

Hash Bash flash - Pro-pot event gets touch of Hollywood

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The Hash Bash was cold and a little bit Hollywood Saturday.

Among the featured speakers this year was actor and director David Arquette, touring to promote his movie "The Tripper," which debuts April 20.

Arquette's words followed the theme of the 36th annual event, which emphasized the need to change laws to legalize marijuana.

"What we really should be fighting is violence" as a solution to solving our problems, Arquette told an enthusiastic crowd of more than 400. They endured freezing temperatures, wind and snow flurries for nearly an hour on the University of Michigan Diag Saturday.

Adam Brook, organizer and master of ceremonies of the Hash Bash since 1989, termed the crowd and response better than expected, given the weather. He said Arquette has been a fan of the event and made time to include the Hash Bash in his tour.

Scio Township Trustee Chuck Ream said that many existing laws ignore research showing marijuana is not a dangerous drug, but rather is "God's holy and sacred medicine."

Tim Beck, executive director of the Michigan chapter of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML) vowed to continue the fight to change the state law. "This thing is going to change, I promise you," he said.

Brook paid tribute to James Wilson Jr., known as Chef Ra, who wrote a food column in the pro-marijuana magazine "High Times." He died in his sleep on Dec. 26 at age 56.

Brook said Wilson often enjoyed a beer at Ashley's on State Street. He marked the memory by emptying a bottle in the middle of the Diag - but didn't sip from it. "My lawyer advised me about that," Brook said.

In the heyday of the Hash Bash in the 1970s, as many as 10,000 people packed into the Diag. The event began 35 years ago as a reaction to activist John Sinclair's 1969 prison sentence on charges of possessing two marijuana cigarettes.

A few people said they smoked marijuana during the rally, but more apparently did so afterward at the nearby street fair on Monroe Street, next to Dominick's restaurant.

Brook warned the crowd not to light up on the Diag, where the U-M Department of Public Safety enforces state law. The minimum punishment under state law is \$100 fine or 90 days in jail.

Ann Arbor's city code treats marijuana possession as a civil infraction, fining \$25 for the first offense, \$50 for the second and \$100 for subsequent offenses.

After the rally, hundreds in the crowd went over to the street fair, where music played and vendors sold marijuana paraphernalia and sweaters that read, "Hash Bash Ann Arbor."

Arquette stood by his chartered bus as he signed autographs and discussed his movie, which focuses on a crazed killer who mimics Ronald Reagan while terrorizing a yearly gathering of hippies at a rock festival in the California forest.

Diane Brown, spokeswoman for U-M's campus police, said the Diag crowd was orderly, and no arrests were made in connection with the rally.

Ann Arbor Police Sgt. Matt Lige said officers made one arrest for marijuana delivery and wrote about a half dozen citations for possession of marijuana.

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