

Local and national media photographers focus in on medical marijuana products during an event held Tuesday in front of Santa Cruz City Hall where the city oversaw the distribution of medical marijuana to patients.

Santa Cruz in spotlight

Medical marijuana handout garners national attention

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OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

The crowd at the medical marijuana giveaway outside city hall in Santa Cruz Tuesday was light-hearted, but the message given by the speakers wasn't. They spoke of pain, muscle spasms, severe weight loss and the trauma of having the federal government raid the farm where they grow the one medicine they say takes care of all of those symptoms without the side affects of conventional drugs — marijuana.

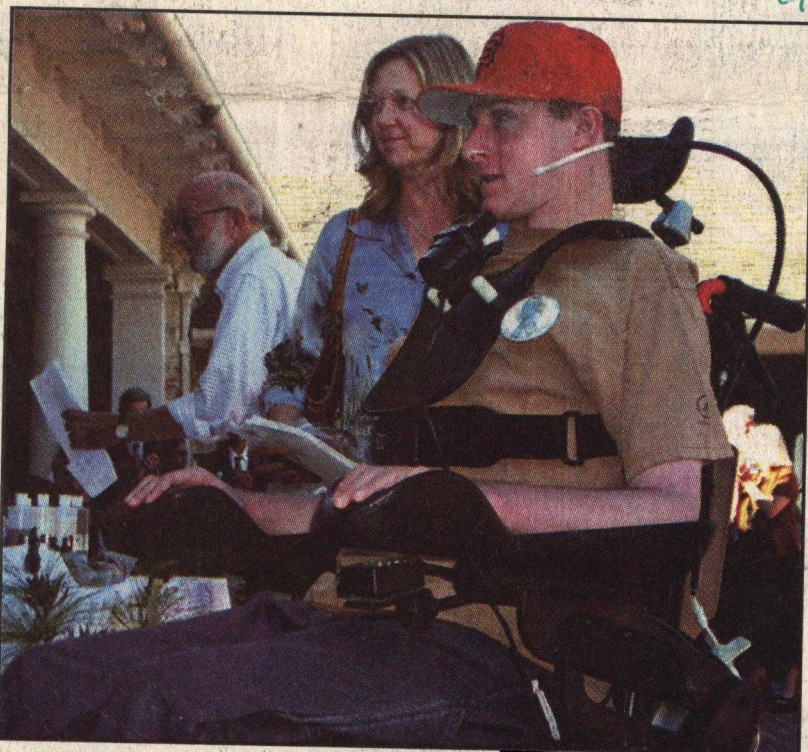
"I was in a surfing accident about two years ago," said 23-year-old quadriplegic Levi Castro, who is a member of the Women's Alliance for Medical Marijuana, which was raided Sept. 5 north of Santa Cruz. "I have involuntary muscle spasms, I lost about 50 pounds when I was in the hospital and I have a lot of nerve pain. It helps with all that."

WAMM provides medical marijuana, grown by members on a farm owned by Michael and Valerie Corral, to about 280 patients with recommendations from their doctors. The collective operates under a law approved by California voters in 1996. Although growing and distributing medical marijuana is legal under state law, the Supreme Court ruled last year that collectives like WAMM are not free from prosecution under federal law.

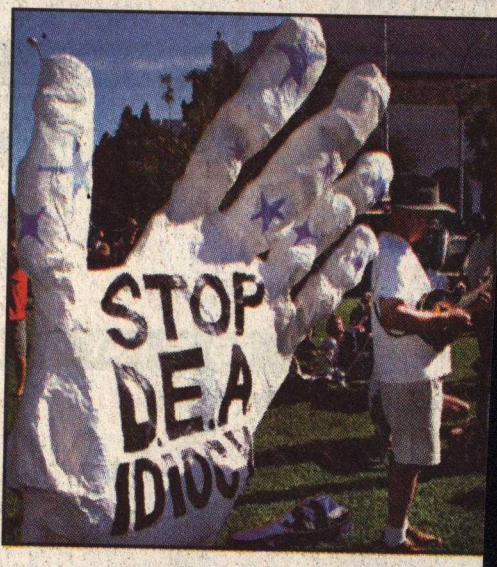
The Drug Enforcement Agency has already raided marijuana clubs in San Francisco, Oakland, Sebastapol and West Hollywood.

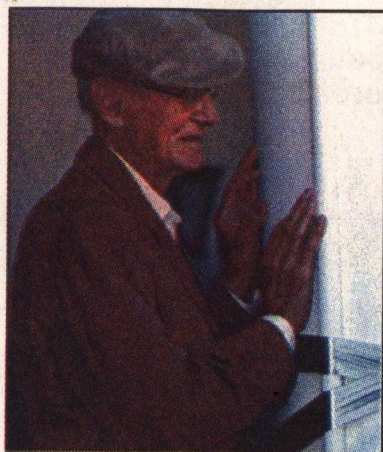
"I'm in pain all the time," said Tim Chambers, who has had colon cancer three times since 1988. "I don't use it (marijuana) recreationally. It is my medicine. If the DEA will

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LEFT: Medical marijuana patient Levi Castro, who was paralyzed in a surfing accident, gets help from his mother in picking up a package of marijuana. BELOW: A musician voices his ideas about medical marijuana and the law.





This man, who said his name was Van, 83, said marijuana has been of great help for his epilepsy and glaucoma.

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take away my cancer, I'll never smoke pot again."

Doctor Arnie Leff, a general family practitioner who serves many local HIV/AIDS patients, has written many recommendations for medical marijuana for his patients. He only writes recommendations for existing patients who either suffer from extreme weight loss, an inability to eat or a terminal illness.

"We're here because City Hall is a sanctuary to us because some federal agencies have taken a harassment position against us," he said. Often, many of his patients use Marinol, a concentrated form of THC, the active chemical in marijuana, before turning to the plant itself.

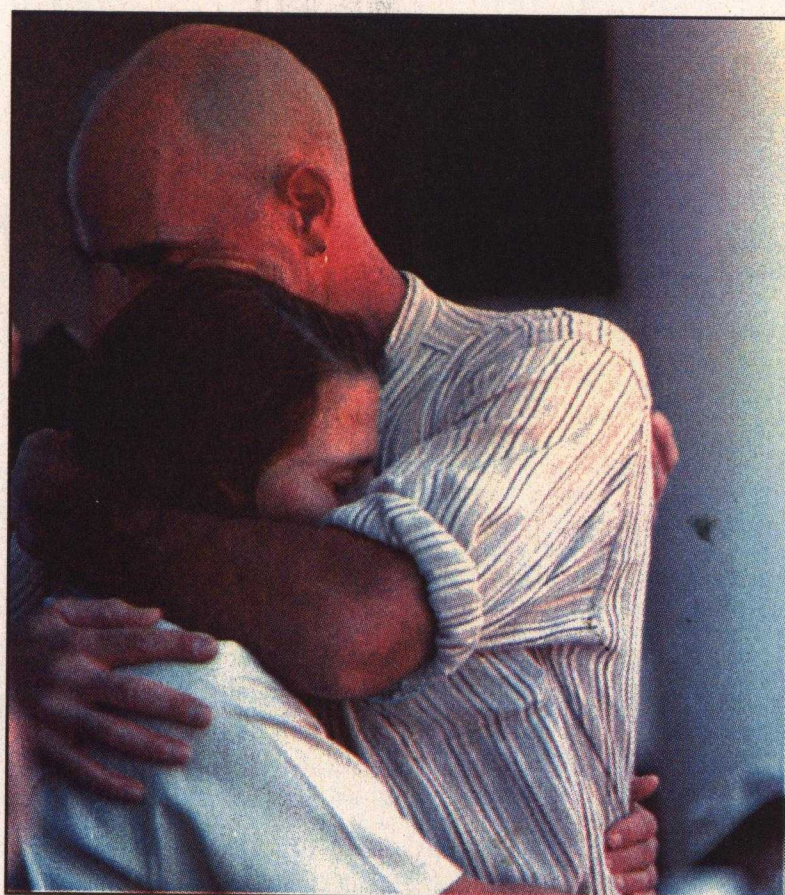
"For some reason, Marinol, which I can prescribe, doesn't always work," he said. "There are chemicals in the plant that aren't in Marinol."

One patient, who identified himself only by the name Van, said, "Medical marijuana has enabled me to stop taking medications that affected my heart." The 83-year-old glaucoma and epilepsy patient added, "It's helped me for almost seven years."

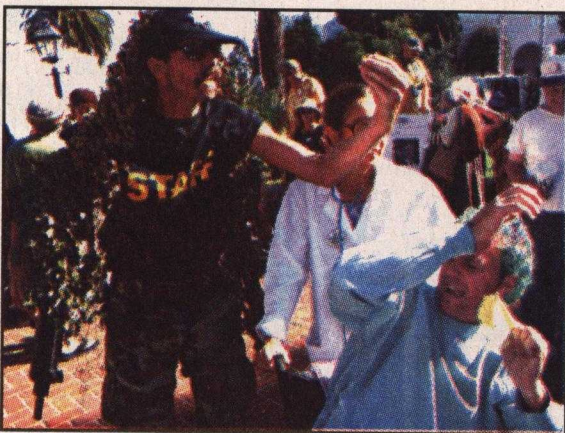
The Corrals have been in hiding since DEA agents raided the farm at their Davenport home. The raid netted 167 nearly mature plants.

"We are not the enemy," Valerie Corral told the crowd. "We are the hungry, we are the infirm, we are the dying ... and when we speak to the federal government, they have no ears for us."

Onlookers chanted slogans and



Valerie and Mike Corral embrace as speakers denounce the DEA raid on September 5 of their medical marijuana farm north of Santa Cruz.



Members of the street theater group Art and Revolution act out a mockery of the DEA raid of a Santa Cruz pot farm.

played guitars, and after the distribution of the marijuana to WAMM patients, members of the street performance group Art and Revolution re-enacted the raid of the farm with a military-looking man harassing a female doctor and a blue-haired patient in a wheelchair.

Plainclothes officers could be seen wandering among the crowd of more than 1,000 city and county officials, including Mayor Christopher Krohn and much of the Santa Cruz City Council, members of the press, onlookers and patients, however no arrests were made and

A green helicopter with unreadable markings circled over City Hall during the rally, pausing directly overhead when the 13 members chosen by pulling names from a hat went up one by one to collect their weekly ration of the drug, which was baked into muffins and brownies and other products.

"We monitored the situation carefully and we take all violations of the law seriously, but we decided not to confirm or deny our presence at the rally," DEA spokesman Richard Meyer said when asked about the helicopter.



Wayne Meyer (right) receives medical marijuana products from Jeremy Griffey, founding board member of Wo/man's Alliance for Medical Marijuana, and others Tuesday on the steps of City Hall in Santa Cruz.



Santa Cruz Mayor Christopher Krohn (right) holds up county supervisor Mardi Wormhoudt's hand as City Council member Tim Fitzmaurice and Suzanne Pheil look on.

arrests would be made, but implied that some action would be taken.

"We're still very concerned about the drug problem in Santa Cruz and we're willing to work with local law enforcement," he said. "It is regrettable that the mayor and the city took part in this action ... the mayor is not above the law."

When asked if any more raids were planned, Meyer said, "Anybody that is distributing marijuana, that is trafficking marijuana, should be worried about the DEA."

Suzanne Pheil, a post-polio patient who was woken up by DEA agents at the farm during the raid, said WAMM was not trafficking mar-

ijuana — its members grow marijuana for their collective use and does not charge any of its members.

"We are not the victims of drug traffickers — we are victims of the DEA," she said. "With a gun to my head the DEA stole the medicine that over 250 sick and dying people worked to grow."