

Bancroft welcomes first retail cannabis shop



By Nate Smelle

The Underground, Bancroft's first recreational cannabis shop held its official grand opening on Friday, Aug. 6. More than 350 people came out for the event at the company's new location in Bancroft.

Established in 2014, The Underground is a Canadian company, which previously operated under Health Cannabis, and transitioned into the legal recreational cannabis market in early 2018. Currently, The Underground has three retail cannabis shops throughout the province, with operations in Barrie, Tillsonburg, and now Bancroft. In the coming weeks, they plan to open their fourth shop in Apsley.

The Underground's president and CEO, David Ferkul was in Bancroft last Friday for the grand opening. Acknowledging that the store in Bancroft has technically been open since last September, he said they had to put the grand opening event on hold until last Friday due to the pandemic.

"It was a good day for us," said Ferkul. "They were over 350 people. It was a record day for sales, Yummy Dogs came out. We had a lot of different producers come out and give out free swag and education about the products. It was a good time. It was nice to meet a bunch of people and see the town come out to show their support."

Throughout his career, Ferkul has attained more than 10 years of industry experience working under the Marihuana Medical Access Regulations, the Marihuana for Medical Purposes Regulations, the Access to Cannabis for Medical Purposes Regulations and the Cannabis Act. Having been engaged in the process of opening cannabis retail stores prior to COVID-19's arrival in Ontario, Ferkul experienced firsthand how the pandemic has impacted the industry. As challenging as it has been to open The Underground amid the uncertainty of COVID-19, he said they have managed to navigate the system and make the new shop a success.

"We had about four months of in-house traffic and then we had the lock down, so we were only doing curbside," explained Ferkul. "We had a little bit of a headstart to get things going normally. COVID comes in and it killed everybody's hours. It was a bad place

for everybody. But, it was all right it gave us time to go slower. It was a kind of blessing in disguise for the business. It's tough to say, because yes there was a lot of people who lost jobs. It was tough on us, but we've been pretty good so far."

Remarking on how it wasn't long ago that actor and cannabis activist Tommy Chong went to jail for selling bongs, Ferkul said there is a debt owed to people like him that "have paved the way for us. The people that have gone to jail, they're the ones that we have to thank at their end of the day for what we have."

Reflecting on the progress that has been made with cannabis legalization in Canada in the past few years, Ferkul continued, "A few years ago it was legal and now it's essential. That's a crazy jump it took. I've been using weed for forever and I keep on saying that same thing to everybody. Think about that: two years ago when cannabis was still illegal we would be in jail, degraded and charged, and our lives ruined. Now, it's no problem. We stayed open during the lockdown when everybody else was closed."

The Underground is located on the edge of Bancroft at 1 Fairway Blvd, Unit 6. For more information on North Hastings' first cannabis shop visit them online at: www.theunderground.store; or, contact:343-476-0363.