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FEATURED

## South Beloit welcomes Sunnyside dispensary with grand opening

By AUSTIN MONTGOMERY Staff Writer

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From left: Sunnyside dispensary employees, Sen. Dave Syverson, South Beloit Mayor Ted Rehl and Cresco Labs Spokesperson Jason Erkes cut the ceremonial ribbon marking the grand opening of the South Beloit dispensary on Mc Austin Montgomery/Beloit Daily News

SOUTH BELOIT—South Beloit Mayor Ted Rehl believes that the opening of the Sunnyside marijuana dispensary along Interstate 39/90 will spur further economic growth in the Stateline Area for years to come.

Cresco Labs employees, Rehl, Sen. Dave Syverson, R-Rockford, and residents were on-hand Monday morning for a grand opening ceremony of the 7,200 square-foot dispensary. Construction on the dispensary located near the intersection of Willowbrook Road and Gardner Street behind the Road Ranger truck stop, began in December.

“We are locked in a really challenging period right now for any kind of commerce and the opportunity to gain additional revenue, you just cannot ignore that,” Rehl said. “On a dozen different levels, this is a gift to South Beloit.”

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That revenue, which the city is slated to receive 75% of the imposed 3% municipal tax, is expected to go towards improving infrastructure and boosting the city's pension plans to offset any budget constraints that could stem from staff retirements, Rehl said.

In June, Illinois marijuana sales stood at nearly \$77 million, which Cresco Labs CEO Charlie Bachtell said “translates to an almost billion-dollar annualized run rate.”

"With our 6-times increase in cultivation capacity and focus on going deep in the state, we continue to command an outsized share of this market," Bachtell said.

Syverson said he hoped the South Beloit dispensary would provide relief to the Rockford location on Perryville Road that dealt with traffic and crowd control issues in January when it became legal to sell recreational marijuana to adults in Illinois.

"There were some problems and this is going to allow some relief," Syverson said. "I know a lot of the neighbors to the Rockford location will be happy with that."

Cresco Labs Chief Communications Officer Jason Erkes said the company aims to "normalize and professionalize the cannabis industry."

"Our store is focused on education to help walk customers through the process of accomplishing their wellness goals," Erkes said.

Law enforcement and community groups in southern Wisconsin criticized the Illinois marijuana legalization approval in 2019. Marijuana use and possession is still illegal under Wisconsin law.

Beloit police Chief David Zibolski was a vocal critic of the law change, pointing to possible increased operating while intoxicated offenses and other public safety issues that could stem from legalization.

With the law change taking effect this year, Zibolski instructed command staff to provide additional training and messaging to officers.

Rehl said as operations normalize at the South Beloit dispensary, he expects South Beloit police to monitor the situation and be ready to change enforcement priorities as needed.

"When this heats up, are we going to need more parking?" Rehl said. "Are we going to need traffic enforcement? We feel that the presence of our police will evolve along with the store. What's really important for South Beloit is that visitors to our city are really safe and whatever that takes we will do it. We're sympathetic to Beloit."

Rock County Sheriff Troy Knudson said he "was not certain" the South Beloit dispensary would "vastly change the situation with marijuana here in Rock County."

“Our deputies will continue to work to ensure highway safety and will continue to pursue possession cases that they come into contact with,” Knudson said.

Rock County currently has three separate traffic enforcement grants currently in effect allowing for increased law enforcement efforts that include traffic enforcement.

“These efforts are timely with regards to this new dispensary opening and hopefully, anyone inclined to travel to Illinois to take advantage of the more lax marijuana laws will keep this in mind and avoid traveling back to Wisconsin while under the influence of marijuana or any other intoxicant,” Knudson said.

Rehl said the dispute regarding cross-border traffic reminded him of when alcohol sales were legal for 18-year-olds in Wisconsin.

“Historically these border issues have been a problem for both states,” Rehl said. “But the strength of the Stateline Area is our ability to work together and I am confident we will do that here.”

The Sunnyside Dispensary, at 7000 First Ranger Drive, will be open from 9 a.m.—9 p.m. seven days a week. Due to COVID-19 customers are required to wear a mask and observe social distancing guidelines.

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