gathered at the inn for grand-opening festivities that included a pagan blessing on an altar with a marijuana plant.

"This is a sanctuary," said local activist and medicinal marijuana user Theodora Kerry. "Most places in the country don't even recognize a patient's right to medical marijuana. This will dispel a lot of fear."



Handmade hemp soap is provided with other hemp-related toiletries for guests of the inn.

Mallek-Tischler and her partner, Andrea Tischler, have been medicinal marijuana activists since the 1980s, when they noted the drug's benefits to friends who were dying of AIDS.

They also restore old homes for a living, and originally considered opening a hemp-oriented restaurant. They switched to a bed-and-breakfast at the suggestion of their architect.

The Compassion Flower Inn, named after the passion flower herb, requires medicinal marijuana users to have a doctor's recommendation or show they're being treated for a disease for which the illicit drug is considered helpful. Smokers must bring their own marijuana, and may only smoke it outdoors in a "toking area" by the redwood hot tub.

City officials said the inn appears to satisfy terms of their new law.

"I support it," said Councilman Mike Rotkin, co-author of the law. "It wasn't the kind of thing we were thinking about, but I think it's probably covered by our ordinance."

Since Proposition 215, local police have trod lightly on medicinal marijuana, working with patient collectives to keep legitimate users from getting swept up in drug busts.

Even though the Compassion Flower Inn is just blocks from a high school and across the street from a Foster's Freeze, no complaints have arisen.

Local boosters think the inn is a grand idea, noting the owners' efforts to restore a crumbling historic home.

"It's beautifully refurbished," said Maggie Ivy, chief executive officer of the Santa Cruz County Conference and Visitors Council. "I think it will be nice new accommodations for visitors in Santa Cruz, with a special humane intention for certain people with illnesses."

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