

Advocates: Pot eases suffering

■ SE Texans describe experiences they say justify reform of laws on use of marijuana.

BEAUMONT

By Sarah Moore

Interest in reforming marijuana laws packed Logon Cafe on Saturday, and passion for the plant brought speaker after speaker to the microphone to share their experiences.

The experience of Port Arthur resident Jeremy Borque, whose plants were seized by Port Arthur police last week, helped to galvanize a group of residents to organize a chapter of NORML — the National Organization for Reform of Marijuana Laws. The meeting at the Logon was to elect a board of directors and go over legal regulations.

Activist Royce Abrego talked of the benefit to the state's highways, hospitals and schools brought by tax revenue like that Colorado is seeing from marijuana sales.

Local organizer Corey Mendes cited a \$42 million price tag each year in Texas for enforcing marijuana laws, as well as the loss of economic benefits from industrial hemp.

But one question resonated strongest with the audience: If you had a loved one suffering from a debilitating illness, and there was something that would ease their suffering, wouldn't you do anything to get it — even if it were illegal?

Borque, who has been successfully using a strain developed for its medicinal properties to control his epilepsy, was one of those who spoke up passionately for medicinal marijuana.

MARIJUANA: Advocates of medical use question rationale of laws that forbid it

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Borque, like many who spoke, had struggled for years to find a solution for his medical problem without relief. Prescription medication was often ineffective, or the side effects were almost as bad as the disease.

Marijuana was not an instant cure for him, but after several years of research and experimentation, he finally began to get some significant relief.

"The last two years were the most successful for me... Right up to a year is the best I've felt in eight or nine years," he said, adding that "without a doubt" medical marijuana has helped him

to have "a normal life."

Most of the speakers did not tend to perpetuate the stereotypes of pot smokers.

Mary Sue Williams, 82, a frail white-haired woman who walks with a cane, spoke vigorously of the need for Texas to legalize marijuana, at least for medicinal uses.

"Texas is so darn slow!" she said, adding that as a native Texan, she felt qualified to say that. "If we can just get it going there's enough people in the state that will help us out."

Williams first learned about the medical uses of marijuana as a young medical technician in the 1950s, when she cared for a chemotherapy patient

who couldn't keep down any food.

The man's son brought him a joint, which he reluctantly agreed to try.

"He smoked a little bit and it calmed his stomach," she said. "I was very young at the time but I have always felt there was a place for marijuana."

Others spoke of using marijuana to help with pain from fibromyalgia, arthritis and a neurological condition causing excruciating pain.

Faith Baker described the herb as a gift from God to heal suffering in the world.

Benjamin Tanner, who suffers from diabetes, said he quickly noticed that

marijuana use helped to lower his blood sugar.

He said there has been some research done on marijuana's effects on blood sugar regulation, but more research and development could help diabetics reduce their insulin dependence and stay less insulin dependent.

"For too long, we've been like fiends in the dark because of the stigma of society," he said. "It is medicine."

Silsbee area resident Larry Williams, 65, said a relative with a mental problem that turned his family's life upside down has been almost completely transformed by use of a very small amount of mari-

juana.

Medication prescribed by doctors put her into a zombie-like stupor.

He himself does not smoke marijuana, but like many of those present, he questioned why drugs with harmful side effects are FDA approved for medical use, when marijuana, with a 3,000-year history of medicinal use, is out of bounds.

But it wasn't all about medical marijuana.

The recreational use of marijuana also got some support.

Mike Johnson said while he understands some don't care for it, putting it in the same class as drugs that damage health and kill

people is wrong.

"I smoked it for 40 years. I liked it," he said, adding that he has never heard of anyone dying of a marijuana overdose.

"If you like to smoke a joint, smoke a joint!" said Maggie Carter, who identified herself as "an activist from long ago."

Sunnie Tillman, 30, of Warren said the marijuana prohibition has had the consequence of driving people to use a synthetic substance purporting to be a marijuana substitute.

"I've lost several friends over this poison in a packet," she said.