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THE NEW CANNABIS NICHE

ENTREPRENEURS ARE CAPITALIZING ON RISING INTEREST IN NATURAL PRODUCTS

BY **DAYSI CALAVIA-ROBERTSON**

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Long Island businesses that offer products containing cannabidiol, or CBD — a compound derived from cannabis that isn't mind-altering — are growing like weeds.

Despite legal hurdles and conflicted public attitudes, en-

trepreneurs are capitalizing on the hype surrounding the hemp plant. Fans of CBD use it as an alternative healing product, and say it helps them sleep, makes them calmer and relieves joint pain, among other benefits, although scientific research into these claims is still scanty.

Some entrepreneurs are cultivating the crop and making and

marketing their own CBD-infused oils and lotions. Others are retailing CBD-based goods ranging from herbal teas and bottled water to chocolate chip cookies and even dog treats.

A craft coffee shop in Farmingdale sells lattes containing the oil; massage therapists in North Massapequa use creams infused with it; and health food stores in

Hicksville and Huntington have several shelves stocked with CBD-infused products.

"Overall, as a society, we've become more and more interested in health and wellness," said Erica Chase-Gregory, regional director of the Small Business Development Center at Farmingdale State College.

"And if you look at millenni-

als, for example, part of a key audience for this rising CBD market, they're highly interested in and constantly looking for products that are organic, all natural, non-GMO."

CBD has also found a ready market among baby boomers, who are turning to it for pain

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Cultivating the CANNABIS market

'CBD' is the latest word in natural products, and it's driving new businesses on Long Island

CBD from A37

management and other age-related health issues, experts and entrepreneurs said.

The trend has spread to dozens of yoga studios and to vape shops, where CBD is available in smokable form. At these businesses, large storefront signs read: "CBD sold here."

But regardless of CBD's growing presence in stores from Manhattan to Montauk, entrepreneurs say misinformation about what CBD is, what it does, and whether it's legal, is widespread.

"First of all, no, it can't get you high," said David Falkowski, 41, a licensed hemp grower participating in the Industrial Hemp Agricultural Research Pilot Program administered by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets.

"And yes, marijuana is cannabis and hemp is cannabis, in the same way a cherry tomato is a tomato and a San Marzano tomato is a tomato," added Falkowski, who owns Open Minded Organics in Bridgehampton, which makes CBD oil.

What's legal

CBD can be extracted from either plant, Falkowski said. To comply with state Department of Agriculture guidelines for licensed growers and be considered legal, it must come from industrial hemp, which is cannabis grown to have 0.3 percent or less THC, the chemical that makes pot smokers high.

If the CBD is derived from marijuana instead of hemp, it's not legal in New York, unless



Jason DePietto, owner of Hemp Smarts in North Massapequa, demonstrates the topical use of the CBD-infused lotions and gels he sells along with water, oil, salves, body wash, cookies and gummies.

you are a patient with a medical marijuana card. If it comes from hemp, it's legal statewide.

Technically, it's still against federal law; CBD hasn't been approved by the Food and Drug Administration or the Drug Enforcement Agency.

And the sale of CBD products online is illegal nationally, DEA spokeswoman Barbara Carreno said.

Despite the FDA's recent approval of Epidiolex, a CBD-based medication for the treatment of certain types of epileptic seizures, "CBD is still classified as a Schedule 1 drug," she said. Other Schedule 1 drugs include ecstasy and heroin.

Even so, Carreno said CBD enforcement isn't a high prior-

ity for the agency.

"We have very limited resources and are actively using them to track traffickers of highly dangerous drugs like opioids and methamphetamines," she said. "CBD in your hand lotion is not the concern that fentanyl is."

CBD has been legally available only in recent years; in 2017 New York eliminated a cap on the number of sites authorized to grow and research hemp and allowed businesses and farmers to participate. Experts say the public's growing interest — sparked partly by consumer inclination toward holistic practices and products, and partly by "Weed," a 2013 CNN documentary about

a young Colorado girl with epilepsy whose health improved after she started taking a high-CBD cannabis — have led to a burgeoning industry.

'Want CBD with that?'

At Flux Coffee, an almost 2-year-old shop in Farmingdale, aficionados can order their craft lattes with soy or oat milk, cinnamon or vanilla, and, for an additional \$2, a 15-milligram splash of CBD.

Customers at the shop, where owner Arsalan Pourmand himself built the white-and-baby-blue-tiled tables, can also buy beverages that feature CBD as an ingredient, without having to ask for it as an add-on.

"I became interested in CBD because I knew a lot of people who were taking it pretty regularly and were taking it because they felt very stressed out, and of course, they all said it was helping them relax," said Pourmand, 33.

"As a business owner, I'm always very stressed, so I decided to give it a try myself, and then afterwards I started experimenting with incorporating it into the drinks here at the shop."

Pourmand started selling a ginger-lime, turmeric and CBD kombucha, and a "Care Bear latte," a honey, chocolate and cinnamon drink with a flavorless CBD, in July. The Care Bear latte, which at \$5.50 costs \$1.25 more than other lattes at Flux, now represents 15 percent of drink sales at the shop, "and rising," Pourmand said.

"Many of the people who come here are the same people who already use CBD or are interested in trying it," he said.

Regardless, customer confusion about CBD's legality and effects is rampant, Pourmand said.

"A lot of people ask like 'Oh, you can sell that here?' or 'So how high am I gonna get from it?' or before asking for the kombucha or the latte will look around first and kind of whisper that they want the 'special' latte or 'special' kombucha," he said.

Customer Tom LaSala, 30, of East Meadow, has been ordering CBD drinks at Flux for the past six months. "I like it because it of its calming effect. It helps me clear my mind," he said. "And it's a great aide for anxiety and stress relief too."

Some CBD enthusiasts claim

