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Welcome mat back out for visitors

Economic grant boost from state announced

By Kaitlyn Scoville
OSHKOSH HERALD

Gov. Tony Evers announced in late June that he would allocate \$140 million to businesses and organizations “that play an integral role in Wisconsin’s tourism and entertainment industries.”

“Wisconsin is bouncing back stronger than ever,” he said in a press release.

The grants will be provided by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) federal funding, which is separate from the \$20.5 million the city of Oshkosh received to improve infrastructure and other public sectors impacted by the pandemic.

Oshkosh Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) executive director Amy Albright said though they’re not a city entity,

their main focus is to bring economic development and improvement to Oshkosh.

The nonprofit is almost completely funded by a local room tax, which is a 10 percent extra charge on hotel and motel stays paid by visitors.

Once it’s collected through the city, a portion of the room tax is sent to the CVB to work on contracted projects, Albright

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Still engaged
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West senior fights way back to goal
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THC vaping condemned for its risks

Health problems viewed as comparable to tobacco

By Joseph Schulz
HERALD CONTRIBUTOR

2019 saw a slew of vaping-related illnesses, with many tied to black market THC vape products, but health care professionals warn that vaping anything can be dangerous as the long-term health effects remain unknown.

A joint study examining vaping illness from the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services from 2019 found that 87 percent of lung illness pa-



Photo by Joseph Schulz

An A-Z Tobacco & Vapor Shop clerk exhales in front of vape juices back in 2019. Health officials warn that the long-term consequences of vaping remain unknown.

Fourth in a series

Breakwater, a community coalition focused on youth and adult substance use in Winnebago County, is sponsoring this series on cannabis, a topic gaining attention as ‘cannabis culture’ evolves with legalization efforts and its future impact on society.

tients interviewed reported using THC vape cartridges.

Ninety-six percent of the reported

THC products were packaged, prefilled cartridges, with 89 percent acquired from the black market, the study found. No single brand of THC cartridge was reported by all patients.

According to local drug recognition expert Nick Place, illicit marijuana cartridges are often cut with vitamin E or various other chemicals and additives.

In terms of vitamin E, Place says the vitamin is “excellent for moisturizing your skin,

SEE **Cannabis vaping** ON PAGE 17

Development leader leaves city on the right path

By Jack Tierney
OSHKOSH HERALD

Oshkosh’s community development director, who was pivotal in keeping Oshkosh Corp.’s headquarters here along with development of the Riverwalk trail system, will retire Friday.

Allen Davis has led the background work of City Hall since 2010, overseeing economic development, inspection, assessment and planning services.

Working together in communities throughout Wisconsin for the past 29



Davis

years, City Manager Mark Rohloff said he will miss Davis personally and professionally.

“He will leave a lasting impression on our community due to his dedication to public service,” Rohloff said.

“I would say that his most notable accomplishments include the development of the Riverwalk, including his ability to secure grants for

eight consecutive years to get that project off the ground.”

Davis also oversaw development of multiple tax incremental finance (TIF) districts along State 21, and in the downtown, industrial and Wittman Regional Airport areas.

“(His) tenure here has been remarkable,” Deputy Mayor Matt Mugerauer said at a recent council meeting. “Without a doubt you’re leaving this city a lot better than you found it.”

Mayor Lori Palmeri added, “You’ve

been leading since the post-2008 recession,” calling Davis “a rock star.”

Davis thanked his staff and Rohloff for their dedicated services, saying “it has been an honor to work with so many great people on so many important projects.”

Before Davis’ arrival, business developers had a 35 percent chance of getting a building permit on their first visit to City Hall. Now, 90 percent of developers leave with a permit on their first visit.

SEE **Davis retires** ON PAGE 15

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Cannabis vaping

FROM PAGE 1

but not so great for inhaling into your lungs” as it can “wreak havoc on a person’s lungs.”

“It’s believed manufacturers are adding vitamin E as a thickening agent to illicit cannabis vapes to make their product appear consistent with legit products sold in legal cannabis dispensaries,” he said. “This additive has received the press as the main culprit behind vaping injuries, but researchers are still trying to learn more.”

Other additives found in black market THC vapes include Diacetyl flavoring, mold, fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides and metals, Place said.

Diacetyl flavoring can cause a condition known as “popcorn lung,” while mold, fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides can come from the process of growing a marijuana plant and have adverse health effects, he added.

“The only thing that should go into your lungs is air; anything else is potentially hazardous to your health and may cause side effects, including death,” he said. “There have not been enough studies on the long-term health consequences from vaping anything to show it benefits your health.”

In addition, vaping THC has become one of the most popular ways of consuming marijuana among young people, he added.

“For people under the age of 25, that’s the most popular form of (marijuana) administration next to flower,” he said. “I think the marijuana flower will always be on top, but vaping is right there.”

Samantha Hilker, Winnebago County community health strategist and Drug-Free Communities coordinator for the Breakwater Drug and Alcohol Coalition, says that’s because vaping has largely been marketed to youth via brightly colored packaging and fruity flavors, which has given it the perception of being “cool.”

There’s so much misinformation that vaping is so cool on social media, they’re seeing social media ads about vaping, or THC products, or celebrities and influencers glamorizing it,” she said. “Why would they think of the potential harm to come from that?”

Beyond the marketing toward young people, it’s hard to gauge the THC dosage when vaping it, Hilker said.

“You don’t necessarily really know what (dosage) you’re getting,” she said.

Additionally, there have been reports of



Photo by Joseph Schulz

Delta-8 THC vape cartridges sit in a display case inside A-Z Tobacco & Vapor Shop.

illicit THC vapes also containing methamphetamine or the powerful synthetic fentanyl, Hilker added.

“We’ve seen people overdose on opiates, but they never even intended to use an opiate,” she said. “Kids are not necessarily thinking about consequences. They’re thinking about the right here and the right now, so the consequences of what comes next don’t always even occur to them.”

Marijuana advocates say that legalization with proper regulatory safeguards in place could help cut down on the negative chemicals in THC vape products.

“Public safety items are usually addressed in legislation; you have to have stuff tested before it hits the market,” said Jay Selthofner, founder of the Wisconsin Cannabis Activist Network. “Right now, in Wisconsin, we don’t have any safety checks, we don’t have any purity checks and we don’t have any testing. Most of those concerns would go away (with legal marijuana), but you’re still going to have bad players in any industry.”

Aside from THC vape products, nicotine vapes also have cause for concern because there’s a lot of unknowns surrounding how they’re regulated, according to Dr. Eric Smiltneek, an addiction medicine specialist at Aurora Medical Center.

He says solvents are used to extract nicotine into vape products and some of the solvents can have adverse health effects.

“The idea of inhaling a heated solvent isn’t very good,” he said.

While many of the carcinogens from cigarettes aren’t present in nicotine vapes, Smiltneek says the long-term effects re-

main unknown.

He added that many of the places selling vape products try to avoid selling products that have proven to have negative health effects, but they may not know which products are harmful until there are reported illnesses associated with it.

“It’s kind of this human guinea pig thing,” he said. “It’s like, ‘Well, I guess we’ll see if this is OK.’ Hopefully, it is. But when it’s not, that’s a bad thing.”

Although the age limit to purchase tobacco products was increased to 21-years-old, Hilker added that it remains unknown if it has had a measurable effect on youth vaping, in-part due to the coronavirus pandemic’s strain on local health departments.

“I haven’t seen or been made aware of any reports or anything available that really shows how (youth vaping) has changed since tobacco 21 has become a thing in Wisconsin,” she said.

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For more information or for references to facts on marijuana visit www.breakwaterwi.org/resources/

