

Expo for medical pot draws crowds

by [Amy B Wang](#) - Apr. 17, 2011 12:00 AM
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The Green Relief [Medical Marijuana](#)

Convention and Expo in Glendale drew thousands of patients, caregivers and those hoping to be one of the first to open a dispensary in Arizona.

The three-day conference, which concluded Saturday, was the first of its kind in Arizona.

"There have been smaller events, but nobody has tried to address all the aspects, not just for patients and caregivers, but business owners," said Lisa Wolfe, show producer for the convention. "Everyone has a question. There's a lot of misinformation out there and this is one place to get it cleared up."

[Green Relief Medical Marijuana Convention & Expo](#)

Last November, Arizona voters approved Proposition 203, which legalized the cultivation and dispensing of marijuana for medical use. The law took effect Thursday.

Nearly 100 booths were nestled throughout the corridors of the second floor of [University of Phoenix Stadium](#)

A mix of attendees and vendors snaked

through the walkways. Bikini-clad girls lingered around a table of vaporizers, while a group in white lab coats across the way offered free samples of organic hand cream. In another area, two men in suits passed out insurance information next to a booth where the presenters were dressed as marijuana leaves.

"I'm not in the stoner world," said Herb Seidel, a chef who was there to promote his cannabis-inspired cookbooks. "I'm actually in it for the patients."

Joy Hannah, 57, nodded as she took note of some of Seidel's recipes. Hannah, who drove two hours from Gila County to attend the expo, described marijuana as "a miracle worker" when it came to her severe asthma and said she hoped the drug would one day be completely legal in Arizona.

Several vendors said it was decidedly lower-key compared with other marijuana conventions they had been to before, where blaring music and entertainment dominated the scene.

"We decided right from the beginning, we wanted it to be a more professional tone,

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where someone in their 50s or 60s would feel comfortable coming to it," Wolfe said.

Throughout the day, dozens of people dropped in on a series of seminars with topics including hydroponics and growing technologies and strain selection for symptom relief.

During one workshop on testing for THC content, people furiously scribbled notes on the gas chromatography process.

An early-morning workshop on dispensary security was particularly well-attended.

"We want it to be successful. We want it to be legitimate," said Rick Hanson, president and CEO of Cutty & Associates, a security company. "It's new to everybody."

Hanson said he felt security would be one of the key players in the dispensary business.

"The ones that are going to be the most successful are going to have the best security, and I don't say that because I'm in the industry," he said. "If you had two dispensaries side by side, and one had an armed security guard and one didn't, which one would you go into?"

Gina and Eric Smith of Phoenix attended the convention because they hope to be one of the 125 approved to open a medical-marijuana dispensary in Arizona. They wandered through the halls, accumulating pamphlets, business cards and stacks of papers.

"First things first, there's the legal aspect," Gina said. Then there were insurance concerns to consider - as well as payment systems, taxes, marketing and licensing issues, she said.

They agreed it's hard not to be overwhelmed.

"We knew the law had passed, but it's kind of scary entering into a new industry," said Eric, a former medical-marijuana patient from California.

He described the dispensary market there as "oversaturated" and said they saw Arizona as the next opportunity.

"This is the place and now is the time," Eric said. "And we want to make sure that, if we do make that investment, we have the information we need to make an educated decision."

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