



Rohan Marley, partners propose new marijuana dispensary for Montclair



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Rohan Marley is one of the business partners in a prospective new medical marijuana dispensary being eyed for Montclair.

By ERIN ROLL

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Montclair could be getting a second medical marijuana dispensary in the near future, with the backing of a business partnership that includes one of the children of reggae icon Bob Marley.

Rohan Marley, in partnership with the Colorado-based business Lightshade, has filed an application with the state for a license to operate a medical dispensary in Montclair.

If the application is approved, Lightshade Montclair would become the township's second dispensary, and Lightshade's first dispensary outside of Colorado.

Rohan Marley is one of the 11 children of the late Bob Marley, the Jamaican reggae singer, musician and songwriter. Rohan Marley, a former football player for the Ottawa Rough Riders, has branched out into several business ventures, including the coffee-growing industry.

Lightshade's application for a Montclair medical marijuana dispensary was submitted during the most recent application period for licensing, which ended in August. "It's a hurry-up-and-wait process," said Mike Leach, Lightshade's chief operating officer.

Greenleaf Compassion Center, on Bloomfield Avenue, was the first dispensary to open in New Jersey in December 2012.

New Jersey intends to allow 24 dispensaries, known as alternative treatment centers, to operate in the state. Eight of those would be located in the northern region, which includes Essex County, eight would be in the central region and six would be in the southern region.

The state has given preliminary approval to six of the most recent round of applications for new medical marijuana dispensaries this year, which will bring the number of dispensaries in the state to 12. Lightshade was not one of those six, as its application is still under review. The Department of Health declined to comment on the application's status on Friday for that reason.

Lightshade's project partners are from the Montclair area or are otherwise familiar with it. Marley lived in South Orange and raised his family there. Leach grew up in Little Falls and attended college at William Paterson University and Pace University, and his family owned a business in Upper Montclair. The other business partners are Montclair attorney John Zidziunas, Erik Caggiano, a cannabis manufacturing facilities manager, and retired Dr. Anthony Caggiano from Little Falls.

Marley is expected to be involved with the marketing aspect of Lightshade, Leach said.

“This is not Big Cannabis coming into town and saying, this is how we do things in Colorado,” Leach said.

Leach said Montclair was picked for the Lightshade’s location mainly because, “it’s a good centralized base.”

Denver has several hundred dispensaries, both recreational and medical, some within a few blocks of each other. Leach said Montclair can handle two dispensaries. All of Denver’s dispensaries support each other and the local economy, he said.

Lightshade is expected to have an answer on the application by the end of the year. If the dispensary is approved, Leach said Lightshade Montclair could open by the summer or fall of next year. He said Lightshade is looking at prospective locations, including one on Bloomfield Avenue, but would not disclose exact locations.

Councilman Bob Russo, a proponent of expanded access to medical marijuana facilities, said he was surprised to learn of the prospective new dispensary. He questioned whether it would be feasible for two medical dispensaries to operate within the same town.

The state handles the licensing for marijuana dispensaries, but the township’s planning and zoning boards would also have to grant approval for the actual location in Montclair, he said.

Montclair does not have any ordinances zoning medical marijuana dispensaries or regulating the operations of dispensaries, said Township Communications Director Katya Wowk.

Julio Valentin, the owner of Greenleaf Compassion Center, said the state regulates the number of dispensaries by county.

Valentin is okay with another dispensary opening up in Montclair, saying that the ability for patients to get access to medical marijuana is what is most important.

“As long as it’s to serve patients, I’m okay with it,” Valentin said.