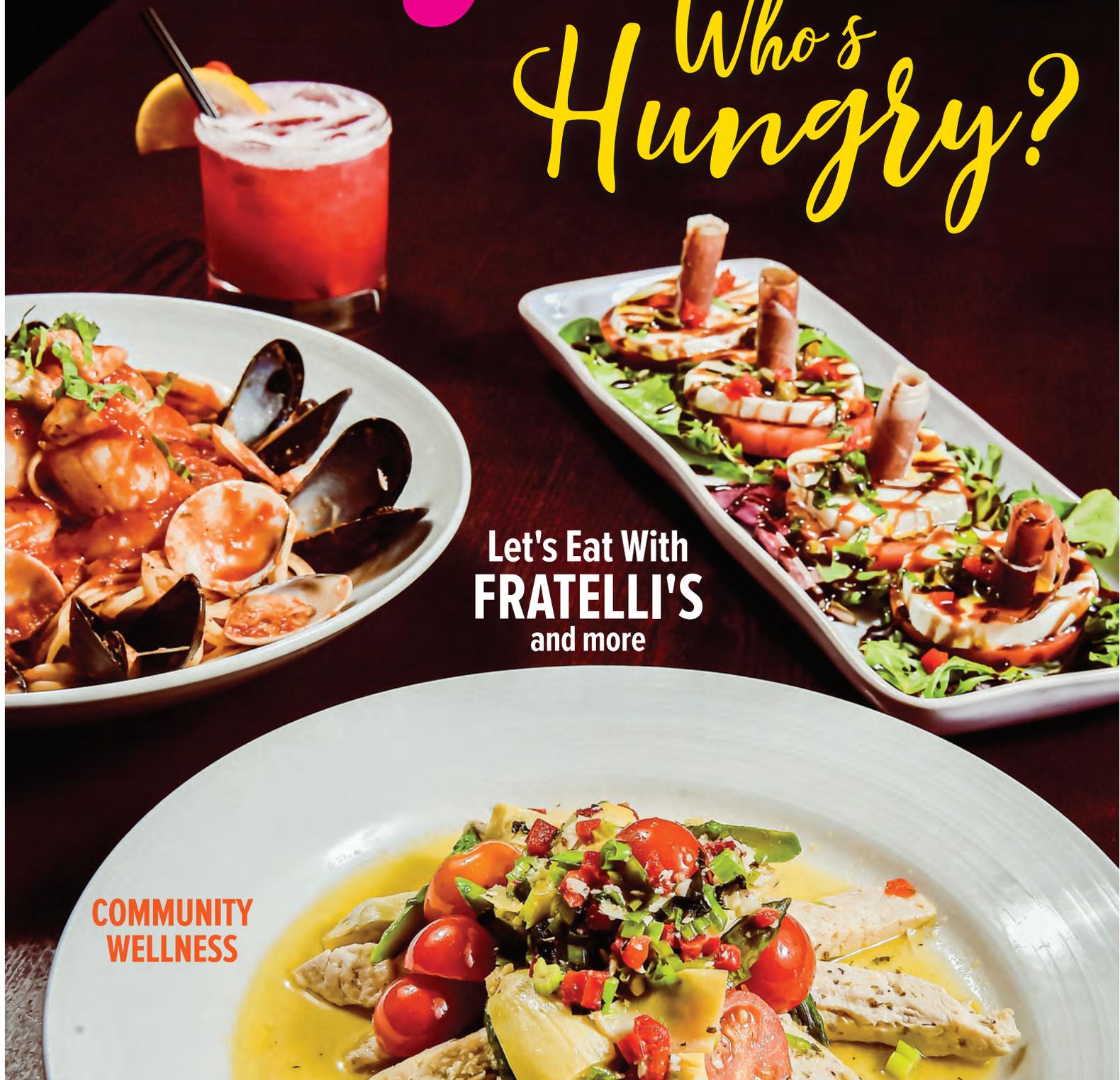


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Growing like Weeds

Entrepreneurs change, respond with the state's medical cannabis business

BY KELLY SWAN

It's not a news flash that cannabis, or marijuana — medical cannabis, that is. Commuters on their way to work may have observed those little buildings that have suddenly popped up with bright signage and flashy green flags flapping in the breeze that shout, "Dispensary." A Ravens fan at a game may have experienced someone sitting nearby vaping something that definitely was not nicotine. Others may have a friend going through breast

cancer treatment who uses cannabis to curb anxiety or increase appetite. Cannabis is suddenly everywhere, or so it seems.

But then, it's hard not to be cannabis curious when the concept of a legitimate industry is still new and promising. Marylanders have only been allowed to purchase cannabis legally since December 2017, and it requires a special medical card. But the economic impact on the state has already been lucrative. The Maryland Medical Cannabis

Commission, the agency that regulates cannabis in the state, reported that the industry made more than \$100 million in sales in 2018 — doubling some forecasts for the first year of the state's program. People are registering to become medical cannabis patients at a lightning pace, with 100,000 to date. Clearly, there is a demand, and the MMCC and others in the business have their hands full as they work out all the kinks addressing safety, access and regulatory matters.

The medical cannabis industry is unlike any other Maryland industry because marijuana is still federally illegal. In some situations, a person can still go to jail for possessing cannabis, even if they have a state-issued medical cannabis card. In addition, doctors can lose their medical license if they are found prescribing cannabis, even though it may be legal at the state level (there are 33 legalized states and counting). The federal-state conundrum also affects cannabis growers, processors and those peripherally in the industry because it's very difficult to get a bank loan, advertise in traditional ways or even manage bookkeeping. Companies that operate nationally are declining to get involved in the cannabis industry for fear of federal penalization.

Enter Jacquie Cohen Roth, an entrepreneur with a background in economics, policy and health care. She made a name for herself as the founder of Mojo Media and the creator of health-focused media platforms, including a business-to-business publication for physicians.

Cohen Roth says she had been keeping her eye on cannabis for years. Then, when the shift toward legalization began, she saw an opportunity to create a business-to-business media platform for Maryland's new and fast-growing medical cannabis industry.

"My original mission was to build an ecosystem inclusive of patients, providers, industry stakeholders and industry influences," says Cohen Roth, who lives in Annapolis. "I have succeeded. It's an established ecosystem to help everyone in the cannabis business develop relationships and learn from each other with a focus on Maryland being a model for a successful and well-regulated medical cannabis program."

In 2017, Cohen Roth launched CannabizMD, which offers those in the medical cannabis industry a space to network, learn and grow. The CannabizMD website has a hip, professional vibe and has photos of happy people enjoying life as well as the cannabis plant in its various forms. You can find stories about people in Maryland who are treating various medical conditions with cannabis. You can also find cannabis industry-specific business tips on hiring and training, finance and marketing.

Recently, Cohen Roth launched Tea Pad, a social enterprise committed to diversity and inclusion that offers networking and educational events, which provide opportunities to learn from each other and hone best practices. The mission of Tea Pad is to break down barriers to entry into the cannabis industry and to empower participation, no matter race or gender, via education.

"Education is the key," says Cohen Roth. "Mothers are crowdsourcing their information. Doctors have so little information. Education is what will help end the stigma."

The learning curve for cannabis can be daunting, so if one's only frame of reference is from smoking weed in college, much has changed. Only those with a Maryland medical cannabis identification card are admitted into dispensaries, and only a

CHANGEMAKERS



CANNABIZMD

Jacquie Cohen Roth

Founder/CEO
CannabizMD
Tea Pad



CHEF JAZZ/GREEN PANTHER CHEF

Jazmine Moore

Chef Jazz
Green Panther Chef

“Education is the key,” says Jacquie Cohen Roth. “Mothers are crowdsourcing their information. Doctors have so little information. Education is what will help end the stigma.”



CANNABIS2ND

Chef Jazz and Jacquie Cohen Roth make a cannabis-infused popcorn at a Super Bowl-themed cooking night earlier this year.

Green Panther
Chef's artisan hot
sauces and mustard



CHEF JAZZ/GREEN PANTHER CHEF (2)

Moore says. “I would go into people’s homes and show them how to make meals infused with cannabis. People were interested in what I was doing. I knew that it was time to come out of the shadows and help people.”

Moore’s curiosity about medical cannabis started in 2006 when she heard that it could be helpful for gastrointestinal issues. Moore suffers from Crohn’s disease, a chronic inflammatory bowel disease that affects the lining of the digestive tract. While the scientific research on cannabis as a treatment for Crohn’s disease and other GI conditions is lacking and inconclusive, Moore has done her own research. In cannabis, she knows she found something that works for her.

“I had been taking Zantac, Zyprexa, Humira, Prednisone, and it made me feel awful,” she says. “So I began to look for other options.” At first it was trial and error. “I read a lot of studies, found a cook book, started experimenting.” She started pairing cannabis with culinary, figured out which strands

certain number of patients are allowed at a time. Walking into one is like walking into a sommelier’s wine cellar, but instead of wine, there are hundreds of varieties of cannabis in multiple forms — flowers, tablets, vape cartridges, gummies and elixirs. The scent of it all smacks customers in the face the moment they arrive. The experience can be overwhelming for first-timers and those who haven’t done their homework.

There to greet patients are modern-day apothecaries, who are enthusiastic about all things cannabis and can provide recommendations on products for whatever ails someone. These attendants are not required to have any medical training; many are essentially salespeople with a passion for cannabis who are knowledgeable about the products they sell and can provide recommendations. Dispensaries, however, are now required to have a trained medical director.

Since cannabis is not yet widely researched or tested like other medications, dosing can be a challenge. Cannabis was not a drug that pharmacy students learned about — until now. The University of Maryland School of Pharmacy announced in June that it will offer a graduate degree in medical

cannabis science and therapeutics starting this fall.

Jazmine Moore agrees that knowledge is critical. Moore, who goes by Chef Jazz, is a culinary-trained chef with a catering business called Green Panther Chef. Moore, who is from Denver and now lives in Silver Spring, holds workshops and classes in order to teach people how to cook with cannabis.

“It was kind of underground at first,”



Spring salad with
CBD-infused jalapeño
citrus vinaigrette

worked and eventually no longer needed her medications. “I could actually sleep and feel better. I thought that other people could be dealing with this, too, and that I could really help people.”

With her Green Panther Chef business, Moore teaches others how to cook with cannabis. She offers cooking demonstrations, private and group classes, workshops and full-service catering. “I put infused canna in butter, oil, coconut oil, on everything. It really helps with anti-inflammatory issues,” Moore says.

Cohen Roth met Moore a year ago, and they began to work together at patient education events. They, along with other minority members, applied for a grower’s license that would allow them to grow and sell their own medical cannabis as wholesalers and a processor’s license to manufacture a full array of medical cannabis products.

In 2017, Maryland’s medical cannabis industry was identified as lacking diversity and inclusion in a disparity study ordered by Gov. Larry Hogan in response to concerns expressed by the Legislative Black Caucus. In 2018, with legislative action, Maryland released four new grower licenses and 10 processor applications.

Ultimately, Cohen Roth and Moore’s team was not selected for a license. But that hasn’t broken their spirits — in fact, they say, this is just the beginning.

“A license isn’t the only entry point into the industry,” says Moore, who was recently asked to design a menu for a local food truck and continues to teach chefs and at-home cooks the benefits of cooking with cannabis. “We’re continuing to expand our CBD product line, partnering with national brands and taking speaking opportunities. It’s been amazing.”

Cohen Roth is enrolled in University of Maryland’s new cannabis program and is helping to underwrite a scholarship for minority entrepreneurship at Morgan State University. And she’s headed to Malta to moderate a panel on the U.S. cannabis industry.

“Cannabis is the missing puzzle piece,” she says. □

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