

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Join Louisiana Veterans for Medicinal Cannabis (LVMC) in raising awareness of the healing properties of psychedelic plant medicines; hear first-hand, personal stories about the positive impact plant medicines have made in the lives of veterans and advocates.

March 14, 2022
9:00 AM
@ VETERANS MEMORIAL PARK
(Formerly Arsenal Park)

LVMC welcomes the community to an event to raise awareness of the healing properties of cannabis and psychedelic plant medicines. The event features a range of veteran and community speakers highlighting plant medicine's positive impact on their personal and professional lives.

BATON ROUGE – The Louisiana Veterans for Medicinal Cannabis (LVMC) extends a warm welcome to join LVMC and other plant medicine advocacy groups at the Veterans Memorial Park (formerly Armory Park) on March 14, 2022 at 8 AM.

Veterans, their families, and friends along with community members, media organizations, and local advocacy organizations are invited to Veterans Memorial Park (formerly Armory Park) on the grounds of the Louisiana State Capitol to hear first-hand stories about the positive impact plant medicines have had on veterans, their physical and mental health, and their families and communities.

“We reached out to our veteran community and they answered,” said Tony Landry, director of LVMC, a non-partisan advocacy group made up of both veterans and civilians. “Veterans will be telling their stories, these are deeply personal stories about plant medicine’s role in their recovery or management of their medical condition.”

Landry’s grassroots advocacy group promotes wellbeing within the veteran community through support and education. Landry also uses his voice amongst the veteran community to navigate legislative bills and get the word out to Louisiana Veteran voters, which bills will favor veteran access to safe, affordable medical cannabis.

“Plant medicine does not cause the terrible mental, physical, and social side effects that opioid and similar pharmaceuticals cause,” said Landry. “Many people in our community treat their pain with these less harmful and natural plant medicines.”

Currently, the only plant medicine available in Louisiana is medical marijuana. The exorbitant costs of Louisiana’s ill-equipped marijuana monopoly forces many patients

to leave the program, instead buying cannabis off the street because it's cheaper. Stigma also forces patients to under-treat their pain due to the legal consequences and safety risks in purchasing their cannabis from the illicit market.

This under-treated pain can be physical or mental. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation and the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Louisiana is experiencing an increase in mental health challenges: as much as 47% of adults reported symptoms of anxiety or depression, compared to just 31.6% of adults in the U.S." (Kaiser Family Foundation; National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2021).

With a geographic location smack dab in the middle of "Cancer Alley," plant medicine's role in addressing Louisiana residents' cancer-related depression cannot be ignored: "Johns Hopkins researchers report that a substantial majority of people suffering cancer related anxiety or depression found considerable relief for up to six months from a single large dose of psilocybin" (Gukasyan et. Al., 2022).

Psilocybin is the naturally occurring psychedelic compound found in magic mushrooms that allows it to penetrate the central nervous system.

"This is not some 'magic mushroom' or 'Dazed & Confused' party stuff. Even our conservative neighboring state of Texas is waking up to the psychedelic renaissance," Landry mentioned, referring to the Center for Psychedelic Research and Therapy at the Dell Medical School of the University of Texas at Austin.

"These are just a few examples of prestigious medical schools and universities conducting *actual* scientific research that explores innovative treatments using psilocybin...research that is helping not just veterans but people with Alzheimer's, epilepsy, ALS/MLS/MS...real people in real time," said Landry. "With all of the talent in Louisiana, we need to be doing things like this. Why bother involving LSU and Southern University if they are not conducting any research?"

"Thinking outside the box really paid off for these other universities," Landry described, "Johns Hopkins just raised \$17 million in psychedelics research funding and formed the Center for Psychedelic and Consciousness Research."

Rally organizers hope to inspire Louisiana to embrace not only medical marijuana but also psilocybin, hoping the state will see plant medicine not just as medicine but as a celebrated, state-wide natural resource.

"I especially want to thank Representative Coussan for supporting Louisiana Veterans in this mission to bring about awareness of the beneficial affect plant medicines can have on our body and mind. By sponsoring our event and providing the necessary equipment for our speakers," added Landry, "Representative Coussan is helping veterans get their story out there, first-hand, for everyone to hear."

One speaker, a veteran helping other veterans, is working to do just that via his modern, no-judgement approach to therapy: “Medicinal cannabis is seen as a strong ally for relief, growth, and change,” said Morgan City native and five-year, combat veteran turned licensed professional counselor Joshua Moffett.

Moffett served three tours of duty in Iraq and two tours in Afghanistan with the 3rd Ranger Battalion out of Ft. Benning, Georgia, completing more than 300 combat missions, one of which was a rescue and recovery operation for Operation Red Wings—made famous through the book and film *Lone Survivor* (2013) starring Mark Wahlberg who portrayed former Navy Seal Marcus Luttrell.

Moffett decided to take a leap of faith in his counseling work with other veterans: “Instead of judging people for using cannabis, I decided to use it as a resource.”

Moffett’s non-traditional approach to therapy could help veterans manage reintegration challenges they face, “Cannabis and other plant medicines can help veterans process their painful memories of war,” said Moffett, adding, “In my work, stigma is a barrier to many people. The more we talk positively about plant medicines, people will feel better about accessing it as a medication.”

Current state law allows only physicians to prescribe MMJ, so while Moffett cannot send in a recommendation to a marijuana dispensary, he integrates cannabis into his online therapy outfit Accurate Empathy Counseling, “Plant medicine helps some veterans find relief. I’ve seen it with my own eyes. As a therapist my goal is to use any tools available to assist veterans on their path to healing and spiritual growth after all they’ve been through.”

In addition to veterans, several speakers from local advocacy groups with missions related to plant medicine helped organize the event. “So many families have been hurt by opioids. Pain pills have ruined people’s lives,” said Angela Owings Broussard, a volunteer medical marijuana (MMJ) advocate with LAMMJ, an organization that seeks to eliminate the stigma of using marijuana as medicine, especially as it relates to the Opioid Epidemic.

According to the Louisiana Department of Health “Louisiana has one of the highest per capita overdose rates in the nation, raking 11th overall. Last year alone, 15 out of every 100,000 persons in Louisiana died due to accidental overdose. According to the CDC, 46 people die daily from an overdose of prescription painkillers in the U.S. with 10 of highest prescribing states in the South.”

“We have this great medicine, something easy to grow and easy on your body. Research proves that it can help people stop taking opioids...but, because of some outdated, disproved, *Easy Rider*-1970’s propaganda, people are scared to death to use it,” Broussard added, citing the Nixon Administration’s initial press strategy that spawned the failed War on Drugs (Winkelman, 2014; Dufton, 2012).

“Are we really still talking about medical marijuana stigma the week after Mardi Gras in Louisiana?” asked Broussard, “That’s pretty rich...Look, we are getting the word out that plant medicine can help end opioid dependency and addiction for many people. Plant medicine can help veterans process trauma. Time is NOT on our side here,” added Broussard. “The quicker we end this ridiculous stigma and expand the number of cultivators to 10 in Louisiana’s over-priced market, the more family members and friends we are saving from dying in the opioid epidemic.”

Another advocate taking part in the rally, is Lessie LeBlanc. Raised in Lafayette, LeBlanc serves as the Acadiana Community Organizer working on the LA REPEAL Project for The Promise of Justice Initiative (PJI), which works to create positive change for people in the criminal legal system. The group focuses on ending the death penalty, challenging inhumane conditions of confinement, exposing prosecutorial and judicial misconduct, providing pro-bono representation for criminal defendants, and fighting racism in the criminal legal system.

Many other states are seeing great gains in re-investing in underserved communities through cannabis-business initiatives. Businesses can thrive while also helping the people in our state who rely on cannabis and other plant medicines for relief.

Decriminalize Nature’s Baton Rouge group is trying to do just that. Lifelong East Baton Rouge Parish resident, Donna McCollough founded the local chapter to help improve and expand the state’s medical marijuana program to include psychedelics and all plant medicines as a treatment option.

“Fungi, Ayahuasca, peyote...these have been used by our ancestors for thousands of years. We refer to them as ‘entheogenic,’ a Greek word which translates to ‘Becoming divine from within,” adding, “They expand consciousness and help you process trauma so that you can heal” said McCollough.

“If we have veterans coming back from war in pain, whether it is physical pain from losing limbs or feelings of emotional numbness, we need to give them all the tools we have so they can heal,” reminded McCollough.

Francis Dorsey, an 11-Year Infantryman from New Iberia who retired from the U.S. Army due to his combat-related injury recalled, “My deep love for photography helped pull me out of pain pill despair. Doing something you love distracts you from the sadness, pain, and trauma that led us to addiction in the first place.” Dorsey is serving as the volunteer photographer for the event through his self-named photography studio located in New Iberia.

Dorsey pointed out, recalling what he described as “a revolving door of pill mills...pills that caused more problems than they solved. The beautiful thing about plant medicine: I went from nine medications...to only two.”

“In fact, growing plant medicine can be as helpful as consuming it for some veterans,” Dorsey illustrated using a veteran-led Hemp farm in Louisiana that uses the physical act of Hemp farming as therapy for veterans.

Horticultural Therapy, similar to sensory-related therapies, uses the soil under foot, the sweat...whether it's time spent outdoors in the sun and fresh air or inside a greenhouse, the literal hands-on approach to nature through gardening has helped humans heal since our history began according to the American Horticultural Association. Organizers hope that hearing what other states are doing will inspire Louisiana to initiate similar statewide green exercise and horticultural therapy programs to that would do nothing but help our state's economy and the people who live here.

“With reduced barriers of entry for both patients and local, small businesses, a more open cannabis industry would create a micro-business boom all over the state,” said Aurora CBD & Hemp co-owner Hunter A. Poiencot, COO of Aurora CBD & Hemp.

Poiencot began bringing hemp-derived products to market in efforts to help his infant cousin who was using CBD to treat her rare form of epilepsy. “The cost of the products is too high, yet this is caused by the legislation itself which seems to be the limiting factor and downfall of the program. Open the market, and I guarantee our current program will see the influx of patients that it needs to create a larger demand and drive down the cost associated with these products.”

While Industrial Hemp laws have changed in Louisiana, the state restricts patients from growing their own THC-rich medical cannabis. “Most medical states allow patients to cultivate up to nine (9) plants in the safety of their own home or outdoor garden,” with our lack of diversity in the Louisiana Medical Marijuana program, “HOMEGROW is a must!” said Poiencot.

Patient-centered Medical Marijuana programs support HOMEGROW and are seeing significant positive results through their use of therapeutic cannabis cultivation non-profit organizations and farming co-operatives. Organizers are hoping to help transform Louisiana's current program into a Patient-centric Medical Cannabis Regulatory Program outlined by NORML. Home Cultivation is a required attribute for this type of program.

In addition to speeches from veterans and advocates, “Chief Albert P. “White Buffalo” Naquin, Traditional Chief of Isle de Jean Charles Band of Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Indians, will begin the ceremony with a speech about the collaborative efforts of our cajun and indigenous ancestors' use of plant medicines and how climate change is currently eroding the very land many of our ancestors grew these plants on and called home.

“The good of plants,” we know this as fact, said Chief Naquin, “I was raised on the Island and that’s all we had. There was no road and the doctors were our elders. There were plants for every disease and ailment.”

In addition to speeches by veterans, advocacy groups, and cultural leaders, other invited guests topics include: Prison recidivism reduction through psychotherapy re-entry programs, changing legal statutes and laws related to psychedelic plants, patient barriers to access plant medicine, harm reduction while medicating with plants, and a focus on plant medicine stigma’s role in the National Opioid Crisis.

“This event is the first time we’ve combined our local advocacy groups. We are laser-focused on ending the stigma and expanding access and affordability of these life-changing medications for Louisiana patients,” added Broussard.

“The *Easy Rider* days are over,” said Landry. “We are going to change the way Louisiana views plant medicine. Plant medicine helps and it’s here to stay. More importantly, though, health is a human right and a right to health requires a right to access affordable medicine.”

PLAN OF THE DAY

- 9:00 AM** **Opening Prayer for Good Harvest (Announcer, TBA)**
Chief Albert P. "White Buffalo" Naquin,
Traditional Chief of Isle de Jean Charles Band of
Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Indians
*Collaborative efforts of our cajun and indigenous ancestors’ use
of plant medicines and how climate change is currently eroding
the very land many of our ancestors grew these plants on and
called home.*
- 9:00 - 9:30 AM** ***Introduction: Tony Landry, Lead Event Organizer & Veteran***
State Representative Jean-Paul P. Coussan (Dist. 45)
Special Guest: Invited Veteran Speech
Joshua Moffett
- 9:30 - 9:55 AM** ***Additional Veteran Testimony from Attendees***
- 9:55 - 10:00 AM** Brief walk to the State Capitol Steps
Posting of Flags
Vocalist + Instrumental Song
- 10:10 - 11:00 AM** ***Community Advocate Speeches***
11:00 AM Color Guard Posts Flag and Colors inside Capitol Rotunda
Attendees & Organizers invite attendees to gather in the Capitol
Rotunda for networking with their local representatives to support
plant medicine-related legislation during the opening of the 2022
Louisiana Legislative Session.

CONTACTS FOR SPECIFIC MEDIA INQUIRIES:

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VETERAN SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKERS & VOLUNTEERS

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Veteran Special Guest Speaker

Combat Veteran & Counselor

Founder of Accurate Empathy Counseling

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Francis Dorsey

Combat Veteran & Volunteer Event Photographer

Owner of Francis Dorsey Photography

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Chief Albert P. "White Buffalo" Naquin

Traditional Chief of the Isle de Jean Charles

Band of Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Indians

Speaker: Climate Change + Disappearing Lands + Plant Medicines of Ancestors

<http://www.isledejeancharles.com/tribal-leadership>

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