

# Pot is a fast-growing industry, and Oaksterdam is on it

OAKLAND FROM AI

battering rams and sledgehammers, carting away an estimated 60,000 cannabis plants and scattering the school's terrified faculty and students.

The university was devastated by the raid, which Oaksterdam founder Richard Lee dismissed as a "last-ditch effort" by federal authorities to enforce marijuana laws that were out of step with the times. Medical marijuana was approved by California voters in 1996. In the years since the raid, four states and the District of Columbia have legalized pot, making marijuana a legitimate business in many parts of America, worth an estimated \$3.5 billion a year.

Still, as Oaksterdam preaches the gospel of pot entrepreneurship, its history offers a lesson in harsh reality. Robert Raich, a lawyer who has twice argued legalization cases before the U.S. Supreme Court, makes that lesson explicit in Cannabusiness 102, where he warns students of the risk inherent in cultivating a Schedule I drug.

"Until the federal government changes the Controlled Substances Act," Raich said, "I teach how to create defenses against possible hostile action by the government."

Business at Oaksterdam is booming despite that risk. Today, the school employs 20 staff members and 150 instructors, including some of the biggest stars in the cannabis universe. Debby Goldsberry co-founded the Berkeley Patients Group medical cannabis collective, and Ed Rosenthal is often cited as the world's leading authority on marijuana cultivation. The Oakland lecture hall holds 50 students and every seat is paid for.

**"Oaksterdam has helped people understand that cannabis is just another business."**

Chris Conrad, who lectures on cannabis history and politics

The school is also branching out to satellite locations. There is a new campus in the works in Las Vegas, where two four-day seminars sold out this year, with 250 students paying as much as \$995 apiece.

Last month, the school conducted a conference in Orlando, where about 300 doctors and nurses earned continuing education credits after learning to use cannabis to treat an array of medical conditions, including glaucoma and glioblastoma.



ABOVE: Debby Goldsberry, co-founder of the Berkeley Patients Group medical cannabis collective, leads a class on procurement and allocation at Oaksterdam University in Oakland, Calif. BELOW: Derek Stephanoff tends to a grow tent with cannabis plants at the school.

And the school routinely advises politicians from places including California and Jamaica on topics such as how to appraise applications for medical marijuana and dispensary licenses, and how to promote marijuana research and development.

At the main campus, the walls display photos of the school's 23,000 graduates, who range in age from 18 to 65 and represent every state and 30 countries. Last month, about 30 California lawmakers drove from Sacramento for lectures on taxation and regulation, studying up for the possible passage next fall of an initiative that would legalize marijuana for recreational use.

Aseem Sappal, the school's provost and dean, said he wants to build Oaksterdam's credibility as a serious institution of higher learning.

"We have high school grads sitting next to oncologists and city council members. We have senators, governors, former congressmen — this is who we're working with," Sappal said. "We have skepticism because it's a big joke, people just smoking pot. But the country is moving in this direction for a reason."

As the legalization movement grows, Oaksterdam is even attracting students who say they have never smoked pot. One is



Kennedy, the retired biology teacher, whose primary interest is in the plant's medicinal benefits.

"My own sister thinks I've lost my mind," she said. "But these are not crazy people. These are not potheads. When you come here, you see it: These are businesspeo-

ple."

Kennedy is enrolled in the Classic Semester — 35 credit hours of basic and advanced classes during which an instructor lectures on the history and politics of cannabis, the plant's nutritional and water requirements, its medical benefits, culinary delights and methods of ingestion.

There are also classes on economics, business management, legal rights and cannabusiness. One of the messages implicit in an Oaksterdam education is that there is a lot of money waiting to be made.

"But it has to be done in a responsible, politically astute way," stressed Chris Conrad, who lectures on cannabis history and politics. He is the author of several books on the subjects, and he has testified as an expert witness in hundreds of state, federal and military trials.

"Oaksterdam has helped people understand that cannabis is just another business," he said. "They don't let you sell a hamburger without a license, and

they won't let you sell marijuana without a license."

That makes sense to Chris Bergan, 22. About a year ago, Bergan dropped out of West Chester University in West Chester, Pa., to go into medical marijuana delivery.

"Business took off, and I started making way more than I would ever have with my English degree," said Bergan, who runs his business entirely on his iPhone.

Oaksterdam offers a superior education as well, Bergan said.

"Over the last month, I've learned more about something I've been consuming since I was 14 than in all the years in between. It's an incredible education. Did you know that there are 22,000 peer-reviewed studies on marijuana in the medical literature? I had no idea."

The business potential of pot looms large at Oaksterdam. Australia is on the verge of approving medical marijuana. Canada is expected to legalize recreational use for adults. And a new study by CBRE Research, a commercial

real-estate research company, shows that pot has powered the Denver real-estate market since Colorado legalized marijuana last year: More than a third of industrial space leased in the city is now used for marijuana cultivation.

Bergan says he hardly knows which prospects to pursue first. Whatever he decides, Oaksterdam says it is there to help.

"You have no idea how many people come here and end up going into partnership with someone they meet," Sappal said. "If there's a student in a class of 50 who's an electrician, that's a tremendous opportunity for networking. Because when you have an indoor grow, who's going to set it up? You want someone who's friendly."

When Lee founded Oaksterdam in 2007, there was no place like it in America. A paraplegic who smoked pot to prevent leg spasms, Lee was a strong advocate for legalizing, regulating and taxing medical marijuana.

Then he went to Amsterdam, where he noticed "a teaching thing called Cannabis College, a little cultivation place next to one of the seed companies." Back in Oakland, he placed a classified ad in the back of an alternative newspaper and, "as soon as the paper hit the racks, the phone started ringing."

Thus, Oaksterdam — an amalgam of Oakland and Amsterdam — was born.

The school quickly grew to include 100 instructors on a 30,000-square-foot campus. But it also became a federal target. To save Oaksterdam — and himself — Lee cut off all involvement with the school and its related businesses, which include a dispensary and a plant nursery.

Although Oaksterdam never closed, it lost its lease and was forced to relocate from its old three-story building to a much smaller storefront. Its staff shrank overnight from 53 to three.

Ultimately, no charges were filed against Lee or the university. These days, he mostly works alongside his mother, Ann Lee, who in 2012 founded Republicans Against Marijuana Prohibition.

And the school is so much a part of local politics that Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf (D) held a fundraiser at Oaksterdam a few weeks before her election last year. Meanwhile, students are once again pouring in from all across the nation.

On a recent morning, instructor John Geluardi addressed 42 students in a lecture hall crowded with grow tents packed with pungent plants under full-spectrum lights. When Geluardi asked how many people were from California, three students raised their hands.

Geluardi is a journalist and the author of "Cannabiz: The Explosive Rise of the Medical Marijuana Industry." He teaches economics, predicting boom times to come if marijuana is legalized and taxed nationwide.

But those riches will be harder to realize until Congress changes the Controlled Substances Act, Geluardi said.

"Federal law makes it very difficult to do business. If you're running a medical cannabis dispensary, you're always on tenterhooks," he told his students.

"Becoming a white market economy," he said, would be "cannabis heaven."

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I am a Warrior of God and of the Great Nation of Ecuador. My mission in this war is to take Ecuador from a state of poverty to becoming one of the richest per capita countries in the world. With the strength and spirit of God behind me and with my love for Ecuador in my heart, I will destroy anyone standing in my way as I will destroy corruption, drugs, poverty, injustice, and dictatorship. I will eradicate all that has brought us to the verge of being an uncivilized state. I want to turn Ecuador into one of the most civilized and advanced countries in the world.

Ecuadorians have what it takes to achieve this. Why haven't they made it yet? Because of a lack of education, a lack of financial resources, and because of all the evil politicians who preach that they dedicate themselves to stealing from hardworking rich people in order to give to the poor but instead dedicate themselves to stealing from the poor. The state belongs to the poor and to all the citizens of Ecuador. Our country is filled with newly rich thieves who have ransacked government coffers. They have done so in such a way that Ecuador, a country where there is bananas, there is shrimp, there is coffee, there is cacao, there is copper, there is gold, there is oil, there is tourism, and there is fishing, is immersed in poverty on account of these evil politicians.

My mission is to bring financial resources to Ecuador. I will establish the world's most modern educational systems and provide the necessary financial resources so that Ecuadorians will become rich instead of being poor and have the ability to turn this country into one of the richest in the world.

My mission is that everyone will have cement housing. My mission is that food, nowadays laden with taxes, will be available at low costs as a result of stripping away taxes and increasing production. This way every Ecuadorian can afford good and inexpensive nourishment.

My mission is to provide health for each and every Ecuadorian and to do away with illness and all that prevents Ecuadorians from becoming people like none other.

I will march ahead of Ecuador leading the way for all Ecuadorians. I will be in the middle of the march inspiring Ecuadorians who may be tired. I will be behind the march pushing those Ecuadorians getting left behind because Ecuador and Alvaro Noboa are one in the same. I am Ecuador and Ecuador is Alvaro Noboa!

My final mission is not Washington's dream, or Bolivar's dream, or San Martin's dream, or Colonel Chavez's dream. My final mission is to unite the Americas into one country, a single union. At that moment there will be no need for resources from outside America. In America, from Canada to Brazil, there is everything Americans need.

When I pass away, being the richest man in Ecuador, my greatest legacy will not be my wealth. My greatest legacy will be to bequeath a fighting spirit, a working spirit, a spirit of strength, a spirit of persistence and a respect for freedom to all Ecuadorians. I will transmit to each Ecuadorian the absence of fear that God has given me.

I will comply with each letter I have written because I love Ecuador and it is my mission entrusted to me by God. I will fulfill this mission because it is the goal of my life. When I am gone I will leave this legacy to all of you.

Glory to God!  
Long live Ecuador!  
Onward Ecuadorians Onward!

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