

Hash Bash 2017 Prepares to Launch New Legalization Campaign

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By Ken Wachsberger



As with any bumper crop, the Michigan cannabis community expected to harvest the results of a successful MI Legalize petition drive after the fall election and now be celebrating. Instead, we're regrouping and starting again—but still celebrating because that's who we are and it's that time again in Ann Arbor.

On Saturday April 1 at the University of Michigan Diag, cannabis advocates and aficionados will gather at high noon for the 46th annual Hash Bash.

Look for lots of highpoints. According to Nick Zettell, this year's Hash Bash coordinator, "We have a state senator speaking, Coleman Young from Detroit, who last year introduced a bill to legalize and regulate marijuana in Michigan. We have several professional athletes, including Darren McCarty, Eugene Monroe, and Cliff Robinson."

- McCarty is a former National Hockey League star with the Detroit Red Wings and four-time Stanley Cup winner who was saved from alcoholism and pill addiction by marijuana. The pain that goes with the life of a hockey player, he says, requires "pills to get up and to go to bed. Educate yourself." He's been clean for a year and a half thanks to cannabis.
- Monroe is a National Football League star who has played with the Jacksonville Jaguars and Baltimore Ravens. Last year he became the first active NFL player to openly advocate for the use of cannabinoids to treat chronic pain and sports-related injuries. "It's time for the NFL to change its archaic standards to better protect its players and set an example for our young athletes," he believes. "For too long, I've watched my teammates and good friends battle with opioid addiction and leave the game with a long road still ahead."
- Robinson, a retired 18-year National Basketball Association veteran, including a stint with the Detroit Pistons, was disciplined by the NBA in 2006 for marijuana use. Since retiring he has become an investor in Oregon's lucrative marijuana industry. "I want to distill the stigma around cannabis, the misperception that athletes and cannabis are incompatible," he says.

"Weather permitting," Zettell continues, "we'll be extending the event with entertainment from Cosmic Knot. We have some legacies but also a whole round of new speakers who have done outstanding work in the world of marijuana activism who will use the Hash Bash as a platform to get to 10,000 people."

Especially exciting to Zettell is Brad Forrester, a member of the board of Michigan NORML and a long-time activist who this past December spearheaded the campaign to get fifty NORML chapters around the country and the national NORML organization to sign onto a letter that was sent to Mike Pence. “With the Trump administration’s hostility to legal marijuana, it will be important to watch them as marijuana legalization becomes a reality in more states.”

It's Happening Fast

Indeed it’s happening fast. Hash Bash social media coordinator Shayna Palinkas points to “the awesome 2016 election results” for medical marijuana across the country:

- Adult recreational use in California, Nevada, Maine, and Massachusetts (only Arizona’s bid was defeated).
- Medical marijuana in Florida (with 72% voting in favor), Arkansas, and North Dakota.

In Montana, medical marijuana was already legal but the state passed a regulatory system that will bring order to the process.

Thirty-three states have now legalized marijuana in one form or another.

And Michigan?

Michigan already has medical marijuana but we could have gone all the way, brought recreational marijuana under the umbrella of safety, and made a huge contribution to ending the wasteful, destructive war on drugs. Had the signatures all been accepted from MI Legalize’s historic grassroots petition drive, Michigan voters no doubt would have supported it and we would be smoking to our success at the Hash Bash.

Instead, like a presidential election that can declare a candidate who loses by three million votes the winner, democracy was derailed. Choice was denied on a technicality. The petitions were not accepted.

But, as history will show after the 2018 election, the derailment was only temporary. MI Legalize organizers brushed themselves off in 2016, assessed the situation, and started over again, wiser from experience and more determined than ever to succeed this time. They aren’t just walking the walk. They’re taking the tokes.

According to Zettell, “Petitions are still being drafted for the new MI Legalize petition drive and won’t be ready by the Hash Bash so we won’t circulate petitions at the event but we’ll be recruiting people to help with the ballot drive.”

They need your help. Now.

Other Speakers

Other featured speakers at this year’s Hash Bash include

- Sue Sisley, medical director for medical cannabis license holders in eleven different states, as well as expert on regulations for laboratory testing; and on the use of whole plant marijuana by combat veterans with treatment-resistant PTSD.
- Jeffrey Hank, civil rights attorney and freedom activist from Lansing, founder of Hank Law, and leader of the campaigns to legalize weed in both Lansing and East Lansing, as well as executive director of MI Legalize 2018
- Chuck Ream, a leader or funder of 25 marijuana legalization victories in 21 cities, founder of Safer Michigan Coalition to unite Michigan’s most effective cannabis activists, and recipient of the “lifetime achievement

- award” from *High Time*” magazine at the 2014 Michigan Cannabis Cup
- John Sinclair, blues and jazz poet and radio show host at www.radiofreemsterdam.com, whose bust in 1969 for giving two joints to an undercover narc and the successful worldwide campaign to free him led to the first Hash Bash in 1972
- Captain Kirk, pioneer in the field of medical edibles and multiple award-winning edibles chef at High Times Medical Edibles Cup, Michigan Edibles Cannabis Cup, Michigan “Best of the Best,” and Metro Times Detroit Best Edible award
- Cassandra Ricks DiGilio, founder of Women Grow-Metro Detroit Chapter, board member of Macomb County NORML, and a member of the Michigan Democratic Party Progressive Black Caucus
- Larry Gabriel, whose column, “Higher Ground,” appears regularly in *Detroit Metro Times*
- Alexi Sinanaj, president of the University of Michigan’s Students for Sensible Drug Policy chapter
- Yousef Rabhi, Michigan state representative
- Virg Bernero, Lansing city mayor
- and others

Special Thanks

Special thanks to the Hash Bash committee members who have done the behind-the-scenes work to bring this special event together:

- Nick Zettell: coordinator and organizer
- Mark Passerini: organizer and past emcee
- Lisa Conine: outreach
- Shayna Palinkas: social media
- Jim Salame: street team leader
- Alexi Sinanaj and Erin Dunne: student liaisons

For up-to-date information on the Hash Bash, Zettell says, “download the Hash Bash app from your application store.”