

Reefer mattress



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel photos

'Bed, bud & breakfast' opens doors in Santa Cruz

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Drugs **SANTA CRUZ**
Christening the "tokers" deck, medical-marijuana advocates freely passed around victory joints, celebrating the opening of this one-of-a-kind bed and breakfast in downtown Santa Cruz.

"Let's medicate," said one gray-haired woman before lighting a tiny black pipe and taking a long drag. Others, old and young, plucked sweet-smelling buds from their personal stashes and rolled joints at the debut of the Compassion Flower Inn, a "bed, bud & breakfast" that caters to medical marijuana users and open-minded travelers interested in alternative lifestyles.

The Compassion Inn smokers joined tokers across America on Thursday, April 20 — 4/20 — in celebration of a counterculture holiday known as "420," the stoner New Year's.

Red-eyed tokers inhaled in groups large and small, public and private, indoors and out, marking a ritual that originated at San Rafael High School in 1971 by a group of teen-age potheads that would meet at 4:20 p.m. to get high.

While the scene at the inn was not entirely unlike a giggling dorm-style '70s

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Top: Anita Henri, wearing tropical bracelets, fires up her marijuana pipe at Thursday's opening of the Compassion Flower Inn, a 'bed, bud and breakfast' in Santa Cruz.

Left: Compassion Flower owners Maria Malleck-Tischler, left, and Andrea Tischler.

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pot party, the mood here was decidedly reflective.

"It's so wonderful to have it be so open," said Isadora Karcher, a Felton resident attending the inn's grand opening that began at — you guessed it — 4:20 p.m.

Karcher and other guests touring the 216 Laurel St. establishment couldn't help but let a mischievous snicker slip when they saw the tiled marijuana, leaf mosaic in the master suite's bathroom, complete with hemp toiletries and towels.

"This is a new age," said Daniel Duncan, eyes darting around the 135-year-old Victorian's half-million-dollar face-lift.

Too new perhaps for Santa Cruz police, who were unaware hemp hotel existed. Police and city officials are still grappling with the finer points of the city's ordinance allowing medical marijuana use passed earlier this month.

"Everybody is jumping into this before it is finalized," said Deputy Police Chief Jeff Locke, a co-author of the law. "I can see both sides of it. From their standpoint, this (fight to legalize medical marijuana) has been going on for years."

The ordinance allows city-recognized medical marijuana associations to provide the drug to qualified patients.

The inn's proprietors say they are not in the

supply business, but simply are providing a sanctuary for those who use marijuana to stave off suffering due to illnesses such as HIV and cancer.

Guests must provide their own pot and a physician's medical marijuana certification to "partake of their medicine in a safe, supportive environment."

"We've been in the medical marijuana movement for a long time," said Maria Malleck-Tischler, who co-owns the inn with partner Andrea Tischler. "We've seen a lot of friends die from AIDS. We've also seen that medical marijuana made their last days easier. We feel a lot of compassion and that is why we came up with this idea."

Business owners in the building next door have not objected to the venture, Malleck-Tischler said.

Aside from their Web site, the couple has done virtually no advertising. But the inn's five rooms, which range from \$125 to \$175 per night, are booked through July. Guests — the curious and the suffering — are coming from as far away as New Zealand, thanks to the overwhelming media attention the three-year labor of love has received.

"I wasn't prepared for that," Malleck-Tischler said of the coverage.

Neither was Chas Sneyers, who had a view of the action on the toking deck from his bar stool inside the Poet & Patriot Irish Pub.

"I live a block away and read about it in the New York Times," Sneyers laughed. "If it helps people, I think it is great."

more who went to last year's 420 festivities and planned on doing so again Thursday, said he didn't know who organized the event and doubted that any one person was behind it. "It's such a symbol in the subculture that everyone comes out for it," he said.

According to Steven Hager, editor of High Times, the holiday began in the California city of San Rafael in the early 1970s, when a small group of high school students called the Waldos began gathering every day at 4:20 p.m. to toke up at the foot of a statue of Louis Pasteur.

Soon, said Hager, the idea of taking a "420 Louie" spread, receiving wide publicity from the Grateful Dead, which was based in San Rafael then. Within a few years, people began referring to getting high as a 420, a code that would easily be missed by parents, teachers, police officers, and bosses, Hager said.

Around 1990, with so many people speaking of a 420, April 20th came to be viewed as "the ultimate 420."

"It's definitely a religious holiday," Hager said Thursday. "It's a ceremony that's being rit-

ualized and passed down as a day to protest the oppression of a way of life."

In general, though, most observers of 420 tend to view the event as a good excuse to get high, often in public, a place normally off limits to pot smoking.

"It's just a lot of fun, the stoner's 'Miller time,'" said Keith Stroup, executive director of the Washington-based National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, or NORML. "But I would say that as long as the government continues to arrest marijuana smokers, 420 will become a bigger and bigger event each year. It will become a national protest on prohibition eventually."

But some advocates of legalized marijuana look down on 420 as a black eye on an otherwise serious political movement. Denny Lane of the Vermont Grassroots Party, which supports marijuana's legalization, said Thursday, "I really don't believe in 420 because the press usually portrays it as a kid with a purple mohawk and a gold nose ring smoking a joint, when the issues are way more serious than that."