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Photo from Carter Uslabar

Buds from marijuana plants contain the highest content of THC, the main active ingredient.

## Legalization debate continues as laws hold

### Wisconsin maintains full restrictions on cannabis

By Joseph Schulz  
HERALD CONTRIBUTOR

Neither recreational nor medical marijuana will be legalized at the state level this biennial budget cycle, despite most Wisconsinites supporting it and growing local demand for cannabis reform.

Gov. Tony Evers proposed legalizing recreational marijuana in February, which he says could generate



### About the series

Breakwater, a community coalition focused on youth and adult substance use in Winnebago County, is sponsoring a six-part series on cannabis, or marijuana, a topic gaining attention as 'cannabis culture' evolves with legalization efforts and its future impact on society.

more than \$165 million in tax revenue annually and could help alleviate racial disparities in the criminal justice system.

SEE **Cannabis** ON PAGE 10

## District's staff input reviewed

### School survey identifies school leadership issues

Oshkosh Herald

More than six months after an unsigned letter from disgruntled school district employees prompted an independent survey of administrative leadership issues, results from that survey were aired at last week's Board of Education meeting that called for a strategic "do-over."

Communication and staff recognition issues led the complaints against Oshkosh Area School District leadership regarding their relations with teachers, principals and others, according to the Gallup engagement survey administered in January by Cooperative Educational Service Agency (CESA) 6.

Since the time the anonymous letter was released Nov. 24, Superintendent Vickie Cartwright resigned effective July 1, Shorewood Schools Superintendent Bryan Davis was hired in late May to replace her and the Board of Education went through a realignment after the April 6 election.

The January survey, taken amid the pandemic-hampered school year, drew more than 1,100 responses from all levels of school employees. They shared concerns about not getting proper recognition, feedback or inclusion in decision-making by their supervisors.

While these management problems were shared by many of those responding, CESA 6 executive director Ted Neitzke told the board that the staff engagement information, including the positive find-

SEE **School survey** ON PAGE 9

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## Shepherd Band to reignite live touring at Waterfest

By Steve Clark  
HERALD CONTRIBUTOR

It's safe to say that Kenny Wayne Shepherd is amped up to return to the stage.

Shepherd, the leader of the band that carries his name, has performed just once in front of an audience since February 2020 because of the coronavirus that shut down live performances in the music industry.

But with the country emerging from the pandemic, the stages will no longer be silent and the arenas no longer empty. For Shepherd that means getting back to what he has done for the majority of his life – starting with a June 24 date at the Leach Amphitheater as part of the Waterfest summer schedule.

"Everybody is pumped about it. I don't think anybody would not be excited to



Shepherd

get back to what we do," Shepherd said in a phone interview earlier this month. "Most musicians have not been able to work for a year and that's how they feed their families, pay their bills and also serve their purpose."

Shepherd, who last performed in front of a limited audience in August, isn't fearful of any added nerves on his return to the stage. The blues guitarist has been performing and recording steadily since his early teenage years.

But he is aware that he and his bandmates – Noah Hunt (vocals), Chris Lay-

SEE **Shepherd** ON PAGE 7

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**Publisher**  
Karen Schneider, 920-858-6407  
karen@oshkoshherald.com

**Editor**  
Dan Roherty, 920-508-0027  
editor@oshkoshherald.com

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# Series takes closer look at cannabis

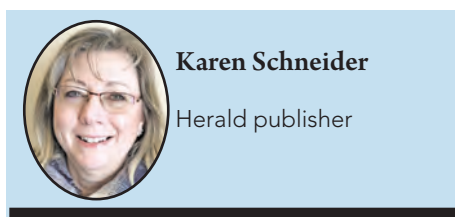
What is cannabis? Is it marijuana? What is Delta 8? THC? CBD? That lip balm contains what? You can overdose on those gummies at the gas station?

These can be confusing discussions and after attending a boot camp on marijuana use with teens through the Alliance for Wisconsin Youth, I had even more questions.

Not only can this alphabet soup be confusing, but we need to understand the differences of legalization versus decriminalization.

I've raised two kids in Phoenix and didn't think there was much left that would surprise me. However, I have been amazed to learn about the forms that cannabis can come in (like lip balm that mimics those round ball items) or the potency of gummies that can look just like the gummy bears I gave my children as a sweet treat decades ago.

As a member of the steering committee for Breakwater, a community coalition focused on preventing and reducing youth and adult substance use in Win-



**Karen Schneider**  
Herald publisher

nebago County, I am always learning and working on understanding cannabis products, side effects, and pros and cons of each. One thing is for sure: Today's marijuana is definitely not like boomers' weed anymore.

Breakwater is sponsoring a six-part series that begins in today's Oshkosh Herald. This series isn't either for or against the use or sale of any product – it's about education.

I've listened in on community conversations where military veterans speak about the relief that CBD products have given them. I've read the articles on toddlers getting into gummies and overdosing. And Wisconsin is surrounded by states that have either legalized or decriminalized marijuana in some form.

This begs us to take a deeper look what is right for Wisconsin and Oshkosh. Be-

ing the lone holdout should be to some advantage as our neighboring states learn firsthand about the pitfalls and benefits of changing the laws on marijuana.

Dan Hinton, Winnebago County's prevention services coordinator, noted the difficulty in finding credible information about marijuana and its variants, so we offer any clarifications that we can.

First, I want to make clear I am not opposed to the market. We have dog biscuits with CBD in them to help our rescue dog's anxiety. Jake gets biscuits around hunting and fireworks season to deal with loud sudden noises. The biscuits have worked miracles in calming our pup down.

In an environment where our drinking culture is so prevalent, we chuckle when hearing of the "chill" you get when taking a "half of a half of a half" of a gummy that has Delta 8, a variation of cannabis that can contain up to 0.3 percent THC, which passed through on the federal farm bill with no age requirements. If these are that strong think about a teenager who eats a pack of gummies that can be picked up at the corner convenience store. Will they really stop at one?

I encourage reading the articles over the next six weeks and have conversations with family and friends.

## Fourth of July parade will be back in town

This year's Oshkosh Fourth of July parade is set to step off at 9 a.m. July 4 with the theme of "Honoring Our Gulf War Veterans" to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Persian Gulf War.

The parade will follow its traditional route beginning at Otter Avenue and North Main Street, north on Main, right on East Irving Avenue and ending at Hazel Street near Menominee Park.

Parade coordinator Anne Hauch said parade participants will be allowed to distribute items such as flags and candy to spectators if they choose to do so.

The parade will be broadcast by Oshkosh Media with John Nieman of Father Carr's and Joe Wiedenmeier of the Friends of OCM as commentators.

The parade is hosted by Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 437.

**EARLY HOLIDAY DEADLINES**

Please be advised the Oshkosh Herald will have **early deadlines for the July 7th issue:**

Space and copy deadline: **6/30, Wednesday NOON (instead of Friday 7/2 Noon)**

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# Cannabis

FROM PAGE 1

“Legalizing and taxing marijuana in Wisconsin – just like we do already with alcohol – ensures a controlled market and safe product are available for both recreational and medicinal users and can open the door for countless opportunities for us to reinvest in our communities and create a more equitable state,” Evers said in a press release.

The proposal stalled in the state Legislature as the Republican caucus is not in favor of legalizing cannabis for either medical or recreational use. The Legislature’s budget-writing committee blocked a Democratic attempt early this month to legalize marijuana for medical use.

Even so, a 2019 Marquette University Law School poll found that 83 percent of Wisconsinites favored legalizing medical marijuana, and 59 percent support recreational cannabis.

Because marijuana remains illegal in Wisconsin, it can severely impact individuals who are caught with it in the form of a possible misdemeanor or felony for repeat possession, notes Jay Selthofner, founder of the Wisconsin Cannabis Activist Network.

“In basically every state around us, people can legally possess it in one way, shape or form, but here in Wisconsin, you could end up with a misdemeanor or a felony,” Selthofner said. “Although you may not end up in the prison system, that’s going to stay with you. You may have housing discrimination or you may be denied a job.”

In Winnebago County, District Attorney Christian Gossett said most charges for simple possession of marijuana are misdemeanors rather than felonies because felony convictions take away voting rights and firearm rights.



Submitted photo

Filtered marijuana cigarettes are a common form of legal consumption offered by companies.

“Taking away someone’s civil liberties and voting rights seems pretty excessive for something legal in a lot of other states,” he said.

According to Winnebago County Sheriff John Matz, marijuana investigations are not a priority for local law enforcement unless it’s either large-scale growing or drug dealing.

The district attorney’s office has also created a drug diversion program for first-time offenders charged with possession, in which they will not face criminal charges if they go through an AODA assessment, possible drug treatment and stay clean for six consecutive months.

Despite making strides with the diversion program, Winnebago County had the fifth highest rate of state convictions for marijuana possession last year, Gossett said.

When marijuana was first criminalized around the time of the alcohol prohibition in the 1920s, Gossett says it was done mostly for cultural reasons, such as a fear of jazz music and because it was perceived as lowering white women’s inhibitions, causing them to sleep with Black men.

It was then used in the late 1960s to tar-

get Black activists and anti-Vietnam War activists, he added.

“Not a lot of science behind all this,” Gossett said, noting alcohol, tobacco and sugar kill more people each year than marijuana.

Nowadays, Gossett says he isn’t sure why marijuana remains criminalized because it isn’t a gateway drug in the same way painkillers are and many of the cultural worries of a bygone era no longer exist.

“We gave up on the prohibition with alcohol, even the Vietnam War protests are over, so now what? What are we doing?” He asked. “We do know that there are collateral consequences (from the war on drugs) that are doing a lot of harm to our society.”

Those consequences include 57 percent of all drug arrests in the state being for possession of marijuana while Wisconsin ranks 14th for the largest racial disparities in arrest for possession of marijuana, according to the American Civil Liberties Union.

For example, roughly 55 percent of white adults in Wisconsin say they have tried marijuana, compared with about 46 percent of Black adults, who are more than four times more likely to have been arrested for possession, Gossett noted.

“That disparity is absurd,” he said. “We know that Black and white people are using marijuana at about the same rates, so it’s an inexcusable difference. When we look at Wisconsin’s racial disparity, in general, and incarceration, we’re amongst the worst of fenders nationally.”

Gossett says something must change. He pointed to either decriminalizing or legalizing marijuana to help alleviate some of those issues.

“We have a philosophical issue that we have to address in the state; it’s not as simple as marijuana but marijuana is sort of a proxy battle for criminal justice reform right now in Wisconsin,” he said. “If we can’t give an inch in Wisconsin, while we’re currently surrounded by states that have either decriminalized or legalized marijuana, how are we going to stop this?”

If marijuana was decriminalized in Wisconsin, it would still be illegal to possess but individuals would face a fine similar to

an ordinance violation or traffic forfeiture, according to Drug Recognition expert Nick Place.

Legalization would allow individuals to possess marijuana up to a certain amount and would allow businesses to apply for a permit to sell it — like a liquor license, Place said. In legalized states, black-market drug dealers would be breaking the law if they sell marijuana without a license, similar to illegal moonshining.

Locally, Common Council member Aaron Wojciechowski is working on a proposal to legalize possession inside city limits, similar to what Madison recently approved.

“People should not have their lives ruined for possessing marijuana,” he said, noting the proposal would not allow for marijuana use in places where smoking is already banned and other public spaces. “You should have the right to use it on private property or if the landlord has given consent.”

By decriminalizing marijuana in Oshkosh, Wojciechowski hopes it can add momentum to a larger statewide push for cannabis reform and to show that it’s not a partisan issue.

Opponents of legalization point to a study that found an 8 percent spike in Colorado traffic deaths where marijuana was present and a 31 percent increase in violent crime from 2013 to 2018.

However, a study by the CATO Institute comparing data in multiple states found that violent crime “neither soared nor plummeted following marijuana legalization,” while traffic fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles traveled stayed “relatively flat post-legalization.”

Eric Smiltneek, an addiction medicine specialist at Aurora Medical Center, said marijuana legalization could work in Wisconsin if the drug is properly regulated to prioritize consumer health over profits.

“There definitely can be something that’s done in a responsible way — I think looking at some of the states that surround us and looking at successes and failures that they have had might be a decent approach,” Smiltneek said. “If you did it in a smart way where you had proper age limits that restricted use, I think we could have marijuana in a way that would be OK.”

Gossett said the cannabis debate comes down to priorities.

“What’s more important to people? Is it more important that you not smoke marijuana or that we work on resolving racial disparity? They’re not necessarily connected, but there is a correlation,” he said. “We have to ask the legislators, which one would you rather?”

“I think what they want is no racial disparity, but marijuana illegal. All the data shows that they’re not exclusive. They do correlate, and that’s a problem. Is racial disparity the bigger problem? For a lot of people, I think it is.”

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