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## **Medical marijuana dispensaries being told: Move it, bud**

An L.A. ordinance shuts down more than 400 stores that opened in the last 2 1/2 years. Outlets that registered with the city in 2007 will have six months to comply with new location restrictions.

By John Hoeffel, Los Angeles Times

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The Kush Clubhouse and the Medical Kush Beach Club boast killer views of the ocean, and that's what Sean Cardillo says he was after when he opened the only medical marijuana dispensaries on the Venice Beach boardwalk.

"It's proven that being by the beach can actually heal a person and make a person feel good," Cardillo said as he smoked a joint in a hazy, mirrored lounge. "We're trying to create this place where people can heal, and they're looking at it like, oh, it's not really that."

Venice — with dispensaries, pot doctors and bong merchants all a flip-flop stroll from the beach — is the example critics typically cite to highlight the consequences of Los Angeles' failure to control medical marijuana. But there are less-vivid pot hot spots across the city.

Cardillo, a onetime ophthalmic technician, said he adheres to the law and runs his shops as nonprofits. That's why he drives a beat-up Camaro, he said, and not a "for-profit 911 Turbo." Nevertheless, his days of surfside healing may be coming to an end.

More than five years after the City Council began debating controls on medical marijuana dispensaries, Los Angeles Ordinance No. 181069 takes effect Monday. Shaped by the council's conviction that the proliferation of marijuana dispensaries was fueled by a passion for cash and not a compassion for patients, the ordinance seeks to rewind a Wild West-type environment in which 600 dispensaries opened without controls.

The ordinance shuts down more than 400 stores that opened in the last two and a half years. Dispensaries that registered with the city in 2007 will have six months to comply with new location restrictions, which will force many to move to isolated areas.

City prosecutors have declined to spell out how they will enforce the ordinance. "Our next step will be to ascertain the level of compliance," said Jane Usher, a special assistant city attorney.

She said her office would rely on reports from police officers, building inspectors and neighbors to identify violators. Offenders face civil penalties of \$2,500 a day and six months in jail.

At least 64 dispensaries, including Cardillo's, have sued and asked for court orders to halt enforcement. Stewart Richlin, a lawyer who represents 10 of them, said he expects many across the city to remain open Monday. "The collectives are going to have to make heavy decisions," he said.

Cardillo, calling it a stressful decision, said he would close the Kush Clubhouse for now. The Beach Club, while legally registered, stands too close to a residential building and possibly a playground, and the business must be moved within six months. "I don't want to do anything to disrespect the city. I'm not in this to do anything illegal," he said.

Fellow plaintiff Dan Halbert, who runs Rainforest Collective in Mar Vista, said he also will close but plans to post a sign on his darkened storefront that reads: "12 jobs lost. 10's of 1000's of dollars in tax revenues lost. Another vacant building in L.A. Drugs back on the streets. Put that in your pipe and smoke it!!!"

Dispensary patron Nicholas Fasoline sat at the Beach Club's \$13,000 laminated-wood hash bar after he had driven down from Moorpark for "the sun, the beach, the girls and the hash." He said Los Angeles ought to leave the older, established dispensaries like the Beach Club alone, but shut down newer ones. "Every corner, there's a weed shop?" he said. "It doesn't need to be that many."

Venice is not the only marijuana marketplace. In Woodland Hills, West Valley Caregivers, West Valley Patients Group, Green Magic, Green Joy and Green Hills cluster together on Ventura Boulevard. In Van Nuys, police raids culled a once-dense concentration of shops at Van Nuys and Victory boulevards.

Michael Larsen, the neighborhood council president in Eagle Rock, said the ruckus had calmed down, but residents have recently complained about disruptive dispensary customers. "They're in their death throes in a sense, so I expect some shenanigans," he said.

Tucked among the stylish shops along four blocks of Melrose Avenue in the Fairfax neighborhood are five dispensaries the city wants to close. At La Luna, L.A. Confidential, Green Medicine and Buds on Melrose, none of the workers would discuss their plans.

Evrika Zatikyan, a painter, shares his Evo's Gallery with his son's Ultimate Care. He has painted a vivid pot leaf on the door, which leads to a counter with 11 jars of buds. "This close-the-marijuana business — very, very bad in my life," he said. Pot helps pay the pricey rent, allowing him to have a studio in a location that draws art dealers who pay more for his work.

Marijuana had become such a draw along the strip that George Betancourt, who owned Bling Jewelry, converted it to DNA Hydroponics. Two flamboyant chandeliers still dangle incongruously over grow lights and specialized nutrients. "I think it could be a good thing for Los Angeles, especially right here, which was turning into a marijuana district," he said.

The Melrose Action Neighborhood Watch does not think it is a good thing. "All of a sudden, they found that Melrose should be this wasteland of people in agony needing help. Yet the demographics don't match that," said Peter Nichols, the group's co-founder.

In Venice, where Cardillo extols the healing powers of beach and buds, the boardwalk scene plays out like a perpetual "Cheech and Chong" movie. On a recent weekend, Evon Newton, a boardwalk fixture and self-styled "pothead," wore a shiny pot over his pencil-thin dreadlocks and clothes painted with cannabis leaves. Nearby, Orsel McGhee sold emergency pot kits that contained eye drops, breath freshener, a glass pipe and a lighter.

The boardwalk takes beach-goers past at least 13 pipe shops, including No Sweat and No Hassle, as well as five doctors' offices that write recommendations for marijuana. Most of the physicians employ barkers who amaze tourists with their patter: "Get legal today, folks. Walk-ins are welcome. Don't hesitate to medicate."

The city's ordinance will do little to squelch the boardwalk's celebration of weed culture. It won't touch pipe sellers or doctors, but it could reduce the number of Venice dispensaries to one or two.

Some of the Kush Clubhouse's neighbors on Sunset Avenue hope the business goes away. "It's too much for Venice Beach," Janet Jones said. "We have so many distractions here. People get high. We have heroin. We have a huge drug problem. I just think it sends a bad message to kids."

But Theresa Witt, a Venice resident, thought it absurd that the kiddie park where her granddaughter was playing could shut down Cardillo's Beach Club. "What's the big deal? It's just because some people frown on marijuana," she said. "People like a little buzz or something, a little break from life."