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Mobile Marijuana Dispensary Rolls to a Halt in Norco

Riverside County businessman Stewart Hauptman's latest venture gives new meaning to the term "recreational drugs." Until recently, he sold marijuana for medical use from a souped-up RV he parked outside a Norco clinic.

He refurbished a 1985 Pace Arrow motor home, installing display cases, a baked-goods section and other amenities. He named the operation the Lakeview Collective-on-Wheels and parked the converted RV in a lot outside the clinic, where people were being evaluated for medical marijuana use.

"That way, when patients came out of the clinic, they are able to get the medicine right away," said Hauptman, a Riverside County videographer-turned-cannabis-entrepreneur.

But the city of 27,000, which bans the distribution of marijuana, went to court last week in a bid to shut down Hauptman's business, which has been cited several times since it opened in October.

"We'll take whatever proper legal action is needed to get them to cease," said City Atty. John Harper.

Hauptman and his wife, Helen, said they are being persecuted for trying to provide a humanitarian service for seriously ill people in great pain. Most of their clients are elderly, many confined to wheelchairs and using walkers, they said.

"These are not young kids who go out and get stoned; this is not about that," Hauptman said. "These are older people, some dying from cancer."

But Norco officials claim the couple's portrayal of their clientele does not match police observations.

"We've seen people, generally speaking, between the ages of 18 and 25 who appear to be in good health lined up outside there to buy marijuana," Harper said.

All marijuana distribution is banned in Norco, regardless if it is dispensed from a vehicle, he said. A hearing on whether to shut down the business permanently is scheduled June 1 in Riverside County Superior Court.

A landmark 1996 voter initiative legalized marijuana for medical use in California, but the question of whether cities are legally entitled to ban distribution is pending before state appeals courts.

Medical marijuana advocates say state law allows cities to regulate the trade but not ban it. Officials from Norco and other cities say local governments may outlaw dispensaries.

The Hauptmans said their business is legal -- and essential. It features "a delicious and fresh assortment of Cannabis-infused edible treats," according to a related website. The herb-spiked brownies, cookies, pretzels and other items cost about \$10 a serving, the couple said. Marijuana sells for about \$450 an ounce.

Their business operates in conjunction with a clinic, Serenity Medical Evaluations, located in a chiropractor's office in a Norco strip mall. Helen Hauptman manages the clinic.

It worked like this: The RV parked in a dirt lot next to the shopping center during the four hours each week the clinic was open. Only patients referred by the clinic could join the collective and buy its medical marijuana, said Helen Hauptman. The collective has more than 600 members, she said.

"It's like a store on wheels," said Helen Hauptman, who uses medical marijuana to treat chronic back pain.

Official pressure has forced the mobile cannabis to shut down for now, the couple said.

"I'm being watched by police," Stewart Hauptman said.

The couple is now delivering marijuana to clients' homes, but not with the RV.

"We're using a truck," Helen Hauptman said.