

## Political action important part of Moscow Hemp Fest

By Terri Harber, Daily News staff writer | Posted: Monday, April 20, 2015 12:00 am

Music, booths, food and people dressed in whimsical clothes were among attractions at this year's Moscow Hemp Fest, but politics is a big part of this gathering.

People who attended the event on Saturday at East City Park provided about 2,000 signatures on the citizen's initiative petition for legalizing marijuana and industrial hemp, said Bill Esbensen of New Approach Idaho.

"We're here to change the laws," he told the crowd between events on the stage. "People in the statehouse forgot who put them there."

The organization was registering voters as well. They need more than 40,000 signatures from registered voters to get the initiative on the statewide ballot in November 2016.

"We're going for about 48,000 signatures" to be sure there are enough valid ones, Esbensen said.

This year, Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter vetoed HB 1146a, which would have legalized medical use of a marijuana extract, cannabidiol oil, on patients who suffer severe forms of epilepsy.

But Otter did sign an executive order allowing a study by Health and Welfare of whether to allow use of Epidolex, a cannabis extract approved by the FDA for limited, supervised access.

Esbensen's group was started this past fall to legalize medical marijuana in Idaho. Neighboring northwest states Washington, Oregon and Montana have.

Keynote speaker Elvy Musikka, 75, has been using medical marijuana with federal approval since the late 1980s. She is one of the last patients involved in this program which provides her the drug to alleviate glaucoma symptoms.

A doctor told her years before, when she was only 35, that marijuana might help. She had been unsuccessful in getting into legal treatment programs and was growing her own at home until she was arrested on felony possession.



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Abbie Olson and Karmali the parrot listen to live music Saturday at the 2015 Moscow Hemp Fest in East City Park.

"I had to try it because nothing else worked for me," she said. "I've been looking for negative effects of marijuana, and I can't find any."

After being acquitted because she had been growing the plants for medical necessity, she was accepted into a federal government program that regularly provides her marijuana as medicine.

Jesus Christ, Buddha and the world's other religious icons "would be ashamed of us for not taking care of sick people," she said.

Marijuana is a natural substance, thus a gift from "our creator," she said.

Feed your mind

While some bought a stone pipe, got their name painted on a grain of rice or bought a tie-dye T-shirt, those with an interest in other political topics also could learn more about poverty and climate change besides hemp and marijuana.

Even some of the music performed provided social and political commentary. Galactic Tofu Farmers played songs against fracking and the torture of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, for example.

The Citizens Climate Lobby had a table with information about the national environmental group that established a chapter in the area last year.

Its goal is to create "political will for a livable world," said Jeff Ramsey, who is a founding member of the local chapter.

Coming to Hemp Fest was an opportunity to let people know the group exists, explain what it's trying to achieve and, of course, to seek more members interested in spreading information about climate change so those in power realize new policies and practices are needed to reduce global warming, he said.

Hemp Fest was started in 1996, focusing only on legalizing hemp but eventually included support for medical marijuana.

"I came to see everything," said Marty Walker, a 22-year-old University of Idaho student as he sat on the grass with a few friends having a conversation. "And it's a nice day."

He's registered to vote but is not an enthusiastic participant in elections. His father tells him it's important to participate in the process even when the choices aren't stellar.

"The lesser of two evils is still evil," Walker said in response.

But he said he'd likely cast his ballot in favor of hemp and medical marijuana if it were an option.

Tammy McCafferty, a Clarkston resident, was also enjoying the weather as she sat on a bench and watched the festivities. Her daughter was off looking at what the vendors were selling.

She's doesn't use cannabis herself and is against smoking of all sorts. But she's read about some of its medicinal uses, especially its use in oil form to treat children who suffer seizures.

"Why would anybody be opposed to using (marijuana) to treat something like that?" McCafferty asked. "People have been taught it's so terrifyingly dangerous that it couldn't possibly be beneficial."

But it's worth further research, she said.

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