

# East Oregonian 10-2-07

## Group defends medical marijuana

*MAMA members speak at BMCC*

**PENDLETON** - Alice Ivany still has nightmares about the day she lost her arm.

The horrific accident happened as Ivany operated machinery at a plywood mill in 1977. The men's gloves she wore were too big for her hands and they were wet.

As she fed lumber into the machine, her right glove got sucked into the machine taking her arm with it. The emergency shut-off bar, three feet above her head, hung just out of reach.

"I was in the machine for 45 minutes," Ivany remembers. "They had to use a cutting torch to get me out."

She used prescription pain killers to calm the fire in her body for years, but couldn't take the side effects such as stomach cramping and nausea.

"It felt like someone was cutting inside my stomach with a pair of tweezers," Ivany said.

Then, several years ago, she got wind of Oregon's medical marijuana program. To her amazement, marijuana - or cannabis - eased her pain with few side effects.

"It has improved my quality of life - I am more lucid," she said. "It has analgesic and anti-inflammatory properties."

Ivany soon joined a group called Mothers Against Misuse and Abuse that champions the medical marijuana program and scrutinizes the nation's drug priorities. Five members of the group - Ivany, Sandee Burbank, Jack Thomas, David Booth and Jennifer Burbank - are setting out on a 20-day tour around Oregon to talk about why 17,000 Oregonians have turned to medical marijuana for relief.

Four of them use medical marijuana, while the fifth, Jennifer Burbank, Sandee's daughter, volunteers because she likes the message and philosophy of the group.

Monday evening, they drove their motor home to Blue Mountain Community College and spoke about Oregon's medical marijuana program.

The group operates a clinic in Portland, staffed with four doctors, that helps patients with diagnosed medical conditions to register with the Oregon Medical Marijuana Program. Only people with specific medical conditions qualify for the program. They include cancer, glaucoma, AIDS and HIV and treatment for cachexia (wasting syndrome), severe pain, severe nausea, agitation from Alzheimer's disease, seizures and persistent muscle spasms such as those experienced with multiple sclerosis.

Oregon's law allows each patient to grow six mature plants and 18 starts and seedlings.

The five MAMA members are frustrated by the millions of federal dollars aimed at curbing marijuana use, while alcohol, smoking and prescription drugs, they say, are more destructive and less regulated.

"One of the worst drugs of all is alcohol," Burbank said, "yet when I turn on FOX News in the morning, they're at a microbrewery - they're normalizing it."

Each year, 101,000 people die of alcohol-related causes, while tobacco causes 435,000 deaths and prescription drugs lead to 106,000 deaths. In contrast, illicit drugs are responsible for 17,000 deaths.



Thomas



Burbank



Ivany

Marijuana leads to few, if any, deaths, Burbank said.

She cited the research of Administrative Law Judge Francis Young who spent two years studying marijuana.

In 1988, he wrote, "Nearly all medicines have toxic, potentially lethal effects. But marijuana is not such a substance. There is no record in the extensive medical literature describing a proven, documented cannabis-induced fatality."

"In 5,000 years of experience of recorded history, there's never been a recorded death for cannabis," Burbank said.

Ivany often uses a tincture, an amber, syrup-like liquid made from marijuana. Other times, depending on her symptoms, she smokes the drug. The tincture leaves one's head clear, she said.

To make the tincture, Ivany uses a rock tumbler and spins it five minutes a day for two months.

Jack Thomas said he suffered from severe pain after a motorcycle accident.

"I flew 75 feet through the air and landed on the street," he said. "I split my sternum, jammed my spine and broke my left wrist."

He stayed on a regimen of ibuprofen for two months - 600 milligrams twice a day. "It destroyed the inside of my stomach," he said.

Cannabis has the pain-killing qualities of ibuprofen without the harsh side effects, Thomas said. "I function well on cannabis," he said. Thomas, an on-call heavy machinery operator for a paving company, said his cannabis use doesn't interfere with his work.

"It calms me down and makes me focus," he said.

Burbank, 63, said marijuana has a muffler effect on her pain.

"It turns down the volume enough so I can stand it," she said.

Burbank, who suffers chronic pain from car and water skiing accidents, grows about 42 marijuana plants in her backyard. The harvest is for her and other medical marijuana users.

Booth, Ivany and Thomas grow only enough for their own use.

Among them, they've grown over 100 different varieties of marijuana, with names like purple silver, bubble gum, Star Trek, trainwreck and big bud.

The group is worried that a ballot initiative proposed by Kevin Mannix, attorney and former chairman of the Oregon Republican Party, may take away their medical marijuana. The initiative, called the Oregon Crimefighting Act of 2008, would replace the Medical Marijuana Act with marijuana derivatives. The synthetic versions of cannabis would replace herbal marijuana and patients would no longer be able to grow their own plants.

"Kevin Mannix is trying to repeal the Medical Marijuana Act," Ivany said. "He bases it on abuse, but any program has abuse."

The synthetic drugs are expensive, Ivany said.

"It will be \$1,000 per month on the taxpayer's backs," she said.