



WHOLESONOME

Healing

RIVER CITY PHOENIX

Discover how one of
Sacramento's oldest and
most successful cannabis
dispensaries meets the
needs of patients and
the community


RCP
SACRAMENTO

LIVING UP TO ITS Reputation

BY KEN MAGRI

In a changing industry, River City Phoenix still puts patients first

It is not unusual for staff at River City Phoenix, one of Sacramento's oldest medical cannabis dispensaries, to receive thank you cards or hear stories of personal improvement from their patients. That's because RCP offers more than medicine — it's a place where relationships are built.

"We wanted to do more than just provide cannabis to patients," says RCP board member David Spradlin. "We wanted to create a space that felt like home away from home for our members."

As more and more businesses enter the cannabis industry, RCP's staff has maintained its reputation for compassionate care with the simple philosophy of putting patients first. By offering high-quality products and wellness services, the dispensary strives to treat the whole patient.

Since it opened, RCP has provided a wide selection of medicine including sativa, indica and hybrid flowers that vary in strength and affordability. Patients who want an alternative to smoking can choose from a variety of edibles from trusted industry brands like KIVA Confections, Korova and Heavenly Sweet Medibles.

The dispensary also carries a variety of concentrates and vape cartridges that range from 60 percent to 80 percent THC content. Don't know how much that is? A trusted staff member can explain things like percentages, milligrams and proper dosing.

To ensure safety and quality, RCP employs the services of Sequoia Analytical Labs to test for pesticides, residuals and microbiological contaminants, as well as

potency. Over the years, RCP has partnered with researchers and beta testing programs, "not only to ensure the safest possible medicine for our patients," says Spradlin, "but also to help push the boundaries of current testing technology regulations to new levels."

Staff members are knowledgeable about the products and ask each patient questions about their medical condition, prior cannabis use and comfort level to recommend the best options.

As one budtender says, "When you see people that you helped two weeks ago, and they come back a whole new person because of something I recommended to them, it's probably one of the most rewarding things I've experienced."

That's what makes the team so effective — their personal commitment to helping patients.

In keeping with that philosophy, RCP offers a range of wellness services that promote patient health. Those include massage, yoga, chiropractic, workplace readiness classes, fresh produce on Tuesday evenings and a legal rights course. These wellness and educational services set RCP apart from others in the industry, and the dispensary's impact extends beyond its walls.

In 2014, RCP founded The Village, a nonprofit organization that began as an offshoot of the Patient Services department, which invests in services for at-risk communities. The Village places an emphasis on youth-focused programs and provides more than 1,500 healthy meals a month. It also provides free community movie nights

and shelter support packages for temporarily displaced children.

In an industry defined by its rapid growth, RCP's reputation for reliability is still at the forefront of its identity.

"Nowadays, we are seeing much more focus on 'market share' and 'products' and 'consumer groups,'" Spradlin says. "But I am really proud of our team for sticking to what we see as our core value: just to take care of our members."

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DAVID SPRADLIN
River City Phoenix board member



Chelsea Fabun, budtender at River City Phoenix, enjoys sharing her expertise in medical cannabis products with patients and ensuring they receive knowledgeable and compassionate care.

PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES



COMPASSIONATE

BY ANNE STOKES

A budtender's perspective from both sides of the counter

Care

Chelsea Fabun knows just how to help the patients who walk through River City Phoenix's doors. While she's been a budtender at the Sacramento medical cannabis dispensary for the past three months, she started as a patient.

Fabun, who suffers from debilitating anxiety and panic attacks, says that the prescription pills she was previously taking didn't help her the way medical cannabis does.

"If I was in a panic attack and needed that relief right then and there to shake me out of it, pills couldn't help that," she says. "That's where medical marijuana came in. That was the one thing that could snap me right out of it."

Fabun became an RCP patient in 2012. She says that her perspective from both sides of the counter helps her better serve patients, ensuring that they receive the knowledgeable and compassionate care that River City Phoenix is known for. She says that even after just three months, she already has patients who request her help.

"I have a patient who knows my voice over the phone whenever she calls. She trusts me, she trusts my opinion," Fabun says. "She has really bad social anxiety, so when she comes in, she wants to come in and leave. I completely understand how she's feeling."

According to Fabun, it takes a wide breadth of knowledge and experience to be a budtender. Not only are they responsible for educating patients about the diverse medical cannabis options, their expertise is often called upon to advise patients on which product type and potency meets their unique needs. Budtenders need to be aware of the different therapeutic effects particular strains may have, as well as edible and topical options available to patients who don't want to smoke.

"We talk with them, ask them about what they are going to be using medical marijuana for," she says. "We need to know if people need sativas to help them stay awake and get things done, or if they're going to need indica, which helps people who have insomnia and can't sleep or who have anxiety and need to just relax."

For Fabun, being able to share the therapeutic benefits of medical cannabis with others is something she loves about her job. The best part, she says, is the satisfied patients that keep coming back to River City Phoenix.

"I want to help other people," she says. "I was pretty much bedridden for a long time and now I'm working every day, dealing face-to-face with people. It's something that has helped me, so I love to help other people."

"I love to help other people."

CHELSEA FABUN
Budtender, River City Phoenix

A Better WAY TO TREAT THE PAIN

Patient finds physical and emotional
relief at River City Phoenix

BY ANNE STOKES

At 5:30 in the morning on May 15, 2004, Victor Gonzales was driving through the intersection of Sunrise and Folsom boulevards in Sacramento when a motorist ran a red light and collided with his motorcycle.

“The gas tank that was between my legs broke my pelvis in four places. I snapped my wrist and I was in an eight-day coma,” he says. “It took two and a half years to fully recover from that.”

While such a serious accident was life-changing, Gonzales’ proclivity for injury dates back to childhood. At the age of 7, he broke both ankles playing baseball. By his early 20s, he re-broke his weakened ankles eight more times. Now in his 50s, his knees are failing due to the added strain over the years. He estimates that he’s broken his bones about 16 times and endured eight surgeries, with more procedures on his knees and ankles slated in the near future.

Gonzales uses medical cannabis to manage his pain. It helps him physically, mentally and emotionally, and allows him to function throughout the day. He is able to stand, cook, do laundry and walk up and down stairs thanks to the medicine.

“It takes my mind off of concentrating on that pain so I can function,” he says. “All of a sudden you realize that you’re not thinking about the pain in your knees or your ankle or your back or your neck. To me that’s a big relief.”

Since 2009, Gonzales has been a patient with River City Phoenix (RCP). He says he appreciates the dispensary’s consistently high-quality medicine and is assured of product safety and effectiveness. All RCP products are tested for potency, pesticides, bacteria and fungus at Sequoia Analytical Labs.

“I continue to go to RCP because of the level of cleanliness in their medications,” he

“They know me.
They know my
history. To me,
it’s like going
home.”

VICTOR GONZALES
Patient, River City Phoenix

says. “To know what you’re getting is truly a good thing.”

For Gonzales, what medical cannabis *does not* do is just as important as the relief it provides. He has used prescription painkillers such as Vicodin in the past, but was concerned about the risks associated with opiates: liver and kidney damage, digestive issues and addiction. Medical cannabis, he says, doesn’t carry those risks.

“I didn’t like the way painkillers made me feel, the grogginess,” he says. “They help the pain, but why would I want to deal with the side effects when all I want is the pain gone?”

RCP’s knowledgeable budtenders ensure that patients know just what they’re getting, as well as the vast amount of options available to them. Gonzales says they take the time to share their expertise and educate patients.

“They know exactly what they’re doing. They’ll tell you the strength, what it does for you, they’ll tell you which one you need,” Gonzales says. “They’re truly concerned about what you want, what you need and how you feel.”

He characterizes RCP staff like an extended family that makes him feel like he’s being taken care of medically and emotionally.

“They try to accommodate everybody, from the guards to the attendant who takes your license to the budtenders, everybody,” he says. “They know me. They know my history. To me, it’s like going home. They remember who you are. It’s a comforting thing.”

Victor Gonzales has been a patient at RCP for several years and says the medicine he receives there helps him function and accomplish everyday tasks. Quality products, peace of mind and a warm, welcoming atmosphere keep him coming back.

PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES



BY ANNE STOKES

FILLING THE *Need*

Charitable programs serve underprivileged youth

Q n Thursday afternoons, the tables inside Colonia San Martin's community clubhouse are stacked with healthy food: fresh fruits and vegetables, organic granola bars, yogurt, oatmeal and whole wheat pasta.

The food is distributed weekly through Full Belly Backpacks, a weekend hunger-prevention program. The program is run through The Village, the charitable organization that River City Phoenix established to meet various community needs.

Each Friday, more than a dozen children who live at Colonia San Martin — a South Sacramento low-income housing community — pick up backpacks filled with enough snacks and meals to last them through the weekend.

"It really helps out. I barely make ends meet as it is," says Victor Damian, whose 12-year-old son benefits from the Full Belly Backpacks program. "I would be hurting if it wasn't for this."

"It's always there — they're always consistent with the backpacks. It's a great organization. I never have to worry about not providing. I'm very grateful for them."

One major problem The Village works to address is the issue of hunger in the Sacramento area.

They especially focus on providing children with nutritious food.

"Every weekend we can at least ensure that they still have food — and not just any type of food, but food that is actually good for them," says Shayna Schonauer, River City Phoenix regional manager. "We try to make sure it's not all packaged and processed ingredients — things that they can still enjoy but that's also going to nourish them."

The menu changes from week to week, but the need remains constant. According to a 2014 Feeding America study, 24.4 percent of children in Sacramento County live in food-insecure households. And in 2015,

the California Department of Education determined that 58 percent of students in the county were eligible to receive free or reduced-price school meals.

Programs like Full Belly Backpacks help families manage while school is out during weekends.

The Village runs several charitable programs in addition to Full Belly Backpacks. Their Shelter Support program provides displaced children with toiletries, blankets and toys. A monthly Birthday Bash provides all the birthday party trappings — cake, food, entertainment and presents — for children living at Colonia San Martin. The Village also supplies food to an after-school program at Hagginwood Community Center, which feeds 350 children every weekday during the school year. While school is out during the summer, that number can swell to 500 students.

Matthew Z'berg, RCP community outreach coordinator, says The Village's charitable programs align with RCP's mission of compassion.

"One of our chief concerns is to take care of kids in our community," he says. "Kids are our future. They're not always well-sheltered or well-fed, so we're always concerned about that."

The dispensary's mission of compassion applies to its patients as well. River City Phoenix has several assistance

programs, including healthy meal planning and food assistance. It also offers free wellness classes and services, as well as programs that help connect patients with the medicine they need.

"Patients can come in and get free acupuncture, free massage, free chiropractic services, free yoga classes," Schonauer says. "We are trying to support and take care of our community."

For more information on The Village and its charitable programs, visit www.thevillageoutreach.com or call 916-274-4253.

"Every weekend we can at least ensure that they still have food."

SHAYNA SCHONAUER
River City Phoenix regional manager

Shayna Schonauer, River City Phoenix regional manager, helps to distribute healthy snacks and meals to children through The Village's Full Belly Backpacks program, a program that helps alleviate hunger in the community.

PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES



Phoebe-Isabella
Comeaux-Cochran
works as a budtender
at RCP.
PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES



A LEADER

RCP promotes employee
and patient well being

IN

River City Phoenix isn't content to be a leader in customer service. The RCP team wants to change the future of the medical cannabis industry, and two ways they're achieving this goal is through allowing employees to unionize and advanced product testing.

Partnership with organized labor

The United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW) first welcomed cannabis workers into its core membership in 2010. The following year, RCP became the first Sacramento dispensary to encourage its workers to unionize within the UFCW Local No. 8 chapter.

"We reached out to the union as a result of feeling a strong need to protect our workers from a variety of threats at the time," says David Spradlin, RCP board member. His concerns stemmed from an increase in federal and local legal action after Melinda Haag, then the U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of California, began shutting down dispensaries, claiming they had been "hijacked by profiteers."

RCP's board members were concerned that crackdowns on dispensaries could impact their ability to act on behalf of employees.

"Things were so much different back then," Spradlin says.

They proactively joined the union to protect employees' jobs, wages and benefits. Spradlin says he credits the union for backing his employees "during a time when most large labor and political groups were trying to distance themselves as much as they could from cannabis."

With additional union members from Southern California and Colorado, the UFCW now represents thousands

of cannabis workers. In recent years, Sacramento's Local No. 8 welcomed workers from two other locals dispensaries, but RCP remains the largest union cannabis employer in all of California.

For RCP employees, union membership means top wages in the region with scheduled yearly raises. Staff also enjoy a full benefits package that includes medical, vision and dental coverage, as well as paid vacation, sick time and bonuses.

"As we progress in
the industry, this will
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other dispensaries."

CURTIS DUCART
Director of purchasing, RCP

RCP also pays into an Individual Account Plan (IAP) for every employee. Because the cannabis industry still has federal banking issues, an IAP functions in lieu of a regular pension plan.

In addition, union shops enjoy the protections built into their collective bargaining agreement. For example, an employee cannot be terminated at the whim of an employer. There is a process that includes a progressive discipline program and grievance hearings. These steps are built into every contract, and when issues arise, workers have a fair opportunity to tell their side of the story.

BY KEN MAGRI

Innovation

Flower is tested for potency in small batches in-house at RCP. PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES



RCP's relationship with the UFCW transcends the often-heard stereotype about hostility between management and union workers.

"In our experience this couldn't be further from the truth," says Spradlin. "We have learned about putting policies in place to make sure that our staff is trained and managed properly, and in turn, taught them a lot about our industry."

UFCW recently created a website dedicated to the growing number of members who are employed at medical marijuana dispensaries and other cannabis-industry-related workplaces around the country.

As Spradlin put it, "organizing under a true collective bargaining agreement is just a natural part of that growth for many operators."

Comprehensive testing means quality medicine

Patient safety and knowledge is a core principle of the RCP collective. In a burgeoning industry like medical cannabis, testing the product is essential for earning the patient's trust. Yet, many dispensaries rely on test data given to them by their suppliers, which may not be recent, nor specific to a particular batch.

"Proper testing is a very necessary thing to ensure patients are getting only the highest quality and safe medicine to use," says Curtis Ducart, director of purchasing at RCP.

RCP was one of the first dispensaries in the country to conduct in-house testing for active cannabinoid levels on all of its flowers, using Quanticann 2 technology from Berkeley's Steep Hill Labs. This technology allows for small samples of between 1.5 grams and 2 grams of ground cannabis to be placed into a machine that produces potency results in about 15 seconds.

For everything else, RCP partners with Sacramento's Sequoia Analytical Labs. Sequoia tests for terpenes and microbiological elements, like molds, mildews and yeast. They can pinpoint exactly what is in any cannabis sample, which can include salmonella, E. coli, and other harmful bacteria.

"They also test for pesticides, which is becoming a huge issue in the cannabis industry," Ducart says.

Cannabis concentrates are tested for residual solvents like butane, hexane and pentane. These solvents are not safe for human consumption and limited to 499 PPM (Part Per Million) or less to be considered safe for sale.

RCP has also partnered with other labs by providing samples for beta-testing. Working together to fine-tune accuracies, they help push the technology and capabilities of testing further toward industrywide standards. They are currently working to develop more accurate testing protocols for heavy metals and other contaminants stemming from environmental factors.

What does this testing mean for the patient? Budtenders at RCP are educated on both test results and testing practices during their initial training. Then, throughout their employment, they continue to be educated as new processes

Michelle Agurto and Roger Saephan with Sequoia Analytical Labs test medical cannabis for mold. PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES



get introduced. Budtenders in turn educate patients, so that they are assured their medicine is safe and can make more informed decisions.

"We have always worked hard to stay at the forefront with our testing requirements," Spradlin says.

"As we progress in the industry," adds Ducart, "this will become a standard we have already set for other dispensaries. I am proud to be part of a collective that truly cares about patient safety."

HOPE, KNOWLEDGE, *compassion*

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River City Phoenix is a leader in patient care in the medical cannabis industry. With a wealth of high-quality medicines and compassionate, knowledgeable staff that will guide patients through their choices, RCP offers a comfortable and professional atmosphere for patients with diverse needs.



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