

From Cop to Cannabis: A Profile of Purlife's Darren White

We Interview Up-and-Coming Entrepreneurs in the Cannabis Industry

by JOSH LEE May 12, 2021



Published May 12th, 2021 at 11:35 am

Darren White is the CEO of PurLife Management Group. White is the former sheriff of Bernalillo County who was once on the other side of the fence when it came to cannabis. Now he heads one of the leading medical cannabis companies in the state. We sat down with him to discuss the ups and downs of running a popular chain of dispensaries.

The Rolling Paper: You were Bernalillo County Sheriff at one time. How have your views on cannabis changed in the last decade, and what changed them?

White: You know, I spent most of my adult life in law enforcement, and like a lot of police officers, I suffered some pretty bad injuries. I've had my knee replaced after several surgeries. I had back surgery. I have been a chronic pain patient for probably 15-plus years because of it. And when I needed it, I would take narcotics that doctors prescribed to me.

But I was introduced to THC ointment after I retired, and I was very impressed. I was still skeptical, but I figured, "What the hell—I'm not an officer anymore, so I'll give it a try." And it worked. I mean it really worked. It made a difference.

At the around the same time, I was contacted by my partner Ryan Gomez. Ryan was a firefighter at the time, and he had this idea that he wanted to apply for a medical cannabis license, and he initially asked if I would do the security assessment and the security plans. And then over time, we just developed a relationship. The old application was 1,400 pages. It was very, very detailed—a lot of work. So we just ended up partnering on it. He and I worked on that application for a year. My son Indy, who now runs of our dispensary operations, helped with the application for the last five months. We were fortunate enough to get issued a license, and we just started to put together the business plans and execute those plans. We started very, very small. We started with one store and one small grow, and we reinvested the money to open up other locations and to grow our cultivation facilities as we went along.

We're now the second largest medical cannabis company in the state. And we still have the same philosophy. We've been growing—no pun intended—and the revenue that we made with the company we've been able to reinvest into the grow operation. We now have two grow

operations and there's probably well over \$2 million invested in each of them.

In what ways is working in the cannabis industry different from working in other sectors?

Well, I speak for the medical, because that's the only side I know. Having lived with chronic pain for as long as I have, you'll do anything to improve your quality of life. Anything. There's nothing worse than living with pain every single day. I think the best part of the job is getting to know people that have sustained injuries that really have been detrimental to their health and well being, and then having them experience cannabis as an alternative to a cocktail of narcotics—and seeing their quality of life get better. That's the coolest thing in the world, and I can't tell you how many people I know that have experienced that.

What advice do you have for others trying to break into this industry?

I would say, first and foremost, you really have to have a plan. You really have to sit down and draw out what your vision is, and what you want to do, and how you want to do it, and how you want to fund it. I think one of the first things that people will realize getting into the business is that in order to grow hybrid cannabis ... It requires a substantial investment. You've got to remember it's a commercial business. So you want to make sure that what you're growing is safe and high-enough in quality that people want to buy it and continue to buy it. It's not just that you want to put a product out there; you want people to come back. And I think some people will be surprised by the initial investment—what it requires.

But if you go in and put budgets together, put business plans together, then you won't be surprised when you start having to order some of the equipment. And it can be pricey. The growth that we've had—in

the last five years, we've probably spent over \$5 million building it. And that's a lot of money.

Do you think the medical industry will change with the legalization of recreational cannabis?

History shows that they all change a little bit. So historically, when we look at the states that have been moved to an adult-use model, yeah, there will be some change. But I think that the legislators really did a fantastic job along with the governor of pushing hard to try to preserve the medical cannabis program. I think New Mexico is positioned well to continue to have a robust medical cannabis program, and I think that's the direct result of the work that the governor and the legislators did to ensure that that happened.

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