

# The Annual Hash Bash Is Back

Las Vega Potheads

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Ace H.

This year's Hash Bash features veterans, pediatric medical marijuana patients, grandparents who use cannabis- and the always-entertaining Tommy Chong.

As per usual, the Hash Bash begins at high noon on the first Saturday in April; this year, that's the 2nd. The annual event takes place on the Diag at the University of Michigan campus in Ann Arbor.

In his introduction letter included in this year's Hash Bash program, organizer Nick Zettell says, "Since 1971, like-minded individuals have gathered on this spot to protest unjust marijuana laws, congregate in celebration of cannabis culture, and enjoy a peaceful afternoon in the Cannabis Capital of the Midwest."

The Hash Bash is produced by Zettell, and the permits to gather on the Diag are obtained by student organizations NORML of U of M; SSDP at U of M; and the University organization's legal arm, LSSDP. Zettell said the purpose of this year's Bash is "to provide a quality program with the audience in mind."

His four goals: "Provide pertinent information, offer relevant entertainers, give the people an opportunity to get involved and generate a sense of community."

The speaker's list includes "a stellar lineup" of relevant names like Tommy Chong, the cultural icon of the marijuana community; Dan Skye, Executive Editor of the industry-leading magazine High Times; Shea Gunther, Executive Producer of the popular podcast Marijuana Today and co-founder of Students for Sensible Drug Policy; Jim Gierach, a well-known speaker for Law Enforcement Against Prohibition; legendary cannabis breeder DJ Short; and the man for whom Hash Bash was founded all those years ago, poet and author John Sinclair.

"It's always good to hear from LEAP and those former police officers. It's particularly powerful," said Zettell, "and the same can be said for the elected officials that speak."

This year there are a number of people currently holding office in Michigan speaking on the Diag, including House Representative Jeff Irwin, representing the Ann Arbor area; Ann Arbor City Councilperson Sabra Briere; Lansing Mayor, Virg Bernero; Thetford Township Trustee and cannabis activist Eric Gunnels; and the Mayor pro tem of Montrose, Ray Foust, whose community just experienced a raid on a dispensary by a narcotics enforcement group against the wishes of the local authorities.

Michigan activists speakers with a notable history include Rich Birkett, a Hash Bash legend and former Emcee; journalist Larry Gabriel of the Metro Times; Chuck Ream, multiple award-winner and the grandfather of the modern marijuana movement in Michigan; Jamie Lowell of MILEgalize and 3rd Coast Dispensary; myself, Rick Thompson of The Compassion Chronicles and MINORML/MILEgalize; Dori Edwards of Bloom City; Charmie Gholson of Michigan Moms United; Jim Powers, father of a pediatric patient and founder of Michigan Parents for Compassion; and Ann Arbor physician Dr. Evan Litinas.

The speaker's list is heavy with lawyers this year, including Jeff Hank, the leader of MILEgalize; Matthew Abel, top man at MINORML; Bernard Jocuns, Chair of the Marijuana Law Section of the Michigan Bar Association (MBA); Michael Komorn, winner of the 2015 MBA's Right To Counsel Award; and David Rudoi, MILEgalize Board member.

Two letters of support will be read to the crowd, one from California Representative Sam Farr and the other from Colorado Representative Jared Polis, both known as strong supporters of marijuana law reform.

"That's a lot to pack in, in a limited amount of time!" Zettell laughed. "But remember, above all else, Hash Bash is a

celebration.”

The celebration begins with a performance of the National Anthem by Jake Szott. In past years, multi-talented performer Laith Al-Saadi has slung his guitar for the intro, but he is currently in the running for the top spot on this year’s version of the television show, *The Voice*.

New this year is the Hash Bash App, a downloadable application for cell phones that gives the user access to the speaker’s list, biographies and photography. Download it via your normal app provider.

Old for this year: campus policies. It is still illegal to smoke or possess marijuana on campus, and each year there are a small (and diminishing) number of arrests for cannabis consumption, typically seen when Bashers pass marijuana joints in the crowd or when it seems that cannabis is being sold.

Also in violation of campus policy: amplified sound devices like megaphones and portable speakers, and tables/chairs set up without a permit. Campus police have notified Hash Bash organizers that they are actively enforcing these policies. The permit secured by organizers allows for a fixed number of tables.

Zettell is excited about Hash Bash, but said he looks forward to the Monroe Street Fair, too. It’s nearly impossible to mention one without the other; the two events have taken place in cooperation for 15 years.

“I don’t think the Hash Bash would have as large a draw as it does without the fantastic work of the Monroe Street Fair,” Zettell added. The Fair runs from noon until 6 PM; the Bash lasts from noon until 1:30 or so, per the Bash’s permit from the University. The crowd typically leaves the Bash and heads for the Fair immediately; the two events are held only a few blocks from one another.

MSF organizer Charlie Strackbein said the same thing about the relationship between the two celebrations. “The emergence of the Monroe Street Fair as a major event has helped to launch Hash Bash into the event it has become,” Strackbein said. “Every year we get more and more press coverage. We expanded this year to double the size of the Fair. That’ll make it easier for people to move about and enjoy everything we have to offer.”