

Not your parents' head shop: The Grateful Shed

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ROSEWOOD HEIGHTS – The Grateful Shed aims to be different than the usual reputation attained by “head shops.”

Owner Jacob Pontow, who operates the business with partner Kayla Nowell, said the Grateful Shed does not operate like a low-quality speakeasy with shady characters as many people imagine smoke shops to be. Instead, he said the business wants to operate like a mom-and-pop establishment. He hopes to bring small business quality to the assorted glass pieces – officially labeled for tobacco use – for his customers. That means customers can come in and inspect the piece, and may even be able to get refunds.

“You can't bring it back here if it's used and dirty,” Pontow said. “But we work with people who need refunds. Obviously we cannot compete with online prices. If people are going for price alone, they'll go online to Amazon or one of the other big guys. We're here to offer people the experience of customer service for what they are getting.”

Many of the pipes sold at the Grateful Shed are admittedly used by people to partake in the smoking of medical cannabis, however, all of them are labeled for tobacco use only. Pontow said his establishment, however, does not carry all of the pipes allowed under legal loopholes. Many of them, often used for meth and crack use, are not carried by the Grateful Shed.

“We've had about three or four of our 600 or so customers come in and say they prefer other smoke shops, because they do carry the globe-shaped pipes or needles or whatever,” he said. “And that's fine if that's what they want to do, but we plan on being a part of this community for years to come, and I don't think we should be selling those things.”

Kratom, a substance recently banned in Alton, is not banned in Rosewood Heights. Even though it is legal to sell, however, Pontow said the Grateful Shed is currently ridding itself of its stock. Pontow said the substance, which is used by many recovering from addiction to opiates, may be better than “Big Pharma” and heroin, but is still ultimately addictive.

Instead of kratom, Pontow is advising people partake in CBD oil, which is a derivative of the hemp plant without psychoactive effects. The psychoactive, heat-activated compound, which gives cannabis its good time is known as THC. CBD, however, is used for anxiety and pain relief, and it does not have the laundry list of warnings from the FDA following kratom.

Despite legally selling pipes labeled for tobacco use and actively working toward the betterment of its customers and community at large, Pontow said the establishment was nearly closed forever by Madison County Sheriffs Deputies.

“When my dad and I were just in here building shelves, they came in and told us they didn't want us selling this stuff in their town,” he said. “It was very Old-Westly all in all. It affected us pretty bad emotionally. It cost us \$2,000 to get a lawyer just to ensure they wouldn't scare us away from operating a perfectly legitimate business.”

It may have given them quite a shock on what was going to be their opening day, but Pontow and Nowell said they have not suffered any further problems with law

enforcement, and have received a pretty great reception from the community with many customers saying they appreciate the fresh take on a head shop with friendly service and community involvement.

The Grateful Shed is located at 99 South Ninth Street in East Alton and can be reached at (618) 471-9420.

